Palestine online: cyber Intifada and the construction of a virtual community 2001-2005

Aouragh, M.

Citation for published version (APA):
Acknowledgements

Much of this PhD is on the account of others. My colleagues at ASSR played a stimulating role with their creative and academic input: Martijn, Rachel, Irfan, Eileen, Barak, Christian, Francio, Marleen, Lotte, Nazima: thank you! I owe a tremendous amount of the critical and innovative outcomes of this book to those I have over the years come to consider more than colleagues: Anouk, Andrew, Mayida, Nadia, Sonja, Marc were often the emotional/intellectual vehicles during my writing. I wish to thank Ruya for helping design the graphs, Shiar for the Arabic transcription, and Miruna for the final editing. A special thanks to Shifra Kisch, my ASSR mate all the way through. I am very indebted to Mohammed Waked and Seda Altug for their unconditional (day & night) support in the last writing stages: this was vital, you are in my heart forever. The camaraderie of all these friends is important because they regard intellectual knowledge for the benefit of all: a collective ownership, making our work inspiring and moving.

I learned a lot from the academic community of the University of Amsterdam. I am grateful to Marianne Franklin, Birgit Meyer, Gerd Baumann, Peter Geschiere, Thijl Sunier, and Marcel van der Linde (I hereby thank everybody at IISG for my very productive and pleasant time there) for their advice and inspiration. Sam Bahour in Palestine has been very valuable for his knowledge about Palestinian internet; Mike Dahan in Jerusalem helped me grasp the status of the Israeli ICT sector vis-à-vis Palestine; I appreciate Rafal Rohozinski for including me in P@ISP. The PhD was made possible by the well-organized ASSR team: Hans Sonneveld, Anneke Dammers, Teun Bijvoet, Jose Komen, Miriam May, Hermance Mettrop, and Philip Romer were central to our work, thank you! I wish to also mention two UvA buddies: Iwan Ellis and his Bushuis security team for tolerating me till late at night in the building; he walked down the dark corridors to open the back door so I can sneak out, often as the last person in the building. And almost every morning these last years did Frans Deutekom of the Spinhuis, regardless of the weather!, come outside to give me a parking spot. Both of you were great!

My promoters Annelies Moors and Peter van der Veer were essential for they gave me important academic feedback; they guided me yet mostly allowed me to develop and polish my ideas. They also gave me the space to pursue my activism, this was important as the life of many people I had come to know and care for during the fieldwork, was being shattered during the sieges in Palestine and Lebanon. Eventually, the two worlds fused: my love for academia and the eagerness to engage politically reconciled. This is to a great extent the outcome of the confidence and moral support by Annelies Moors. I express my deepest gratitude for her sharp academic observations. Moreover, she understood I sometimes had to take one step back in order to make two steps forward; her remarkable solidarity was very motivating. Sukran.

The support was important because much happened since I started this research—the impact and racist backlash of 9/11, the war in Afghanistan, Iraq and Lebanon, Pim Fortuyn and Theo van Gogh, the rise of xenophobe politicians, and the recent electoral triumph of extreme right Geert Wilders. These tendencies were reinforced by absurd dichotomies such as “Muslim” / “non-Muslim” or “Allochtoon/Autochtoon”; sometimes the daunting situation made me feel more secure in war-torn Palestine or Lebanon. Albeit these temporal/territorial escapisms: organized activism was essential. Many people I worked with deserve mentioning: Eva, Ruben, Naima, Jamna during the initial antiracism activities; Rene Danel, Mohammed Rabbae in our fight against Islamophobia (VerWildering); and the enjoyable engagement of Jaap Hamburger, Tariq Shadid, Amal Bansalah, Wim Lankamp, Lokien Holleman, Lily van der Berg in the antiwar/Palestine campaigns. These people illustrate that, however important to interpret and analyse the world as we academics love to do, it is important to help change it as well.

Regrettably, war is still being waged and racist demagogy even surpasses previous held boundaries. We continue the struggle. Despite the obvious reactionary constraints, and not so obvious impediments. ‘Not so obvious’ because several progressives tell us we are mistaken (or trapped in a ‘false consciousnesses’); others have replaced racist islamophobia with new
euphemisms as ‘freedom of speech’. I started to believe that some of the ‘armchair left’ were seriously confused when some even conflated outright populist rhetorics with axioms of Voltaire (the muslim bias became a bit too obvious). Alas, the struggle goes on with or without their blessings—with the ‘pessimism of the intellect and the optimism of the will’ as Gramsci brilliantly noted. On this note, some say comradeship is one of the strongest relationships. I shared tough and inspiring times with many activists of Internationale Socialisten; they gave me the stamina and conviction to see that another world is possible. So to Bart, Pepijn, Peyman, Michiel, Sylvia, Maina, Johannes, Karima, Mahmoud, Wael, Karwan, Ruth, Catherine, Peter, Hamid, Hans, Bram, Angela, Pat (who first introduced me to Marxist politics in New Cross), John Rees, Sabby Sagall, and many many more: power to the people, united we stand!

Writing a PhD is not a matter of academia or politics only. Many friends kept me sane and motivated, merci to Nordin Dahhan, Hanaa El Mehrafi, Mirjam Shatanawi, Nihal Rabbani, Maurice Crul, Frans Lelic, Jamal Ftieh. My longterm friends Catelijne Houten, Edith van den Akker and Viola Marth; your precious spirits often brought me back to my feet. I shower you with kisses. Bart was fantastic, with your warmth and friendship, delicious meals and excellent choice of movies; you were often my safety net. And thank you for designing the cover of the book: a squeezing hug and a mouah for you! I also want to show gratitude to Han, Annielies, and Joke Griffioen for their lovely support and interest in my work.

I met many interesting people during fieldwork in Palestine, Jordan and Lebanon. My appreciation goes to all the people I interviewed in these countries; they are the soul of this book. I also made new friends. In Jordan I greet Fadile ‘fufu’ abd’el Rubaia, she took me out many times to overcome the intellectual/political dullness in what we jokingly renamed the Kingdom of Boredome. Yazan Qurashi was a true friend in Amman, a proud Jordanian with whom I quarrelled about the silliness of ‘Al Urdun Awalan’ (Jordan First!) in times of war. Yet the quarrels always ended with a big smile and a hug. I admire his voluntary work with Palestinian Intifada victims, when most gave up he continued. I salute Ibrahim Aloush for his commitment. I also wish to thank all the people at IFPO-Amman.

My time in Lebanon was exceptionally exciting/enlightening. Those times would not have been the same without the loving care of my ‘families’ in the refugee camps, in particular Kholoud from Bourj Al Barajne, Dalal and Maryam from Shatila, Ashraf and Sanaa’ Abu Khurj and their families in Nahr al-Bared (a camp which was completely destroyed last year, leaving these and many other refugee families homeless, again). I am very grateful to Rosemary Sayigh for hosting me in Beirut, I felt at home with her and was greatly inspired by her work. I thank Amal Khoury, Salah and Samira Salah, Bissan, Zainab and Mansour for their friendship, and the brave rifaq of al-Yasari, from whom I learned a lot about (complex!) Lebanese politics/activism.

Palestine left the deepest imprint on my soul. My housemates Rama and Wafa (with whom I share that bizarre experience when painting our apartment yellow and bleu ‘to bring some brightness in the house’, when an Israeli F16 hit a building nearby literally shook us back to reality); Reem; Karma (remember when we broke curfew at night and bumped into two Israeli tanks? in stead of hiding she challenged the soldiers while their M16s pointed at us); Naama, Ashraf, Sherine; Raouf; Kifah. Last but certainly not least; my dearest Mohammed Maragha (I am so proud that against all odds you keep fighting for a progressive alternative in Palestine) and Hazem Alnamla (my heart stops beating a few seconds when I hear of another attack on Gaza and I think of your lovely family locked up there). If I return to Palestine I will be at your door.

Finally, family is an important pillar. My mother Alia; my brother Abdel Karim and Sara, and there three lovely children Youssra, Nadia, Tariq; my sister Farah and Mohammed ‘Arbi, and their princess Aya; Hakima and partner Mohammed (with both I share IS activism, so you are more than family); Fatima (thank you for your “sister love”, and help with bibliography) and partner Nordin; and my youngest brother Mohammed Ali (I love you and have high hopes for you!). One person connects us all and is dearly missed. I wish there had been enough time to make him as proud as he made us. From an immigrant ‘gastarbeider’ you struggled to become a respected independent man who provided us with the spirit and means to study. Thank you for this chance. You are gone but never forgotten. This one is for you.