Palestine online: cyber Intifada and the construction of a virtual community 2001-2005
Aouragh, M.

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: http://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
Chapter 1: Introducing the research—Virtual Reality from below

“They can stop us at checkpoints and borders, but not on the Internet.”
Sharif Kanaana, 1999, Birzeit/Palestine

1.1 Research and Occupation

On a hot summer afternoon in 1999, after I had finished my MA research related to Palestine and returned to visit my friends there, I met Sharif Kanaana in his Birzeit University office to resume a previous discussion about the internet. “The Internet is the voice of the voiceless people, Palestinians can now share their diaspora experiences through websites and chat rooms.” His rebellious words and my own experiences with this new tool showed me the political relevance of the internet.

Sheltered from the winter cold outside four years later in 2003, I sat in a comfortably heated lounge in one of the fancy hotels in Amman during my second fieldwork trip for PhD research. After spending months in Palestinian cities and refugee camps that were regularly closed off by Israeli curfew, the luxurious setting was rather outlandish. I waited in the lobby to meet Palestinian professor and activist Ibrahim Aloush; at that time we were both banned from entering Palestine. The subject of our discussion was also the internet. Like Kanaana, Aloush viewed the internet with enthusiasm. We agreed that the internet harbours great potentials for overcoming physical closure and calling attention to oppression and undemocratic practices. But he was keen not to exaggerate this potential in terms of achieving major political successes. In his opinion, “the most superior form of political organization in our case has always been, and remains, direct and on-the-ground methods.” Initially this surprised me because, as a critically engaged academic, he uses the internet extensively. The internet was both his public voice and a tool for political mobilization; he had initiated both the Arab Nationalist mailing list and the Free Arab Voice website.

Kanaana and Aloush’s views reflect different phases in considering the potentials of the internet. At the time I was analyzing the impact of the internet in Palestine and discussed this with Kanaana, the discussions were euphoric and evoked a sense of excitement; the internet was revolutionary. In the years that followed, the

1 As many journalists, researchers, solidarity activists, and above all, Palestinian exiles came to experience, neighbouring Jordan is the first choice for Israeli deportation. Jordan was also my temporary host during the research. While we both confront similar predicaments regarding Israel, we face very different impediments. After all, as a European citizen I can travel to most parts of the world. Moreover, as a Dutch citizen of North African descent I can still exercise my right to visit, or even settle in, the country of my grandparents. However, for Aloush, and other Palestinians in the diaspora, both options are, so far, impossible.

2 See website on http://www.freearabvoice.org.
new technological possibilities indeed revolutionized many aspects of Palestinian communication. Aloush’s caution can be seen as characteristic of later assessments of the political/economic potential of the internet. In terms of the social impact of excessive internet use, I occasionally heard of effects of alienation rather than activism and engagement, or was told not to misunderstand internet activism for offline resistance. Despite their cautions, both men enumerated the benefits of the internet for Palestinians. The internet could help defy the repression of everyday life in Palestine by overcoming the limitations of checkpoints and occupation and thus generate feelings of ‘mobility’ and ‘political autonomy.’ Kanaana and Aloush, each in his own way, integrated the internet, cyber space, and virtuality into new political constructions.

The enthusiastic suggestions about online possibilities also reveal something about offline limitations. They remind one that Palestinians do not enjoy political independence or freedom of movement and suggest that ‘virtual’ spaces provide alternatives for reaching inaccessible places. They elude to the absence of independent territorial places and free infrastructures necessary for free debate, free mobility, and free democratic decision-making. My conversation with Kanaana in the late 1990s took place at a time when the promises of the Oslo Agreement remained intangible. Palestinian society was shifting—people were increasingly agitated by a life that was getting worse, and ‘Oslo’ had already become synonymous with despair. By 1998 my friends and contacts talked in terms of ‘political betrayal’ and lack of hope. Though sometimes it did feel like any spark could cause an inferno in Palestine, I initially thought that a political implosion was not really possible.

By the time I worked out my ideas about the internet in Palestine and planned the research, the “explosion” was a reality. The outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000 positioned my work in a different context from what I had originally envisioned, disproving my earlier expectations. Only 18 months after that summer chat with Kanaana, what came to be known as the al-Aqsa Intifada dominated the whole of Palestinian society. Stone throwers, street clashes, assassinations, and F-16 attacks were on the news all over the world. Mainstream ‘Western’ media propagated a picture of Israel that was prepared to make historic offers while Arafat turned his back on the negotiations and incited his people to revolt (Dor 2004). For many European and American viewers it seemed as if a period of calm and negotiations had been unexpectedly interrupted by Palestinian aggression. These oversimplified portrayals did not do justice to the complexity of the reality on the ground.

3 Arafat and Rabin’s signing of the declaration of principles (DoP) in Washington in 1993 symbolically sealed the Oslo Peace agreement. After uprisings and negotiations, Palestinians were promised autonomy. The core issues—refugees, Jerusalem, economic/military self-determination—were not addressed. Israel not only refused to abide by the minimum demands of the agreement, it also confiscated more land and continued to build settlements and by-pass roads on a larger scale than before the agreement was signed. For an analysis of the Oslo pitfalls see Said (1996), Peace and its discontents: essays on Palestine in the Middle East peace process.

4 The so-called “spark” was caused by Sharon’s provocative visit to the Al Aqsa site.
But the situation did change in the case of cyber space. Compared to mainstream media, internet-mediated communication is better equipped to capture the complexity of the Palestinian situation. The internet provides an alternative space for grassroots voices and representations. It also relates to the reality on the ground in more complex ways. ‘Virtual,’ ‘cyber,’ ‘online’ representations of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict are anchored in an offline face-to-face paradoxical reality. As I have come to learn, internet-based communication alternatives help to redress the Palestinian narrative; that of an occupied nation without a state lacking access to dominant media structures and missing some of the conventional tools for political mobilization. Studying the impacts of the internet therefore deepened my understanding of the way the Palestinian public sphere is affected by the widespread penetration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The internet is clearly used to overcome the enduring immobility/occupation that Kanaana spoke about. The ‘tensions’ revealed by these realities became central to my research which was increasingly shaped by ethnographic experiences.

Personal confrontations

I had just returned from a pilot fieldwork trip in Palestine in September 2001, less than a week before 9/11, when a new page was turned in Middle Eastern history. Over and over, television screens showed images of airplanes penetrating the World Trade Centre buildings. Excessive mobile text messages and phone calls to and from Palestine blocked the mobile network several times. When I was finally able to reach the West Bank, all I could hear was shock and fear in his voice when a friend said ‘… this is not what we needed. You’ll see; they will make us pay for this’. While we talked, the news channels showed images of Palestinians cheering, contextualized to accounts of people celebrating the 9/11 attacks. Some of the pro-Israeli spin-doctors found new opportunities in this scenario, confirming my friends’ worries about the pretext 9/11 would offer for further repression/stigmatization of Palestinians.

The American ‘war on terror’ that followed would lead to many political groups in the Middle East being branded ‘terrorist’. Simultaneously, the fear on the ground was that the newly elected Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon would get a carte blanche to crush the Intifada. This soon became reality; Israel’s crackdown on the Palestinian uprising was characterized by violence and isolation: the peace process has been declared dead ever since. While media attention shifted to New York,

5 Many such media items later appeared to have been taken out of context or even fabricated. For an analysis of these kinds of urban legends see Janet, L. Langlois (2005) “Celebrating Arabs”: Tracing Legend and Rumor labyrinths in post-9/11 Detroit.

6 This was later used as a pretext by other governments to blacklist their own dissident organizations.

7 It must be noted that for many Arabs this MP in particular was detested: Sharon was the Minister of Defence that many remember for the “Qibia” (Palestine 1956) and Sabra and Shatilla massacres (Lebanon 1982).
Washington, Afghanistan, and then Iraq, collective punishment of Palestinians took place unnoticed and off-screen. In other words, the fusion of Bush and Sharon’s doctrines in the years after 2001 continued to represent the systematic destruction of Palestinian livelihoods, albeit with less media coverage.

I managed to return to Palestine to conduct a longer fieldwork in 2002. Two words capture the reality of these post 9/11 Intifada years: closure and curfew. Curfews have a particularly paralyzing effect on society. When Israel applies a curfew upon Palestinians it is targeted at all people and institutions and often comes without warning. It is a military curfew, ordering everybody to remain at home. So the consequences are enormous. Businesses, government offices and pharmacies are closed, schools dismissed, and medical services inaccessible to the public. The total closure of towns and cities was accomplished by checkpoints, and Israeli jeeps, tanks and Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) in the streets make them inaccessible by blocking all entries. If the curfew takes place midday (often via loudspeakers notifying all to go home), within an hour the city turns into a ghost town.8

One of the first times I experienced a curfew, I soon grew impatient. I had no choice but to deal with the situation as it was; meetings were called off and interviews rearranged and I was able to get some supplies from the neighbours who owned a little shop. This house arrest was part of a ‘collective punishment’ that all residents had to undergo. To be forced not to go out on the streets and not being able to leave the house causes a sense claustrophobia/isolation. The only alternative was to call friends to hear how they dealt with the situation. One thing I knew for sure: the first thing I would do when curfew was lifted was to go to the supermarket to stockpile drinks and food, and then go to an Internet Service Provider (ISP) and get myself an internet connection at home. Being connected to the net made an immense difference when I was once more stuck in a curfew a few days later. And when a military attack took place during a curfew and phone contact or visits were impossible, I would surf the net for the latest news, or email/chat with friends to find out if they were targeted or had more news.

We are confronted with the internet in myriad ways: as researchers, as consumers, and sometimes as online information producers. While fieldwork illustrated the meaningfulness of direct access to media and communication tools, it also raised new questions. The importance of direct internet access in the Palestinian political context compelled me to understand Palestinian ‘information society’, or ‘networked communities’, in a historical/political context. Multi-sited research in specific territorial situations also required a mapping of the Palestinian context according to local differences.

---

8 Not much later, Israel embarked on a new great plan for closure: the Wall along and within the West Bank finalized this immense entrapment. The Palestinian economy suffered a severe recession and thousands of families were hardly able to stockpile enough to survive.
Different Palestinian sites

Delving into the impact of ICT in the different territorial settings of the research showed that the everyday localities I studied differed. Refugee camps in Palestine display both differences and similarities with refugee camps in the diaspora. In Palestine, the refugees are not exiled; they are not direct outsiders and even if they are located within geographic sites like Ama’ri camp or Dheishe camp, the borders are rather fluid, although this use to be the case before stricter checkpoints were implemented in 2003 between the cities of Nablus, Ramallah, Jerusalem, and Hebron. After these military separations were established, movement was severely restricted in the West Bank (especially Qalqilia and Nablus) by the erection of the wall. Meanwhile, Gaza was basically cut into three parts by military borders.

The impact on Gaza is catastrophic. The city is much smaller than the West Bank, composing merely one-sixth of the occupied areas, but inhabited by one-third of the population in the Occupied Territories. With more than 1 million people, of whom a large majority is refugees, on merely two sq km, it has one of the highest population density in the world. This also meant that it is easier for the Israeli army to invade/arrest in the bigger (West Bank) Palestinian cities. I was told that whereas Gaza is more oppressed in terms of impoverishment and severely affected by being sealed off like an open prison; at least tanks and soldiers could not go in/out at will.9

Most protests in the West Bank take place in camps that lie at the entrance of cities and towns (such as Ama’ri and Dheishe). Youth stage clashes, throwing stones and rolling burning car tires, targeting jeeps and tanks that enter the cities, many children/teenagers from the camps participate in these activities. This also means the people in the camps often fall victim to acts of retaliation perpetrated by the Israeli army. The internet project in Ama’ri camp where I did research had to abort the project for a while. The Israeli army had invaded the camp, leaving traces of destruction behind; the women’s centre (that was hosting the project) was disconnected from the internet because the tanks had trashed the electric post and phone cables. Figure 1 shows the main Palestinian camp locations and where I conducted research in the OT and Diaspora.

Beside these differences with the “inside” (the Palestinian Occupied Territories) settings, there are also differences with the “outside” (the diaspora). Military incursions by the Israeli army such as in Palestine do not occur in the diaspora for example, at least not since the war against the PLO in 1982, when Palestinian camps in Lebanon were directly attacked. Yet, while colonial segregation such as in Palestine is absent in the diaspora, it is social discrimination in Lebanon and Jordan that represents a non-legible burden for Palestinians. Also the history of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) during Black September in 1971 in Jordan; the Israeli invasions and civil war in Lebanon; the overcrowded and poorly maintained camps in Jordan and Lebanon, present other markers of difference.

---

9 The last three years showed the other side of the coin: the dense geography of Gaza is the argument the Israeli army often uses for massive air force attacks on Gaza.
Figure 1: Three fieldwork sites/phases (original map from UNRWA website 2002)
There are not only differences between countries in the diaspora, but also within one country the setting can differ considerably as explained: all this impacts ICT access and use. The geographic separation and social fragmentations are manifested on several levels: Palestine/diaspora; camp/non-camp; central/remote settings. The distance between the (capital) cities and the camps strengthens the different forms of segregation and the sense of isolation. For example, al-Bekaa camp in the North-East of Jordan or Nahr al-Bared camp in the North of Lebanon are quite isolated; often directly by way of military checkpoints. It is easier to be part of a city’s social/political life when a camp is located in the capital, especially when expanding working class suburbs have incorporated the camps, as in Beirut and Amman. I could visit the camps in Beirut or Amman while also planning others things the same day, but a visit to Bourj al-Shamali in the South or Nahr al-Bared in the North of Lebanon was a different undertaking. I had to take a taxi journey from the nearby city (Tripoli or Sour, respectively), via separate roads that at times included military posts. These everyday realities on top of the political developments since I embarked on the research in 2001, determined my objectives.

Rethinking the objectives

The research objective was to examine different types of imagined Palestinian communities and explore how they are reconstructed by internet usage. The personal and ethnographic experiences sketched above helped me to fine-tune the general objective into the following aims: (1) examine the role of the internet in creating transnational links and images of Palestinian communities, and (2) investigate how the internet is used to mobilize local and transnational (pro) Palestinian activism. I start from the idea that the internet is a mediating space through which the Palestinian nation is globally “imagined” and shaped. This ‘global Palestine’ is a platform that gathers people of different local and diasporic Palestinian entities. Communities that were traditionally separated by national boundaries and/or travel restrictions, now exhibit new modes of connection via internet interactions.

The processes that produce such virtual Palestinian communities are not merely online-based but lie at the complex intersection between capitalism, technological development, politics of representation, and modes of governmentality. In fact, not only does internet use strengthen and reconfigure internal Palestinian communications, it also reconstructs its relation to global audiences. The internet may therefore affect Palestinian national self-identities and the ways these identities are related to/shaped by transnational forces. Moreover, I came to learn that internet usage do not only generate local/grassroots political participation, but also generate regional and transnational activism and mobilization.

10 Al-Bekaa camp was once literally locked/closed off during protests in support of the Intifada.
Though I take the internet as a vantage point, I wonder in what ways the social/political desires of Palestinians shape internet development. As indicated in figure 2, the different areas central in this research are not one-sided but complexly interrelated. Technological developments are crucial, but they do not determine the impact of internet usage in the research areas. The internet is clearly deployed as a political instrument, making cyberspace part of a political space that is shaped by both local and global forces. Political contexts and practices on the ground—violence, peace process, closures/isolation, and other regional developments—influence the use of internet communication as well as technological developments. Unveiling these local and global forces requires an understanding of the underlying political-economic issues, especially where they relate to offline Palestinian experiences.

The way I reformulated the general research objective had everything to do with being faced with certain contradictions between euphoric expectations and everyday contestations.

Figure 2: Schematic diagram of the dialectic relations involved in the research

Discovering contradictions

By starting to unravel the offline and online relations in the different fieldwork sites I became aware of the limits and potentials of internet technology. Locating the research questions into their historical and political-economic contexts indicated several contradictions and research tensions (Figure 3). The first issue concerns the overrated idea of mobility, as the returning myth of globalisation. The world is in constant movement because of migration processes and free flow capitalism: hence the supposed increase of mobility in a transnational world. Many fieldwork examples showed something different or even countered this notion. The context of the
Palestinian diaspora, points to mobility, at best forced mobility. Narratives of exile, deportations and occupation in the coming chapters express these contradictions. When facing serious problems crossing the borders from Jordan to Palestine, after being denied entry to Palestine and later deported, I understood much better that the concept of mobility is distributed. The sense of isolation due to curfew and closures is also characteristic of this immobility. During discussions in Palestine and Lebanon I came across many examples of the exile and immobility people were confronted with. During an interview in 2002, Samar, from Shatila camp in Beirut expressed what I heard so often:

   People want to, but don’t believe they can go back to Palestine. But we should believe it, because if you cut the hope of returning to Palestine you are nobody: a person without a homeland is like a person without any roots.

The internet did help to bridge distances and overcome a sense of isolation. 23-year-old student Zen from Bethlehem Palestine was one of the lucky few that had internet connection at home at a time when it was most needed. During an interview in Ramallah in 2001 she gave the following explanation:

   The first two weeks of the Intifada I used to chat extensively. It was very difficult to go to work because they shot people at the checkpoint; I was scared to go out […] The meaning of place and time changed a lot, I am from Bethlehem which is not far from Ramallah. I use to visit my family every weekend. Now if I want to know how they are or need to assure them I’m ok, I send them an email. When they attacked and reoccupied Bethlehem, I checked many websites and news sources on the net for information and pictures.

Secondly, the concept of a new alternative/virtual space strengthens, rather than replaces, the strong ideal of an independent territorial state. The virtual traversals to-and-from offline Palestinian cities and villages are often about being in space in search for a place. This apparent tension between space and place was very concrete in the diaspora because most Palestinians are exiled/refugees and thus never seen their homeland. Nevertheless, Palestinian territorial reference is a major part of everyday social and political life and is commonly referred to. 16-year-old Shaker from Beirut tried to explain the strong urge he felt to be connected to the land and the people of Palestine during an interview in 2003:

   When you’re cold you need gloves and when you’re sick medicine, but meeting a Palestinian from Palestine is like meeting your other half, the missing piece of the puzzle.

The relation between offline and online reality is very important. Face-to-face contact becomes a fantasy for those who can only have virtual communication as an alternative. Mere virtual connection with Palestine as an alternative also has a
downside. Dali, from Shatila camp in Lebanon explained during an interview in 2003 how isolation and immobility re-constitute the relevance of place and space:

You feel like drifting away as if no one is around you in the internet café. The only aim is to talk with him [Dali’s internet friend in Palestine]. But I want to see him, I feel something is missing. I shouldn’t make the mistake of talking about love, but just politics and Palestine because it is impossible to meet anyway. It’s hard.

Closely related to the harsh realities of immobility and isolation/exile and the reinterpretation of space and place, is the third issue: oppression. This is a forceful thread in the Palestinian experience. The collapse of the Palestinian economy and infrastructure, casualties and a society with thousands disabled/traumatised, and the hardships that the neglected refugees in host countries have to endure, are all ‘in-your-face’ realities. But besides the victimization, the military assaults, and the media bias, there is also resistance. Palestinian agency occurs at different tactical/strategic levels: in internet cafés where kids play Intifada games or where youths assemble to debate with Israelis on chat forums, and by hacktivists who damage or infiltrate pro-Israeli websites; and also indirectly by making local or global websites to notify the world, express the historical Palestinian narrative, and humanise the Palestinian people, or, international political mobilization and support.

The Electronic Intifada website illustrates these three themes. Pro-Palestinian activists from different countries joined efforts and started an electronic uprising. They launched a web-based movement aimed at countering the media propaganda, uncovering pro-Israeli reporting that many journalists were getting away with. The term Intifada is related to a form of resistance. The content and personal features also emphasize the oppression of Palestinians. One of the website’s major aims is mobilizing the international community to support the right of (territorial) Palestinian self-determination while virtually bringing together Palestinians and non-Palestinians. By doing so, it offered alternative mobility and space for people who are not capable of engaging in direct activism or lack of offline mobility. These three tensions—mobility/immobility, space/place, and oppression/resistance—are the concrete prisms through which to understand the research questions.

**Figure 3: “Tensions” during research**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contradictions of The Field</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CONTRADICTION I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobility &amp; Immobility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTRADICTION II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual Space &amp; Territorial Place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTRADICTION III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppression &amp; Resistance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One of the challenges of multi-sited research is to understand the local (historic) differences. History is written from a contemporary perspective as well as from different localities in the present; history forms a crucial backdrop to this research. The aim is then to trace “how and why media messages go awry and yet also how they shape lives, treating audiences neither as resistant heroes to be celebrated, nor as stupid victims to be pitied” (Ginsburg, Abu Lughod, Larkin 2002:13). These three tensions are in fact the markers of a particular local (colonial/political) history.

1.2 Narratives of Discontent

The establishment of Apartheid in South Africa in 1948, the Partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, and the occupation of Palestine in 1948, illustrate a post WWII momentum when territorial fragmentation was a central part of colonial rule. The geographic partitions in the context of imperial wars involved new articulations of nation and community and redefined the relationship between national identity, the (colonial) nation state, and a shared collective narrative.

Palestine can be described as a nation without a state. The Palestinian tragedy has been a transnational one involving diverse populations and states. Self and group identity can be based on people’s lives as victims of oppression and, of course, experiences during resistance. It is important to understand the history of the Palestinian people in order to understand the concept of a shared (political) identity. Even though it was prohibited to express Palestinian identity in whatever form, be it local or national, manifest or latent, such claims to a national identity did not disappear; to the contrary. Rather, it was preserved and politicized, particularly in the refugee camps and occupied cities.

One of the clearest illustrations of the indomitable claims of identity are the incessant references to belonging to a certain village or house, even though it might have been destroyed or long taken over by Israeli families. Fourth generation refugee camp children still perceive themselves as being from Jaffa or Deir-Yassin, making the local attachments (fuelled by virtual sentiments on the internet) very apparent. In order to understand the relevance of the internet as a social-political alternative, it is necessary to study the wider Palestinian context while pointing out the historical roots of 1948 and 1967. To know the needs of the present, we must understand the losses of the past.

In defence of history

The making of the Israeli state was based on a Zionist nationalist ideology in which land and labour had to be ‘Jewish only’. Ella Shohat (1989) showed how this meant the overall exclusion of Palestinians from land, employment, and politics. In 1897, Theodor Herzl adopted Zangwill’s famous dictum; “The problem of Zionism is one of means of transport: there is a people without a land and a land without a people”.
Such exclusionary views were repeated over and again until they became common in Israeli (and much of Western) society. A century later such notions were again repeated, for example by then Prime Minister of Israel Golda Meir, who stated in a Sunday Times interview on June 15, 1969: "There were no such thing as Palestinians. When were there an independent Palestinian people with a Palestinian state? It was either southern Syria before the First World War, and then it was a Palestine including Jordan. It was not as though there were a Palestinian people in Palestine considering itself as a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They did not exist".\(^\text{11}\)

Therefore, according to Edward Said, Zionism is crucial for comprehending the current human and political crises. In The Politics of Dispossession he wrote:

In my opinion, the question of Zionism is the touchstone of contemporary political judgement. A lot of people who are happy to attack Apartheid or U.S. intervention in Central America are not prepared to talk about Zionism and what it has done to the Palestinians. To be the victim of a victim does present quite unusual difficulties. For if you are trying to deal with the classic victim of all time—the Jews and his or her movement—then to portray yourself as the victim of the Jew is a comedy worthy of one of your own novels. But now there is a new dimension, as we can see from the spate of books and articles in which any kind of criticism of Israel is treated as an umbrella for anti-Semitism. Particularly in the United States, if you say anything at all, as an Arab from a Muslim culture, you are seen to be joining classical European or Western anti-Semitism. It has become absolutely necessary, therefore, to concentrate on the particular history and context of Zionism in discussing what it represents for the Palestinians (1994:121).

What was known as the country 'Palestine' and its people, the 'Palestinians', began being transformed permanently during the first decades of the 20th Century. World War I, the Zionist movement, and the politics of the British Mandate had drastic consequences for Palestinians. Until WWI, Palestine belonged to the Ottoman Empire. Following the 1917 Russian Revolution, Bolsheviks exposed documents on the Sykes-Picot (1916) agreement made between France and Britain for the division of Palestine, Syria and Lebanon. The Balfour Declaration in 1917 was Britain’s first open support of the Zionist movement in Palestine. Between 1917 and 1947 land purchase and Zionist migration into Palestine grew, while Arab Palestinian forces weakened. This succession of events caused major changes in the self-consciousness of the Palestinians (Khalidi 1997:159).

After the British colonial army crushed the Palestinian uprising of 1936, the British Peel Commission of 1937 suggested partitioning Palestine into a Jewish and Arab state while retaining a British Mandate area. Accepted by the Zionists, the Palestinians rejected this and more revolts broke out (Takkenberg 1998:9). This

\(^{11}\) For a history of Zionist politics as represented by Herzl and Meir see: Nur Masalha (1992), Ilan Pappe (1992), John Rose (2004).
scheme was later followed by the more sophisticated United Nations Resolution 181 plan in 1947, which in fact violated other UN principles that granted people the right to self-determination. This UN partition plan of 1947 led to al-Nakba, or the Catastrophe (the commonly used term for the events of 1948). The plan granted the Jews in Palestine over 56% sovereignty of the territory at a time when they owned less than 7% of the land and constituted less than one-third of the population. By the end of the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948, Israel appropriated 77.8% of the land. Contemporary discussions about peace deals do not mention that Palestinians had already compromised profoundly when they were forced to accept Israel on 78% of Palestine that was subsequently lost through war, occupation, and exile.

Palestine was fragmented and became largely a country of displaced refugees. The question of why the large majority of the Palestinian population fled from their villages in 1948 is still debated. In the 1980s and 1990s several Israeli historians ‘rewrote’ this history from an unusually critical perspective. The primary causes were armed attacks on Palestinian villages, lack of united Arab leadership, and weak military capacity compared to the British-backed Zionist armed forces (see Morris 1987, Ilan Pappé 1988, 2006, Avi Shlaim 1988). The Zionist movement, and later the state of Israel, forced upon Palestine a double migration: firstly, through a massive displacement beyond their territory and secondly, through the arrival of large groups of settlers to replace the Palestinians (Safieh 1997). In 1967, after Egypt suffered a militarily defeat, Israel occupied the remaining Gaza (under control of Egypt), West Bank, and East Jerusalem (under control of Jordan). Now, 60 and 40 years later by the start of the 21st century, three million Palestinians live in the occupied West Bank and Gaza, more than one million Palestinians live within the (pre-1948) borders of Israel, and a majority of the remaining four and a half million exiled Palestinians are scattered around refugee camps throughout the Arab world. The vast majority of Palestinians cannot return to Palestine.

Palestinian life inside the territories is determined by occupation. While Kimmerling (1993) described Israeli policies towards Palestinians as one of the ‘stick’ and the ‘carrot’, occupation took increasingly violent forms from the early 1980s on. Military rule in the 1980s branded a stick far more than a carrot. In 1985 the Iron Fist policy was introduced by then Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, with the aim to break down any national aspiration or opposition. This was to be achieved by any means necessary, such as the ‘bone breaking’ methods by the First Intifada. But by then the Palestinian grassroots movement was already changing. Teachers, workers unions, women’s movements, and student unions, self-governing community projects, and a variety of political parties had become rooted in society. In his discussion of the

---

12 Especially Morris’ ‘The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem’, chronicled for the first time in detail the terror and ethnic cleansing that drove 600,000-750,000 Palestinians from their homes in 1948, thus refuting the myth that they fled under the orders of Arab leaders.

13 I.e.: to punish or seduce into submission: different tactics for the same aim.

14 Perhaps the first televised example of Israeli oppression: young men were dragged to hills where soldiers used stones and rifles to break arms and legs.

---
history of Palestinian revolts, Hiltermann (1992) describes the important role of the strong social structure for the formation of local organization of later broad-based resistance.

From the 1970s on, West-Bankers and Gazans began to demonstrate in solidarity with Palestinians inside the 1948 borders (‘Israeli Arabs’). Palestinians adopted the common hymn *Biladi, Biladi* [my country, my country] and literature of resistance flourished (Kimmerling 1993:254). The new universities played an important role in this regard; particularly at Birzeit University where the left-nationalist student councils went deep into anti-colonial activities. Students worked to bridge the division between rural and urban Palestinians and prevented Israeli efforts to purchase land from farmers (Kimmerling 1993:255). The expulsion of the PLO from Lebanon in 1982 relocated the political centre from Beirut to the Occupied Territories, which strengthened political consciousness. December 9, 1987 was a major turning point in Palestinian history: the outbreak of the Intifada. For many around the world the Intifada was an eye-opener about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. For the first time Palestinian perceptions of the Israel-Palestine conflict received some hearing in Western public opinion, and Palestinians could be viewed as an oppressed people.

Due to the collapse of the Soviet Block and the first US war against Iraq in 1991, Palestinians were forced into negotiations and agreements. The meetings of 1991 in Madrid and the official PLO/Israel/US-brokered Oslo negotiations were to present a solution for the Middle East conflict. Prior to 1994, Palestinians had no form of sovereignty. The Palestinian territories were colonized and the existing Palestinian political leadership could only operate on a symbolic or very local level. The political-economic circumstances steadily deteriorated. The peace process created false promises and (like the popular protests) was portrayed in equally false ways.

**False Promises—False Portrayals**

The period between the first and second Intifada is important and should be seen in light of the transformation of the PLO. Hassan (2003) describes the years between 1982 (expulsion from Lebanon) and 1993 (start of Oslo/PNA) as the period when the PLO abandoned the politics of resistance linked to struggle for national liberation, and embraced the 'politics of appeasement'. The major problem is that this shift was predominantly defined by US interests (Hassan 2003:1). Later, in exchange for Israel’s strategic control of all Palestinian territory (albeit under a Palestinian flag) and complete denial of the right of return for refugees, Barak’s government pulled President Arafat into a full and final settlement. According to Perry Anderson, Oslo did not change anything significant:

> After eight years, the IDF (Israeli Defence Forces) remains in complete control of 60% of the West Bank, and ‘joint’ control of another 27%; a network of Israeli-only roads built on confiscated land divides and encircles the residual enclaves under Palestinian authority; the number of
Jewish settlers, who monopolise 80% of all water in the occupied territories, has virtually doubled; the per capita income of Palestinians fell by one quarter in the first five years after the Accords (2001c:18).

Offering Arafat partial and symbolic independence meant abandoning any pretence of a return to the pre-1967 borders. In a context of popular opposition to such ‘surrender’, Arafat was trapped. Taking the conditions in account, the eruption of a popular uprising was hardly surprising anymore. Two months later Sharon made a provocative visit to the holy Harm Sharif (part of the al-Aqsa Mosque) in Jerusalem. The illusions of a ‘just peace’ in the context of Oslo had vanished and Palestinians did not accept the dictates or provocations (Anderson 2001c:19). A new generation stepped in and mobilized active resistance. On 29 September 2000, on the day of Sharon’s trip, the Intifada exploded for the second time. However, this Intifada took shape in a radically different context, that of a post-Cold War, post-Oslo, and soon enough post-9/11 Middle East. It therefore soon met with a response that was bloodier than ever.

The situation also caused bitterness and despair. For example, studying or working abroad was a common aspiration for Arab youth but with 9/11 this was nearly impossible. In Palestine feelings of desperation were being challenged by the continued mobilization of the Intifada. The different forms of resistance comprised of Fatah factions, Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and Non Governmental Organisations (NGO), secular Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP)/Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) factions, as wells as Islamist Hamas and Jihad, and even international activists like that of the International Solidarity Movement (ISM).

Young stone throwers at the clashes mostly hailed from poor classes and refugee camps; militant groups were mainly formed around the youth movements of political parties. The Intifada also spread outside Palestine when protests occurred in Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, but also in the US and Europe where it merged with a growing antiwar movement after 9/11. Edward Said succinctly captured the shift in political activism:

A turning point in the Arab history has been reached and for this the Intifada is a significant marker. For not only is it an anti colonial rebellion of the kinds that we have seen periodically in Setif, Sharpeville, Soweto and elsewhere, it is another example of the general discontent with the post Cold War order displayed in events of Seattle and Prague (2001:30).

---

15 This stems from the Sharm Al Sheik (Egypt) US-Israel-PNA meeting of 2000, which was followed by the Why River Washington meeting. Using the word ‘generous’—and revering to ‘90% of the land, is misleading because it actually means 90% of the 22% of historic Palestine (West Bank and Gaza), itself divided by Israeli By-pass roads or settlements; in other words a non-viable Bantu state.
16 The ‘Seattle protest’ is considered the birth of the new anti capitalist movement where thousands demonstrated against the WTO meeting in November 1999. Prague 2000 was the first international follow up where 25,000 people from Europe demonstrated against the IMF and WB.
While there are a number of similarities, there are also differences between the First and Second Intifada. In 1987 Palestinians introduced the Intifada as a new style of rebellion combining the character of a non-violent movement with that of a national struggle for independence. Many people were involved in one way or another in resistance through civil disobedience. Popular committees challenged the Israeli colonial administration and underground school systems and medical teams were set-up, Israeli products were boycotted, and there were many cases of tax rebellions and strikes (Hiltermann 1992). Ruthless oppression, which included killing, torture, and prolonged detention, and the broader impact of the first Gulf War in 1991, weakened the morale of the uprising. Later, top down centralization of the PLO, and the eventual malfunctioning of the PA administration itself, also limited the chance to combine official negotiations with continued resistance from below (Andoni 2001).

The return of the PLO leadership to Palestine after Oslo had significant consequences for grassroots structures and participation. During the First Intifada, grassroots resistance was organized with more or less direct (albeit underground) participation. But the Oslo interim agreement created a different environment for the second Intifada in 2000. The fact that the PA had partial control over some territorial areas complicated matters significantly; especially their monopoly of armed forces creating on-the-ground divisions. The militarization of society through armed groups and militants not only stalled a mass movement, it also allowed Israel to use its full military arsenal because the presence of the PNA and armed security forces allowed Israel to portray the conflict as a war between ‘states’. The consequences were incomparable to even the most violent reactions to earlier uprisings. The use of F16 jets, bombardments and tank attacks on towns and cities worsened the type of injuries and total casualty tolls.

During fieldwork in Palestine many activists complained about the official media portrayal of the Intifada, underlying another clear difference between the First and the Second Intifada. However, a crucial/positive, difference with the first Intifada was the development of mass electronic media. This is significant because the focus of protest is often the media. A shift in coverage of Palestinians allowed for the Palestinian cause to gain more legitimacy. A concurrent shift in a more critical coverage of Israel’s actions opened up a space for previously unthinkable criticism of Israeli policies.

Criticism from inside Israel started to gain strength too; Israeli journalists like Amira Hass, Gideon Levy, and Dan Rabinowitz wrote about the deliberate political agenda behind Sharon’s visit to the al-Aqsa Mosque in 2000 that sparked off the Intifada, the deadly realities at checkpoints or the consequences of the wall, and so forth. However, views of critical journalists like Hass or Levy who are known in Israel are rarely explored in mainstream European media.17 Moreover, a large number of

---

17 They are, however, invited to talk at conferences and debates, mostly attended by a selective audience. In fact, when living in Palestine the public debate on Israel seemed more ‘open’ than in many European press forms. The taboo on criticizing Israel was confirmed in a documentary that unveiled how high profile...
mostly, but not exclusively, Arab journalists have been obstructed, injured, or killed. Reports on attacks against the press in Palestine piled up since the beginning of the Intifada because those who seek an inside view must be present at the literal centre of the conflict.

IDF forces have attacked numerous reporters and technicians as documented by Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (Al Mezan) and the International Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). Even when wearing special vests and other signs of identification, Israeli soldiers systematically prevent their movement, destroy their devices and instruments, and even open fire. Many independent or Arab journalists have had their press offices closed and permits withdrawn. Comparative research listed Israel as one of the top countries that do not provide objective journalism. In other words, a war over representation is waged often literally, which, according to many Palestinian NGOs, is a deliberate attempt to hide crimes against Palestinians.

These realities in Palestine showed me the shortcomings of the “free” press, liberal public sphere, and other ideals that presuppose there is open access to public discourse and free mobility. The on-the-ground realities and experiences of curfew/closure/immobility determined the focus of the research. It became more important to understand the effects of new internet technologies on Palestinian diasporas, and internet communication as expressed in political contexts. In order to link theory about ICT, globalization, and mass media, with practices of occupation, exile, and capitalism, I will briefly discuss the major theoretical frameworks underlying the research questions.

1.3 Theory and Practice

The development of the internet has altered communication styles and information/media structures, while the rise of global capitalism and global communication continues to impact our world (Featherstone 1995, Kellner 1998). According to Castells, the network society emerged from this transformation of global economy and culture. The transformative potential of the internet (also central in descriptions of political-economic changes) were a common feature of the globalization discourse; though utopian idealisation about the magic of “globalization”

politicians and journalists were systematically targeted by right wing and pro-Israeli organizations such as CIDI in Holland (see Zwijgen over Israel, by Zembla 2003).

18 For attacks on journalists in the Occupied Territories since 2000, see CPJ report at: http://www.cpj.org/regions_00/mideast_00/mideast_00.html; Information for 2001-2006 and more on general press developments can be found at www.cpj.org/regions_07/mideast_07/mideast_07.html#top.
19 http://www.mezan.org/. And see CPJ general statistics about democratic state of journalism in Palestine/Israel. This practice is against the international law and UN resolution that “guarantees the protection of journalists delegated to perform risky missions”. A large number of mostly but not exclusively Arab journalists have been killed or injured. According to the 4th Geneva Convention this is considered a war crime. See also Kay Hafez who describes that Israel applies censorship “for the sake of nationalist goals” (2001:6).
were often out of touch from reality. For Fukuyama (1992) and Friedman (1999), globalization marked the triumph of capitalism and market economy. Huntington (1996) was inclined to stress the definite ‘clash of civilization’ between the civil West and the uncivil rest. This magic of “globalization” actually arose out of another/preceding idiom: the magic of “postmodernism”. Both magical models were major (theoretical) promoters of ICT.

Globalization and the role of “new technologies” became new kinds of postmodern articulations. A stream of thinking, specifically from cultural sciences, by which according to Eagleton (2004) postmodern theorists:

… reject totalities, universal values, grand historical narratives, solid foundations to human existence, and the possibility of objective knowledge. Postmodernity is sceptical of truth, unity and progress, opposes what it sees as elitism in culture, tends towards cultural relativism, and celebrates pluralism, discontinuity and heterogeneity (:13).

This transition is marked by an implosion of technologies that supposedly even created a post-human species, or replaced political economy (Kellner 2002:287). Baudrillard argued that information technologies entered every aspect of society and created a social environment that is ‘simulated’.

To avoid overtly pessimistic or optimistic—and usually abstract metaphysical—narratives, Kellner (2002) argued for understanding globalization as a product of technological revolution and global restructuring of capitalism. A political economy of ‘new’ mass media and its value as commodity of social capital belies the internet and new public spheres. The internet may emphasize the interrelationship between society and an ‘effective’ (i.e. critical) public sphere. The important question becomes how access to the internet can impact society, or more precisely, how the internet transforms the global Palestinian public sphere. What is sometimes lacking is a conceptual understanding that integrates complex/diverse phenomena.

New technology (and ‘new’ economy) are part of a global restructuring of capitalism, but they are not autonomous forces that themselves generate a new society or economy distinct from previous modes of social organisation (Kellner 2002:289). Implementing Kellner’s message demands a critical assessment of the development of electronic media in general. The next section will be an assessment of some of these notions by tracing the evolution of electronic media. My aim is to understand the progressive as well as oppressive characteristics of globalization of media and how national/collective identity and belonging in traditional media overlap/differ from internet media.

---

20 Kellner argued that Capitalism persists to be the hegemonic force; and that this is not less, but more so since the postmodern ‘end of history’ paradigm. Unrestrained capitalism continues to dominate production, distribution, and consumption.
Tracing the electronic revolution

What possible relationship could exist between this shrinking, splitting, and boxing of end-credits on the one end, and mass revolts against the imposition of International Monetary Fund policies in a modern metropolitan capital such as Argentina’s Buenos Aires? How could it be that this shrinking, splitting and boxing is related in any way whatsoever to the West dropping bombs on this or that part of the developing world? … Could there be a connection between such a marginal aspect of our experience in the media and the structures of the media themselves? And is there anything linking all this to the forms and content of the media and the meanings they generate? Perhaps … you are aware that the world is not quite right, but the reasons for why it is wrong do not disclose themselves in how the world appears (Wayne 2003:1).

If media has emancipating potentials we need to discover how and to what extent. The important questions Wayne (2003) poses in the opening quote challenges us to link media and politics in such a way as to understand contemporary media cultures from a political-economic context. Critical analyses of media technology are not new; they can be traced to the debates inspired by the Frankfurt School in the 1940s and Cultural Studies in the 1960/70s in Britain. Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall, and contributions in Feminist and Postcolonial studies were influenced by Marxist analyses. The internet has a special place in the development of the ‘electronic revolution’. Understanding how the internet potentially represents/transforms the Palestinian public sphere also means connecting the history of media to frameworks of (national) community.

Instead of referring to ‘the’ media, it was also required to deconstruct different media forms. Marshall McLuhan’s groundbreaking work in the 1960s has broadly influenced our thinking about media. McLuhan introduced the ‘hot and cold’ media dichotomy which helps explain the reconstitution and transformation of media (1994). ‘Hot’ media have low participation but high information content, while ‘cool’ media is high in participation but contains a lower level of information intensity. Examples include telephone vs. print media or cinema vs. television. These reconstitutions implicate the meaning of place, space and time. Media thus also impacts the public sphere and (national) community, and this juxtaposition has been debated incessantly.

According to Habermas, the critical public sphere declined as electronic media became a dominant field of consumption and promoted media capitalism/competition rather than information and debate. Unlike the hot medium of face-to-face communication in the idealised coffee house salons, the development of new, cold, media such as newspapers, TV or radio, disallowed the possibility of talking

---

21 Marxism had offered a framework of media with regards to unequal social relations. These dynamics result in the formation of ideological representations of society; ownership, content and media production are linked and shaped by class domination. A good overview can be found in Stevenson (1995) and see also the work of Colin Sparks (2006 and 2007).
back and taking part. Through specific communication practices, people were turned into (and regarded as) a receiving public. This process, in time, transformed communication relations from collectivism to individuality. The public became more privatized, and the private more commercialized. The new economic/political contexts therefore transformed interactions between the public and the private. The way ‘hot media’—more direct and face-to-face transformed to ‘cool media’—with more space to participate, is related to broader Modernising changes. Stevenson argued, “The transition to electronic communication can be connected with a change in the experiential nature of modernity” (1995:119).

The link between media and national identity has been placed centrally in one of the standard texts related to nation-state/nationalism. In Imagined Communities Benedict Anderson (1983) describes the ‘imagined’ characteristic—members of a nation will never know all the members yet do feel connected to them. The nation is also characterized by “sovereignty” and “limitedness”. These attributes of the nation are important because they refer to it as having territorial yet elastic boundaries dividing it from other nations, and involving self-determination because “nations dream of being free” (Anderson 1983:6). Shared symbols, images, narratives, and language circulates beyond face-to-face interaction. Through this process the role of mass media and communication gained importance in constituting a sense of national community. These same tools strengthened the nation-state. Its rise was unthinkable without top-down media, centralised technological infrastructures, homogenizing national newspapers, national broadcasting corporations, and so on. Nations and nation-states should, in other words, be considered ideologically constructed.

In their early writings Habermas and Anderson had the ‘traditional’ media technologies as their available examples. The technological developments of media infrastructures created more space to participate. The internet contributed to ‘widening’ this public and private sphere. A qualitative difference between internet and other media forms are the participative elements provided to its consumers/users. Watching television or reading a newspaper comprises a single activity, while internet technologies can embrace a variety of participatory elements. Later, Anderson (1991, 2001a) also placed television and the internet as the powerful influence of print media.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the internet started to undermine state monopoly on media. The further globalizing economy and the fast developments of technological media, influenced the ways people exchange and express their ideas. The internet is comprised of different levels: one can read, write, watch pictures, listen to music and live radio programs, voice chat with one another, use a camcorder while chatting to see each other, download films, and archive material, etc. The internet is like a basket containing newspapers, radio, and television, except that all these, on their own, miss the potentially interactive and grassroots features of internet based media. According to Castells (1996) citizens became attached to a ‘mediate global’ public sphere as we see greater diversifications. Castells’ influential Information Age trilogy (1996, 1997, 1998) and The Internet Galaxy (2001), suggest that a network society relies on an interface between the global and the local (the virtual space of flows and the territorial
New mass media thus plays a crucial role in the re-imagination and reconstitution of links between people, and in the emergence of (new) public arenas of debate.

One of the theoretical critiques regarding the imagined community was that the nation-state no longer features as the privileged space for the imagination of identity. Appadurai (1997) outlined the changing transformation from national communities to ‘communities of sentiments’ assuming a new process of ‘de-territorialization’. One of the buzzwords became transnationalism as I will debate in Chapter Two. Anderson (1992) argued that distance and exile are still powerful incubators of identity and, moreover, that better communication strengthens awareness of others in distance places, and therefore affecting self-identity. Rather than transnationalism, the result of new forms of communication is thus long-distance nationalism, a kind of trans/nation-state/nationalism.

Cultural and technological globalization also impacted the notions of public space and public sphere. Thus another, yet related, critique regarded the public sphere concept and was much debated (Calhoun 1992). One of the effects of new electronic media is the expansion of the public sphere with opportunities for participation by a public with transnational ties, creating space for new interpretations/interpreters. The internet relates differently to social, political, and economic power structures in comparison to television. In much of the academic discourse about a ‘transcendental cyber space’, the internet is to some extent treated as an autonomous (cyber)space. The transformation from a territorial to a virtual/network society supposedly led to the disappearance of the nation-state as an important political-economic framework.

A central argument of Castells with regard to this discussion is that a new form of capitalism has emerged: global in its character, hardened in its goals, and much more flexible than any of its predecessors. The network society makes explicit the dynamics by which the global elite has dominated the lives of those who remain banned to the local. This reinforces a structural domination of the ‘space of flows’ (online) over the ‘space of places’ (offline). New social movements have sought to resist the expansion of the ruling classes. By using new media forms, political groups developed alternative voices through free sources of the internet. The most quoted examples were the Zapatistas’ use of the internet in their struggle against the oppression of indigenous Indians by the Mexican state. While understanding the described transformation of the capitalist system, the influence of the online over the offline is doubted. That is why the Zapatista example remains an interesting allegory—they were not internet activists but guerrillas who used the internet in addition to their predominantly offline resistance.

As mentioned above, postmodern/globalization analyses about the impact of new media remained too much on the level of philosophy and contribute to a metaphysical narrative that rarely articulates concretely how political power and

---

22Although Anderson correctly critiques the interpretation of transnationalism as a concept that should oppose the notion of nationalism, in my view the notion of long distance by Anderson and that of transnationalism share more similarities than differences.
capitalism shape internet development and society. Thus, however fascinating some of the narratives, the alternative space-less world cannot be devoid of any link to locality. As Terranova (2004) shows, rather than disconnected from a particular place, to have virtual reality we need more connection and for this we still need a grounded ‘real’ infrastructure as this relation itself holds important implications. Moreover, Palestinians strongly identify as part of a national community. The internet can shape the formation of national identities and public spheres in a similar fashion as the electronic communication and ‘print capitalism’ we know from Anderson and Habermas.

We also need to look at different social-political histories of mass media, and the relation between politics, media, and society. This is especially important in the Arab world, where there have been profound changes with the new programs via MBC and AL Jazerra since the 1990s introduction of Satellite television. Together with the beginning of internet technology, this has generated social changes in local and transnational media spaces. The level and type of participation and availability differs according to country and class.

The 1990s neo-liberal free-market policies led to an increase of Satellite and internet projects. Although aiming towards commercialization of the medium in general, these new infrastructures were important in circumventing centralised and censored state media; particularly as the Middle East is one of the most state-controlled regions. Progressive online newspapers are an example of the reconstructions of identity and mobilizations on/via the internet in the Middle East.23 While most internet users in the early phase of internet development in the Arab world belonged to the elite classes, this changed a great deal with the mushrooming Internet Cafes that offered low cost internet as I will show in Chapter Six. The internet penetration statistics in the Middle East show the highest growth rate in the world. According to the Internet World stats Report there was more than a 400% increase of internet access between 2000 and 2005. These are rough estimates because community access and shared usage is high, especially in Palestine, having had several important technological leaps as I will explain in Chapter Two.24

The early work on new media and the internet in the Middle Eastern context, offered by Alterman and Eickelman (1998), and Anderson (1999), had an important impact on understanding the relationship between media, political community, and public sphere. According to Eickelman & Salvatore (2003), the institutionalization of certain media contributes to specific ways of being a public, of coming together and creating collectivities”. As Eickelman argues:

23 Simultaneously, however, the internet has increased the number of jailed journalists increased even more. One of the reports by CPJ (2006) shows that one in three jailed journalists worldwide is now an internet blogger. Egypt has been one of the most repressive, withCubeMedia. Org reporting that 42 journalists were covered in 2006. Egypt has also arrested more than 200 people in the last several years for criticizing the government.

24 www.internetworldstats.com/me/reports.htm
…in a repressive ‘homeland’, public sphere can also enter more readily into contact with their ‘diaspora’ counterparts, often living in circumstances less subject to political control and intimidation. The increased possibilities for transnational communication also contribute significantly to widening ‘homeland’ public spheres. Some ideas of public can be intensely local; others can be transregional and transnational. 

Looking back, Birzeit University was the embryo of Palestinian internet. At the time of my MA fieldwork in 1998/1999 student campaigners and volunteers at the Computer Centre prepared the Birzeit Internet Festival with the aim to enhance general internet skills through workshops about email usage and search engines. Several of my friends were also involved in a unique project that combined radio with internet technology. With Outload they offered programs and had discussions about local/internal issues, music, and interviews (see Table 1). The program could be listened to once a week via the BZU website from any place in the world.

By tracing the electronic revolution, especially with regards to the construction and imagination of national communities, Palestine showed the limitations of the liberal public sphere and transnational mobility. The idea that internet media is a completely different (better, freer) form of ICT than newspapers or television, exaggerates the differences while downplaying the structural forces that make up internet technology. It is too tempting to attribute a specific role to the internet and overstate the meaning of a virtual world, especially if viewed as some sort of substitute. These seem to be opposing statements, but in fact what is needed is a dialectic understanding that can make sense of contradicting phenomena.

When we discuss online identity and construction of communities, it is important to note that mass mediation online does not replace face-to-face communication. We cannot forget the importance of physical practices, and it is more helpful to look at media in relation to offline, face-to-face, forms of communication. Every fundamental change in the history of communication is part of a preceding and future process; according to Carey (2005:446), most of the initial internet literature was not sufficiently historical and lacked a comparative perspective with other forms of technology. Another important point is the fact that this ‘space-less’ technique ICT offers, is in the Palestinian case so obviously used for ‘place’ (territorial) related motives, in particular through the strong call for a Palestinian state on the internet.

Therefore, although it is sometimes stated that the nation-state is an outdated concept, this is hardly applied to the particular conditions of Palestinians. The internet’s relation to everyday life cannot be understood without considering the broader political-economic dynamics. Concerning the impact of ICT developments, Dahhan (2003) writes, “Palestinian Israelis indeed find themselves between a rock and a hard place: discrimination within Israeli society towards them has been echoed in the framework of CMC (computer mediated communication) and ICTs.”

---

It is important to note that, contrary to the open *publicness* of communication, the introduction of the internet also enables users to operate *secretively* (from the state). But a form of *selectivity* can also be motivated by unequal computer literacy, (in)accessibility or exclusion of web-domains, cultural preferences and conditions. The public sphere is an important notion, especially as numerous contributions offered new ways to move beyond the traditional public sphere. The idea of *counter public sphere/counter publics* (Klug 2000, Warner 2002, Fenton 2003) is important with regard to the Palestinian national context. Many of these assessments lead me to conclude that the impact of electronic/mass media is to be seen as a dialectic process.

**Dialectics of Internet**

The political situation today is the major component of our internet use, “al-haja ’um al-ikhtira’” [need is the mother of invention]. When companies are not able to go from the West Bank to Gaza, all of sudden Video Conference becomes important; when people are stuck home on curfew, all of sudden your internet connection to the outside world is important. Sam Bahour, Ramallah.

During an interview in 2002 in Palestine, Sam Bahour explained the importance of the internet to me. He is one of the many Palestinian expatriates who returned after the Oslo agreements and participated in the founding of the first major Telecom provider in Palestine, The Palestine Telecommunications Company (PalTel). PalTel performed well in constructing a modern, high-performance infrastructure. This is even more impressive given the difficult circumstances in which PalTel has to operate, which included working under occupation and military attacks in the occupied PNA areas. I could see that the internet played an important role in Palestinian society. The number of internet connections in Palestine, but also in refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan saw an exponential growth between 2001 and 2005. The development of the internet could “open” borders and even offer alternative ways to establish social relations.

There is no direct equilibrium between technological availability and open access, neither between the potential of virtual mobility and actual mobility. New analyses, such as of a de-territorializing world inspired by Castells and Appadurai, are best understood when they are studied in line with empirical experiences. No medium can completely transcend the economic gap widened by neo-liberal policies of the Washington consensus of the 1980/90s (Terranova 2004:41). The internet infrastructure itself exposes the power relation that lies beneath it. The strongly centralized governing bodies like the regulatory board (ICANN) that modify virtual space through URL/WWW name control, confirm this. These bodies resemble (electronic) real estate corporations that struggle and compete, and where legal disputes correspond to friction between electronic and local space (Terranova 2004:45). What is needed is a framework that integrates grassroots and critical means of resisting capitalist domination within the context of top-down electronic media production and the commercial public sphere. Mansell (2004) argues: “Insofar as
social and economic relations are not egalitarian within society today, there is a strong case for developing insights into the economy of new media” and calls for “revealing a much deeper understanding of the way in which articulations of power are shaping the new media landscape” (2004:97).

In the early stage of research many looked at online phenomena in isolation, understanding the internet in relation to what was happening online. For utopian analyses the internet was thought to be bringing a new “Enlightenment”; as Wellman (2004) noted, “They extolled the internet as egalitarian and globe spanning, and ignored the way in which difference in power and status might affect interactions both offline and online” (:124). But the hyper-euphoria about the ICT wonders of capitalism did not last long. “The flames of the dot.com boom dimmed early in 2000, and with it the internet came down to earth (125).” The internet is part of many other everyday communication tools, becoming normalised, albeit benefiting some groups more than others.

While utopians marvelled about online euphoria, dystopian analyses warned about the real life effects of virtual reality. However, it became clear that the internet may help/maintain offline relationships and a sense of community. In fact, Wellman and Haythornthwaite (2002) showed that the more people use the internet, the more they see each other in person or talk over the phone. James Carey (2005) identified three major flaws in the way the argument about the internet evolved. Apart from inadequate grounding in the historical development of technology and the tendency to analyse the internet in isolation from wider technological context, the most important flaw in my opinion, is that much of the research failed to examine the internet in view of the social-economic circumstances of the users (:445). The Palestinian case is of great importance to reflect on these embedded understandings as it represents a diaspora community in need of transnational media/communication.

Nevertheless, the internet was soon also researched from this critical/embedded focus. Franklin (2001) describes how economic/political forces exploited technology for commercial, military, and political reasons, and demonstrates how the internet is implicated in power relations. In her research on the use of the internet among South Pacific diaspora Samoans, Franklin (2001) points to the different ‘tales of internet’ consisting of a top-down and a grassroots vision. This can alert us to examine how and in which conditions, under the influence of latent and manifested forms of control (and politicized context), different groups manage to (not) use the internet.

It is clear now that this approach does not disregard the option of the internet as a space where solidarity, mobilization, and self-empowerment are present. The internet facilitates the search for practical (on the ground) solutions to problems of isolation, discrimination, exclusion, and social/political conflicts. This dialectic understanding of the internet, media, and communication immediately tells us something about the political struggles implied. The way media, protest, and politics fuse, needs practical demonstration in order to understand at which level of Palestinian resistance internet technology may or may not be significant.
I also view the internet as a tool of everyday political practices. Moreover, the Palestinian case confirmed that the internet is both a non-elite tactic and a hegemonic strategy. This dialectic approach unveils that cyberspace is a part of offline life: micro politics as practiced in local internet cafés are related to macro politics. If there would be an Internet Manifesto it might just as well start with the metaphor that internet surfers make their own history, but not (always) according to their own chosen circumstances. This contradiction captures the earlier mentioned tensions and relations by which the internet and Palestine are connected. The Palestinian case disproves many of the (dystopian and utopian) claims about the internet’s impact. Evidently, discussions about theory also reflect choices and values regarding methodology.

1.4 Online-Offline Methodology: Anthropology from Below

[Ethnography’s] open-ended procedures refer both to the manner in which observations are made, and to the process of compiling a description. Far from truncating description, it has its own search engine in the form of a Question. What connections are going to be useful? … It pulls one in the situation of not necessarily wanting to tell in advance (Strathern 2000:59).

My methodological experiences were greatly affected by what was taking place in larger political contexts. As elaborated at the outset of this chapter, Palestinian society grew more impatient and protest erupted into a popular uprising in 2000. Many Palestinians supported the struggle because the situation became, de facto and de jure, unbearable. The casualty/death toll on the Palestinian side was at least 10 times higher than the Israeli average and by January 2003 more than 2000 Palestinians had been killed and 21,000 injured. In January 2006 the casualty toll grew to respectively 4000 and 31,000. As with the impact of the first Gulf (Iraq) War in 1991 on the First Intifada (1987-1993), the Second Intifada was again considered ‘stuck’ with the US War on Iraq in 2003. The 9/11 attacks had actually permanently determined the political reality, but the US invasion and occupation of Iraq affected the balance of power in the Middle East to the extreme. Palestinians became increasingly trapped between support of the principle to fight for independence, and scepticism with regards to how effective such an uprising would prove. Timing clearly influenced my research as the methodological challenges of curfews, closures, and deportation

26 Subsequently, as can be noticed, I don’t write internet with capital I.
27 The Israeli withdrawal from South Lebanon by Hezbollah in May 2000 added legitimacy and credibility to armed resistance. Yet when Hamas won the Palestinian elections in 2006 showing broad support for resistance against Fatah, they were met by unprecedented punishment by the international community. The EU froze all financial support and boycotted the democratically elected PNA, causing a catastrophic degeneration and eventually leading to situations that could be described as a pre-civil war. The suffering of Palestinian citizens could now be blamed on Hamas by its competitor Fatah and US and Israeli politicians.
aforementioned made clear. As Strathern suggested in the opening quote, ethnography throws up the unplanned, the counter initiative, and, like the outbreak of the Intifada or 9/11: the unpredictable. These unplanned developments directly affected the stages of my fieldwork.

This project was born in the context of destabilization and extreme conflict in the Middle East between 2001 and 2005. During fieldwork in 2002, the rumours that attacks on Arafat's headquarters in Ramallah and “retaliations” on refugee camps were underway actually did come out; border controls became more restrictive and international activists, researchers, and media professionals were prevented entry. Meanwhile, life in Palestine itself was crippled by the curfews and closures. After two fieldwork visits I was deported from Palestine. This setback resulted in visiting Jordan where I conducted research that also enriched the work. Meeting people in the refugee camps outside Palestine shed new lights on my research project and on the impact of this Intifada on the Palestinian diaspora. Lebanon and Jordan taught me valuable lessons on the complex issues of exile in general, and internet use by Palestinian refugees more specifically.

The fieldwork was certainly shaped by the dominant political developments. My understanding of grassroots internet usage was enriched by ethnographic/multi-sited research. As a result, the fieldwork covered three phases—Palestine (2001/2002), Jordan (2003), and Lebanon (2003/2004). During the first phase (2001/2) I gained insights into the world of web-designers, internet producers, and telecom policies in the West Bank and Gaza. I conducted interviews with representatives of ICT companies, institutions/projects, and academics in the field of ICT; and observed/participated during activities in internet cafes, universities, and community centres. In the second phase (2003), I conducted research in Jordan when Israeli officials refused my entry into Palestine during my second visit. I focused on work visits in Wihdaad, al-Bekaa and Irbid refugee camps. I mostly held interviews with internet users and engaged in participant observations. Similar research activities were part of the last research phase in Lebanon (2003/4). Here the focus was in Palestinian refugee camps in/around Beirut, Tripoli, Sour, and Saida, and I continued to study people’s everyday engagements with the internet (see figure 1, the lines on the map point to the camps in the three fieldwork sites.

In the former section I argued for a dialectic analyses in our theories, but these three different fieldwork practicalities have also stressed a dialectic approach between offline and online methodologies. This methodological dialectic refers to my views of the internet as a new space and as a new tool.

Internet as space of research

As there have been major changes in the way internet studies in different disciplines developed and the scope of research so far is immense, it is not possible to assess this in its totality. My aim is to bring methodology and analyses; i.e., online and offline community plus online and offline ethnography together. In other words, I bring the
internet as a tool and as a space together to outline material conditions and virtual experiences while using both material and virtual instruments.

Cyberspace is sometimes treated as an autonomous space that is de-linked from place or physical reality (Ellis et al [2004] discusses various positions on the topic). In the case of Palestine this virtual space is shaped mostly by a continual reference to a particular place. The internet is a tool of communication and can be an alternative meeting “space” where members of virtual communities meet on websites, chat rooms, online discussion lists, email, etc. However, this medium is not divorced from offline reality. It is a “space” that has to be entered via computers, cables, and so on; these are placed in houses, or internet cafés that are located in cities, refugee camps, occupied land, a host country, and so on.

It can be argued that Cyber space facilitates the erosion of national sentiments and supports transnational identities or disembodied worlds, but I suggested that in the case of Palestine the reverse might actually be true. Many websites feature flags or links to official/informational political sites. This can be taken as an indication that the internet does not weaken national identity but may even make it stronger. New modern technologies go hand in hand with traditional means of information dissemination. A clear example is when email messages are printed out and distributed to recipients, reaching people who don’t use personal computers. I use these qualitatively motivated statements not to contradict the concepts of “virtual reality” and “cyberspace”, but to connect offline with online realities.

A ‘normative’ or ‘popular’ conception of the internet may ascribe ‘typical’ behaviour to certain people or communities, but online dissemination does not have to correlate with offline opinion or behaviour. An over-generalization from online analysis may result in essentialist arguments that do not correspond to complex realities. This problem stems from of the idea of the internet as an autonomous space that has its own independent effects on people. This representation is criticized, and echoed by Wellman’s question of whether relationships between people who never see, smell, or hear each other, can be productive, supportive, or intimate (1997). This question relates to how we view cyberspace as a social phenomenon.

The internet offers new ways of creating identities and new spaces or self-representation. Whether the internet can be seen as a field site that can be studied through active participation in chat rooms or mailing list discussions, suggests another definition of the internet as an ethnographic space. I see the internet space as (an important part of) a public sphere rather than a virtual community and I take into

29 Hyped research such as Internet & Jihad in the Netherlands (Benschop, 2006) leads one to think that online politics reflects offline radicalization/behaviour of communities that are (predominantly) investigated. As a consequence, the study refers to specific (unidentifiable) online examples yet it authorizes larger assumptions about Moroccan culture/Muslim (youth) identities. This is irresponsible, especially with a currently fashionable trend of populist politicians (mis)using these reports, such as proposing new laws that demote former transparency/democracy codes, and to increase prison sentences. Thus, a person calling for jihad online is represented as having the same impact as organizing for jihad offline, and should therefore be punished in the same way.

28
account the different values given to online/offline space, face-to-face interaction, and multiple identities. It is easy to fall into the utopian discourse and subscribe to the argument that humankind is on the way to becoming ‘cyborgs and androids’ (Stockl 3003:72). There is a new reality when space and time overlap, and even where anonymity and accessibility are available we are dealing with complex relations. As I suggested in the aforementioned contradictions between virtual space/territorial place, and will explain further in Chapter two; we cannot make a snapshot of online space as we do with offline space, let alone expect the internet to construct and fulfil a sense of belonging in the same way.

Nonetheless, by pointing out the potential shortcomings of ethnographic (anthropologic) methodologies I do not imply that the internet has no effect on people. In fact, ample social science research on the internet’s impact on communities indicates otherwise. The internet helps make public what was previously personal, and creates new links between individual and community. Research on the topic also includes debates about the very meaning of terms such as virtual community or computer mediated communities, as I will show in Chapter Two. Accordingly, I consider the dialectics of the internet in my research methodology as crucial and look at the offline/online processes that are involved. Contextualizing Palestinian internet activities within larger political-economic systems and developments helps transcend the ‘the local/global’ dichotomy. By following this multi-method approach, I wish to integrate specific (micro) ethnographic subjects within broader complex (macro) contexts like the nation-state, economic globalization, and transnational communication.

Communities may be imagined as virtual as well as actualized in interpersonal relationships (Strathern 2000:60). As the increasing mobility of ideas and products challenge fieldwork methodology, Marcus (1995) suggested examining the circulation of cultural meaning and identities in different time-space situations. These multi-sited fields are connected by the link between communities and ideas, thus can also be applied to internet research where online fields are constituted by (hyper) linkages between websites (Hine 2000:61). From this understanding, ethnography for internet research will help in studying social phenomena related to transnational communities.

If a location is both an online and offline phenomenon, than multi-sited here refers to online and offline sites. These approaches are particularly relevant in the case of Palestine. Ironically, research about Palestine on the ground means that it is difficult to conduct fieldwork. There are many problems that researchers face in conflict areas. The harsh everyday conditions may make online research techniques appear as attractive solutions and I was sometimes forced to experience this myself. With more and more conflicts infesting the world, this problem might generate an inclination towards conducting online research that obviously might fail to capture important offline realities. This is problematical because it can lead to less face-to-face interaction and more armchair anthropology.
Internet as tool of research

Besides gathering data through participant observation and interviews during the three different fieldwork phases/sites offline, I analysed the ways websites were presented/linked (online). I observed grassroots and top-down aspects of internet diffusion by studying internet producers and consumers on commercial, cultural, and political levels. On the ground and ethnographic examination tracks peoples activities and narratives “as they cross domains and thereby create heterogeneous social worlds” (Strathern 2000:59). It became clear that the internet is constituted by power relations; that the internet is “historically and socially constructed, rather than coming from nowhere” (Franklin 2001). How does the internet generate new national, religious, or political expressions and create possibilities of (individual) access to media and shape new collective imaginations? This question accounts even more for the transnational context involved in researching a nation such as Palestine.

To answer this important question we need to resort to an ethnography that is based on the juxtaposition of qualitative and quantitative issues. Several studies have avoided grand generalizations about the internet, and showed that ethnographic research offers substantiated analyses. Miller and Slater (2000) were among the first to address internet use in Trinidad and by the Trinidadian diaspora. They show that the internet does not produce its own conventions and society; the way in which people express themselves is only partly influenced by the internet. Moreover, there is no such thing as The Internet as many forms of media/contents are part of the internet.

Research often focuses on interactive communication in newsgroups, chat rooms, or websites (where communication is mainly text based); but there is also more space to study the offline social/political aspects of the internet. The availability of online technologies enhances our research methodologies, but it cannot replace the need for offline interviews and observations. If the aim is to know how people construct new identities on the internet, moving beyond content analysis and asking internet users what they experience or what their preferences are is more fruitful (Miller & Mather 1998). Hine (2000) made a similar suggestion and states that researchers need to go beyond the online text of, for example, a newsgroup posting or a webpage. Researchers need to include the producer of the text in their stories if they want to comprehend the context of production that gives rise to the product itself. Studying the role of the internet in constructing collective-national identities and in reconstituting the diaspora requires long-term engagement with the everyday life of the informants. Brouwer (2004) shows how qualitative methods, such as participant observation, informal interviews, structured interviews and literature, are crucial for internet research. This approach not only emphasizes/includes the informants’ views, it also provides new questions and data.

Stockl calls this ethnography ‘immersion’: the ethnographer forms relationships with informants and the intimacy involved in this relation is fundamental. Immersion in the case of internet research “takes on the form of building relationships in terms of writing, in terms of reading emails, thinking about
them, reflecting about them, and finally answering them. Immersion in this case does not involve the constant presence of the researchers, but the field is constantly present in the ethnographers mind.” This is a reversal of the “ethnographer-in-the-field to the field-in-the-ethnographer” (2003:74).

By combining offline and online research methodology I was able to see how Palestinians in the diaspora—in this case Jordan and Lebanon—seek to empower/represent themselves as members of national collectivities. I have argued that the internet is not to be understood as the substitute for an offline tool or spaces. Sometimes political contexts challenge our academic opinions by force. I therefore call for an anthropology from below; one that creates spaces for organic links and enables us to contribute to a positive change in everyday reality.

Organic Intellectuals

My own background had positive and negative consequences during research and fieldwork. The pro’s of being Arab/Muslim, is that scepticism towards foreign researchers or journalists was less problematic.30 At the same time, there are also cons because as an Arab I was more likely to be hampered by Israel for working and living in the Palestinian Occupied Territories. On the other hand, as a woman I sometimes experienced the limitations/barriers regarding my presence in public/private space, such as street activism, certain internet cafes, conducting visits in remote camps or during night hours, or meetings with leading/political spokesmen.

When encountering such minor and major problems during fieldwork in Jordan I could not rely on ‘academic freedom’ and police control in refugee camps complicated the work. Interviewing Palestinians in the camps was officially allowed only after obtaining permission from the government. Yet receiving the permission/green light to conduct interviews and participative observation was a laborious red tape process. Moreover, the issue of Palestinian refugees is politically sensitive in Jordan; sometimes people were overtly cautious during interviews and thus it required more time. The worst example was my deportation from Palestine after I tried to embark on my second fieldwork there.

The differences between the localities and countries researched also made me experience that the context of Palestine is marked by segregation, immobility, and military violence. During the first major fieldwork phase I stayed in the Occupied Territories for six months out of which I spent four months in partial (17.00-07.00) curfew and 30 days in full (24hr) curfew. During the last fieldwork month (Ramadan) of that phase the curfew was finally lifted. Throughout this whole period my base (Ramallah) was under closure, thus separated with military checkpoints from Birzeit and Jerusalem (therefore the rest of the West Bank). Checkpoints were often closed,

30 The scepticism is not without reason, see for example article by Timothy Mitchell, The Middle East in the Past and Future of Social Science (2003). Also the recruitment of anthropologists by the US Army in Afghanistan and Iraq has worried academics. See International Herald Tribune. Anthropologists help U.S. Army in Afghanistan and Iraq By David Rohde Published: October 4, 2007.
preventing anyone going in or out. Many of my fieldwork contacts had regular jobs/classes so interview appointments after office/school hours were therefore difficult to achieve. Conducting interviews during full curfew days was impossible. Visiting other Palestinian cities for interviews, participatory observation, and networking became even more complex. While reaching Gaza for interviews was a very difficult challenge; Nablus, Hebron and Jenin were impossible to reach because of the closures and physically difficult roads through hills and mountains.

Instead of working and trying to reflect on the experiences and findings with a certain detachment, even for a ‘foreign researcher with a safe passport’ like me, life was often a hassle. The presence of an aggressive army in the direct (home) setting, limitations and exhausting treatments that everybody undergoes or has to witness at checkpoints, the regular disappointments due to cancellations and delays of meetings, and horrible news that contacts from former/new fieldwork visits were arrested, killed, or injured. A lack of motivation would arise after such experiences or made the project seem useless. It is impossible not to take matters personally if a researcher is confronted with such forms of repression. The voices and feelings in this book capture those particular moments and episodes. The Intifada, or what is left of it, is marked by a harsher reoccupation and destruction of Palestinian infrastructures. ‘Objective’ social science is a myth but we still have to be open about our ideas/interpretations by offering the necessary contexts. To give voice to Palestinians and participate in peace initiatives are important ways of being organically linked to this work beyond the strictly academic level.

The concept organic intellectual, introduced by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, suggests that the intellectuals’ political life, principles, and work are connected. The anthropologist James Ferguson (1990) made a similar point when he asked what possibility there is for offering our engagement or expertise to emancipation and empowerment. Activism in academia is often ‘not done’, but researchers on the Middle East (especially of Arab/Muslim origin) are particularly ‘suspect’. This new kind of McCarthyism after 9/11 is also challenged by initiatives such as Academics for Justice. Nevertheless, we can make a difference for the people we have known as our neighbours and friends. I heard and read many stories about the history of Palestine, but as Abu Lughod (2004:35) noticeably described: “It is different to actually be there”, and to be delayed, humiliated, interrogated, in fear, and disconnected from friends.

One of the most basic ways of an academics’ engagement is through political participation in one’s own society (Ferguson 1990:281). This is even truer for those working in the West where state politics contribute to the crises that our fieldwork

31 Because after school/work hours coincided with the lifting hours, people finish work/school and usually hurried to buy groceries or arrange the necessary tasks before curfew was imposed again.

32 Besides social handicaps, the general immobility and these exhaustive experiences also confronted me with how a researchers’ physical disability hampers fieldwork possibilities.

33 See campaigns such as Campus Watch attacking US academics that are critical to Israel and American foreign politics. More about these developments are found on www.academicsforjustice.org
friends and contacts are confronted with. It is possible to challenge existing hegemonic forces via our NGOs, Unions, political parties, or universities. There is no guarantee that our involvement or information will be relevant—and where such alternative engagements are practiced against existing dominant orders, it may even cause difficulties in our work (Ferguson 1990:287). But: possibilities are there to be explored. And there are special opportunities (or even responsibilities) for political work amongst those with special knowledge and expertise, says Ferguson (1990):

The anthropologist who has seen “his village” exterminated by death squads for instance, has both a special perspective and a distinctive political role to play on debates over aid to the “Contras” or support for El Salvador. Likewise, the field researcher who knows the Palestinians as real, flesh and blood human beings, and not only as shadowy figures brandishing machine guns, is in a position to combat the deceptions and misinformation that are put forward to justify the denial of Palestinian self determination (:286).

There will constantly be dilemmas and tensions between one's position as a researcher and (political) human being. Nevertheless, if researchers are present to write and discover more insights we can at least be hopeful that these new insights contribute to justice.

Outline

In the following chapters I address the contradictions that have puzzled me and answer the central questions about the role of the internet. I will focus on the creation transnational linkages and shaping of the collective imaginations of Palestinians, and how the internet is used in mobilizing local and transnational (pro) Palestinian activism. This and the next chapter are introductions to theoretic, historic and technological contexts. Chapter Two will contextualize the research according to the three tensions and assess the history and relevance/impact of internet technology.

Chapter Three will cover the first contradiction and studies Palestinian (im)mobility with regards to new virtual realities. Chapters Four, Five, and Six cover the second contradiction and investigate offline/online practices. Chapter Four examines how virtual space is related to territorial place and engages with the debate about nation-state/collective identity. In Chapter Five I intend to unravel the relation between national identity and internet developments by looking at virtual representations through a study of Palestinian websites. In Chapter Six I examine the offline/everyday impacts of internet technologies in the diasporic contexts.

Chapter Seven and Eight epitomize the third tension, as well as contribute to the discussions ensuing from this research. In Chapter Seven I focus on the political assessments that are bound with the internet and portray how Palestinian political agency transcends into virtual reality. The aim is to study the positive and negative effects of these practices, especially in the context of occupation and exile. Chapter
Eight presents a critical debate about the potentials of the internet. These assessments are an overlap between activist and academic discourses aiming to bridge both worlds by engaging with debates of social movements and activism.

These twofold terrains of contestation include my aim to challenge political and academic paradigms. This aim was shaped by the point in time described in this book and is relevant in more than one way. The research coincides with a period when ICT began to be introduced on massive scales in the Arab/Muslim world; a part of the world where war increasingly dominates the lives of ordinary people; when the Intifada was at its peak and the social and political possibilities of internet for Palestinians astonished many; in other words a historic period and the remake of a Middle East at the start of the 21st Century, when all the above aspects intersect and influence one another. And still do.