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Telling memories : Al-Nakba in Palestinian exilic narratives

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Introduction: Telling Memories in a Time of Catastrophe

In 2008, Palestinians across the world marked the sixtieth anniversary of their *nakba*. The Arabic word *nakba* means “catastrophe”. Palestinians use the word to refer to the events that took place in Palestine before, during and after 1948. These events culminated in the establishment of the state of Israel, but also in the loss of Palestine. The direct outcomes of these events were both the destruction of more than 450 Arab villages and towns – most of which were renamed with Israeli or Hebraized names – and the forced expulsion of more than 780,000 Palestinians who used to reside on 78 percent of the territory of the Palestine Mandate.¹ Today, there are approximately ten million exiled Palestinians. While four million Palestinians are internally displaced in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and inside Israel, the majority of them are scattered across the Middle East and beyond.²

A vast literature already exists on Palestine and the Palestinians, so why write another book? Two immediate and related feelings inform the present study. Both feelings instantiate my authorial voice in a double role: in its academic aspect, as a cultural analyst; and in terms of location, as an exiled Palestinian belonging to the third generation of post-*nakba* Palestinians. The first is my continuing sense of horror at the Israeli military occupation and unrelenting war against the Palestinian people, combined with the deafening silences of the so-called world opinion. The five years since I started working on this book in 2003 have seen momentous political developments in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, but have produced no improvement and in most ways even a marked deterioration in the living conditions of Palestinians. The second Intifada rages in the occupied territories since September 2000, and the seeds of conflict for a third uprising are already planted. Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem live under conditions of siege, enduring a blockade of towns, crippling economic measures, land confiscations, and military attacks on civilian areas. Under

¹British colonial mandate of Palestine lasted from 1922 to 1948. For historical records of this period as well as detailed figures of the expulsion of Palestinians, see Aref Al-Aref’s six photographic volumes *Nakbat Filastin* (1959), Khalidi (1984, 1988: 4-19 and 1992), Fischbach (2003), and Gilbert ([1974] 2005). Also, for a complete list of names of Palestinian destroyed villages, see *Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center’s* visual tribute of the fiftieth anniversary of *al-nakba* in 1998 on the following link: <http://www.alnakba.org/villages/villages.htm>.

²For relevant studies on population and demographic changes in Palestine before and after *al-nakba*, see Abu-Lughod (1971 and 1982) and Krystall (1989: 5-23). Krystall’s article describes the depopulation of Palestinian neighborhoods of West Jerusalem in late 1947.

different yet equally appalling circumstances, the Palestinians inside Israel live as second-class citizens, who face socio-political discriminations and restrictions on their cultural and economic opportunities. Neither has there been much improvement in the fate of exiled Palestinians outside historical Palestine. The majority continue to live in dire straits in refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria.

The second feeling that informs this study is my pride that Palestinians all over the world have managed to maintain a shared national identity since *al-nakba*, even though the different groupings know little about each other. Although the Palestinian national movement predated 1948 by several decades, nothing forged Palestinian identity as adamantly; it seems, as the loss of Palestine. There is not one Palestinian family that has been unaffected by this loss. Indeed, forced or prevented movement, as well as the condition of exile that scattered families and communities, has produced specific lifestyles, cultural beliefs and identifications. Factors such as class, legal status and economic and political affiliations shape Palestinians' identity, while most of them nonetheless retain a self perception that pictures Palestine as an unified country with a language and distinct cultural values and features, whether that is true in the present or not. As I demonstrate in this study, two striking features of current Palestinian identity are the great diversity of personal memories of the loss of the homeland, and a sense of overwhelming belonging to one another in a shared exile. Both features, I realized, facilitate the cultural re-mapping of a concrete Palestinian identity, which has been persistently and systematically *un-mapped* out of time and space since 1948. It is from this realization that my project emerged.

Telling Memories deals with the cultural memory of *al-nakba* as a powerful narrative signifier of contemporary Palestinian exilic consciousness. I explore the ways in which Palestinian popular literary, audiovisual and oral narratives and life stories articulate memories of the loss of the homeland, memories of historical events around 1948 in relation to the continuing exile of 2008. I argue that the persistence of catastrophic output in Palestinian culture and politics is closely linked to their construction of exilic identity. Narratives of *al-nakba* offer a set of symbolic identifiers and images or, as I will call them, "imagings" of loss of place. They provide the exiled subject with a concrete geopolitical orientation of the lost home in Palestine, and expose the ways in which that loss continues to be experienced in the present, influencing the identity and agency of different generations of post-*nakba* Palestinians.

As the Palestinians continue to be denied the right of return to their homes in Palestine, the relevance of narratives of *al-nakba* continues to increase. They are indeed the

key narratives of Palestinian historical and political discourses. As I have mentioned above, a great deal of scholarly work concentrates on Palestine and the Palestinians; yet little attention has been paid to the cultural memory of *al-nakba* and its relevance for narratives of exile. One of the few recent books on these issues, with which my study shares various theoretical and thematic points, is the collective volume *Nakba: 1948, Palestine and the Claims of Memory*, edited by Ahmed H. Sa'di and Lila Abu-Lughod. The book comprises ten contributions that weave together a tapestry of Palestinian memories. They examine the ways in which Palestinians remember their past and carry it with them into the present through symbols, maps, deeds of land and the keys of the houses, stories, habits and poems. Drawing on various theories and methods to highlight the modalities of Palestinian loss of place in the cultural present, Sa'di and Abu-Lughod's study outlines the historical emergence of Palestinian collective memory, the challenges to it by marginalized voices and the moral and political implications of its erasure.³

As the editors explain in their introduction, the volume contests the notion that Palestinian collective memory is ontologically given. Instead, the authors contend that no memory is ever pure or unmediated (2007: 3-5). My study pursues this line of thought, and thus situates itself within the larger field of cultural memory and identity studies. *Telling Memories* focuses on the ways in which an exiled nation negotiates, challenges, and crucially reshapes its cultural memories. What are the cultural-political significations of memories of *al-nakba*? How can we conceptualize contemporary memory practices that are structured, though not determined, by a past history? And how can we take those practices into account as articulations of power relations without neglecting the distinct agencies and imaginaries of different generations of exiled Palestinians today? These are questions my study attempts to answer.

Memory is a volatile concept. The work of memory in all its forms, from historical essays to personal reminiscences, legal testimonies and imaginative recreations, is not only slippery but also inherently contradictory. On the one hand, memory posits a past reality that is recalled outside the person's subjectivity. Yet, on the other hand, memory requires a narrator who is equipped with conventional cultural filters of generational distance, age and

³ The "right of return" is an internationally recognized designation in United Nations' resolution number 194 of December 11, 1948. This resolution stipulates that Palestinian refugees should be permitted the return to their homes from which they were previously expelled. This right, moreover, represents a key demand of the Palestinians for any settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It has been repeatedly rejected by Israel. The full text of this resolution can be found on the following URL Link: <http://domino.un.org/unispal.nsf/0/c758572b78d1cd0085256bcf0077e51a?OpenDocument>.

gender, class and political affiliations, on whose authority the truth of the past can be revealed. Memories are narrated by someone in the present. Nonetheless, we still use them as authoritative sources of historical knowledge.

Memory is always mediated, even in the flashes of so-called involuntary memory. They are complex constructions in which our present experience conjoins with images that are collected by the mind from all manner of sources, including from our inner worlds. Furthermore, memories are always both individual and collective. We are constantly confronted with images of the past, whether we actively observe them or not. Memory moves from the world of smell, sensations, habits and images to the outer world via cultural forms such as literary texts, prose poetry and film. We enmesh memories with myths, folktales and popular narratives in the ways that we talk about traditions, national consciousness and identities. The work on memory, then, must address itself not only to questions of what happened, but also to how we know things, whose voices we hear, and where silences persist. I discuss the meanings of silence and denial in Palestinian narratives of identity in relation to the generational memory of *al-nakba* more in depth in chapters Four and Five of this study.⁴

Most scholars today distinguish between official, hegemonic histories promoted by state institutions and popular practices of memory, memories by marginalized segments of society, even when they acknowledge that the boundaries between them are not rigid. In the Palestinian case, the absence of a sovereign state and the institutions required to promote an official version of events problematizes the relationship between history and memory. In fact, all Palestinian histories – those of the elite and the marginalized – are, to borrow one of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s central terms, “subaltern” in relation to the dominant narrative of Zionist discourse. I refer here to the well-known colonial meta-narrative of Palestine as a land without a people for a people without a land.⁵ This narrative claims a Jewish historical

⁴ Of the many publications on cultural memory, Andreas Huyssen’s *Twilight Memory* (1995) and *Present Pasts* (2003) are good starting points. His perspective is critical of fetishism with old things. Also, on the relationship between cultural memory and the symbols of the nation state, see Nora (1989: 7-25). Further, for concise discussions of cultural memory in the context of conflicted discourses of memory, see Bardenstein (1999: 148-71), and Bal (1999b: vii-3).

⁵ For excellent theoretical explication of this narrative, see John Rose’s *The Myths of Zionism* (2004: 1-8). Rose’s study refutes Zionism’s mythical history. Also, for relevant critiques on the Zionist project in Palestine, see Hertzberg ([1976] 1997), Palumbo (1990 and 1991), and Masalha (1992, 2003 and 2005). Moreover, a useful contribution on Israel’s physical transformation of the landscape of Palestine by carving it into an image of its Zionist ideal, is Mitchell (1994: 5-34). According to Mitchell, the face of the holy landscape is so scarred by war, excavation and displacement that no illusion of innocent original nature can be sustained for a moment. For the term “subaltern”, see Spivak (1988b: 271-313, 1996a and 1996b: 198-222). Spivak uses this term in her description of the circumstances surrounding the suicide of a young Bengali woman that indicates a failed attempt at

presence in Palestine based on a timeless biblical attachment to the land while rejecting, with brutal military force, Palestinian historical or temporal counter-claims. I use Spivak's term in this context not to idealize victimization, but to foreground the relationship between official Israeli history and silenced Palestinian memory as one of ongoing obliteration and inscription.

The conflict between Palestinian and Israeli discourses and their matrices of power, denial of *al-nakba*, victimization and agency will be central to my discussion in the fourth chapter of this study. The grounds of these discourses, as I attempt to show there, are inherently uneven. The main battle is over land of course, but when it comes to questions of who owns the land, who has the right to settle and work on it, who cultivates it and who plans its future, all of these issues are effectively reflected, contested and decided in and through narrative. The power to narrate or to prevent other narratives from emerging is crucial for the balance between Zionism and what can be called Palestinianism. With respect to obliteration and inscription, two overtly political aspects emphasize the connections between Zionism and Palestinianism today. The first is that the history of the "ethnic cleansing" of Palestinians remains largely an untold story. This story is notably eclipsed by pervasive public commemorations of the Holocaust and celebrations of Israel's establishment, much of which, as Norman G. Finkelstein succinctly puts it, is "a tribute not to Jewish suffering but to Jewish aggrandizement" (2001: 8). The second aspect is that the near-total omission of Palestinians' history of *al-nakba* from mainstream academic and public discourses in Europe and the US has nevertheless not impeded the continued cultural life of memorizations of the catastrophe across different generations of exiled Palestinians. Both aspects oblige me to make an important clarification.⁶

My aim is neither to compare the Palestinian narrative to the Zionist one, nor to propose a model for comparative analysis between both narratives. Although they both merit serious analysis, those goals would exceed my current project. Instead, I propose a culturally meaningful reading of the loss of Palestine that exposes what it means to be a Palestinian

self-representation. Spivak concludes that "the subaltern cannot speak", not in the sense that the subaltern does not cry out in various ways, but that speaking is a transaction between speaker and listener. Subaltern talk, in other words, does not achieve the dialogic level of utterance.

⁶ My use of "ethnic cleansing" here follows Ilan Pappé's use of this term to describe the Palestinian condition of loss of homeland and exile. In his book, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Pappé demonstrates conclusively that the Zionist concept of "transfer" – a euphemism for ethnic cleansing – was from the start an integral part of a carefully planned colonial strategy, and lies at the root of today's ongoing conflict in the Middle East. For Pappé, the ethnic cleansing of Palestine is represented most clearly in Israel's persistent attempts to wipe out the Palestinian heritage and cultural identity since 1948. See Pappé (2006). For a more recent study on genocide and conditions for a deterioration of Palestinian-Israeli conflict from chronic to catastrophic violence, see Dayan (2008).

subject in exile today. This approach is premised on a view of exile, not simply as metaphorical or existential, but rather as physical and actual condition of forced displacement that is connected to the cultural logic subtending the historical catastrophe of 1948. This view of Palestinian exile constitutes the focal point of my discussion in the second and fifth chapters of this study.

Telling Memories does not recount the history of *al-nakba* but traces in literature, films and oral narratives and life stories how the collective wounds of a culture can emerge in specific narrative and artistic forms, and how these in turn affect the identity of different generations of post-*nakba* Palestinians in exile. In this regard, this study is not concerned with what actually happened in 1948. I am interested less in the particularities of *al-nakba* – what happened, where and why – than in the fact that this catastrophic loss has not ended, but endures to this day. Indeed, the extraordinary violence and exploitation of the condition of loss persist in various forms in the present. To recognize the cultural significance of the Palestinian catastrophe, as well as to provide an avenue for long-smothered voices, I follow trails of memories in the narratives that are scattered across geopolitical borders and settings.⁷

My desire to investigate Palestinian narratives in exile has guided my decision to focus on a limited number of cultural objects. My corpus consists of two literary texts, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's novel *The Ship* (1985) and Liyana Badr's collection of short stories *A Balcony Over the Fakihani* (1983), two films, Tawfiq Saleh's *Al-Makhdu'un* (The Dupes, 1972) and Mohammed Bakri's *1948* (1998), and a collection of oral narratives that was published in 1998 by the *Journal of Palestine Studies* as "Reflections of Al-Nakba", combined with some personal interviews that I conducted in my fieldwork in the Gaza Strip in 2004. For this corpus I have chosen what I consider to be important and essential narratives. Mine is definitely not an encyclopedic approach; nevertheless I have made an effort to choose narratives from diverse geopolitical settings, a diversity that reflects the plural sensibilities of the Palestinian experience.

The title of this book, "Telling Memories", is programmatic of the underlying principle of my analysis. From the beginning, readers will quickly discover that the narrative constellation between the act of remembering the loss of homeland and the act of telling this loss in exile is crucial to my argument. I posit an unstable relationship between the historical *nakba* of 1948, as the starting point for this study, and the conceptual metaphor of

⁷ For an excellent historical study that deals with the particularities of loss of Palestine in 1948, see Khalidi (1997). Khalidi's study traces the long history of Palestinian national consciousness and identity. For a relevant study that examines opposing versions of Palestinian and Zionist historical narratives in the context of contemporary Palestinian-Israeli conflict, see Rotberg (2006).

“catastrophe” as a cultural-narrative motif. In using *al-nakba* in this way, as both the material event and the conceptual metaphor, my analysis not only tracks the diverse contours of Palestinian memory representations of the past loss of place, but also accounts for the processes of narration through which these memories are told in the present. My point is that memorial modes of storytelling, or what I specify as “fragmented narrativity” or “exilic narrativity” and “performative narrativity” respectively, are at the heart of how Palestinians narrate loss of homeland in exile. Thus, my formulation of the title maintains the distinctive theoretical aspects and cultural significations of the two terms, “telling” and “memories”, in order to show how they can work together in taking the past memory of *al-nakba* into the present and the future, both in time and space. Palestinian exilic narratives have a performative function in the precarious preservation of cultural optimism or even stability in the face of the ongoing catastrophe.

My focus on the memory of loss of homeland and its storytelling (or narrativity) in exile is prompted by the cultural dynamics of *al-nakba*, not merely as the political event of the establishment of the state of Israel (or loss of Palestine), nor even as the humanitarian event of the creation of the world’s most enduring military occupation and refugee problem, but rather as the existential experience that continues to define most Palestinian history, shatters their society and at the same time consolidates their shared national consciousness. Indeed, memories of *al-nakba* reinforce the centrality of the land in Palestinian discourses of identity. As we will see in the following chapters, Palestinians acknowledge both the presence and the absence of the homeland as an existential resource: they experience the loss of place in exile as the loss of a whole way of life.

More relevant to my point about remembering and storytelling from a cultural-analytic point of view is that Palestinians’ memories of *al-nakba* also influence the substance and the style of their narratives of exile. In his article, “Half a Century of Palestinian Folk Narratives” (2007), Sharif Kanaana examines the rupture and dislocation in Palestinian folk narratives that accompanied the overall rupture of *al-nakba*. According to Kanaana, in the aftermath of *al-nakba* many changes occurred in the types of narratives Palestinians told and their habits of narration. These changes, Kanaana writes, can be summarized in two broad trends. The first is that

traditional narrative genres ceased to be used, totally or partially. The genres associated with truth and believability, that is, men’s genres, went out of use much faster than did genres associated with fiction and imagination, that is, women’s genres. (2)

The second trend is that

[a] strong politicization of folk narratives occurred after 1948, and two types of narratives took the place of traditional types. One type consisted of narratives of war and loss of homeland. The other came later and was connected with the immediate political situation under Israeli occupation. The new narrative types are less sharply divided by gender, and more by age, than traditional narrative types. (2-3)

Following Kanaana's thematic division but not as a typology, I consider both narrative themes – that of war and loss of homeland and that of the immediate political situation under Israeli occupation – as one type of Palestinian narratives, namely “exilic narrative”.⁸

In order to gain purchase on the memories of *al-nakba* and modes of storytelling in Palestinian exilic narratives, I develop an interdisciplinary approach. This approach adopts insights from a range of disciplines and sub-disciplines such as literary theory, especially narratology and postcolonial criticism, media and audiovisual analysis and cultural anthropology. I use “interdisciplinarity” in the sense of Ronald Barthes' conceptualization of the term in his article “Jeunes Chercheurs” (1972). According to Barthes,

Interdisciplinary work, so much discussed these days, is not about confronting already constituted disciplines (none of which, in fact, is willing to let itself go). To do something interdisciplinary it's not enough to choose a “subject” (a theme) and gather around it two or three sciences. Interdisciplinarity consists in creating a new object that belongs to no one.⁹

This view of interdisciplinarity is foregrounded in my method, which I call cultural analysis.

In her edited volume, *The Practice of Cultural Analysis* (1999c), Mieke Bal offers the framing theoretical backgrounds and analytical coordinates of cultural analysis as an interdisciplinary, self-reflexive practice that “seeks to understand cultural objects and theories from the past as part of the present” (1). Against complaints about certain vagueness in cultural studies, Bal contends that cultural analysis “does have an object that is specific enough, as well precise methodological starting point” (2). The issues at the core of this methodology, Bal continues, include “the standpoint in the present and subsequent relation to history, close reading, and methodological (self-)reflection” (13). These issues, as Jonathan Culler argues, highlight the main differences between cultural analysis and cultural studies. According to Culler, cultural analysis defines itself in terms of a self-reflexive methodology,

⁸ For relevant discussions on practices of Palestinian traditional storytelling of *al-nakba* and exile, see Muhawi (1999: 344-48) and Sayigh (1998: 42-59).

⁹ Barthes' text is cited as the epigraph of James Clifford's introduction in *Writing Culture* (1986: 1).

which does not settle the debate between popular and high cultures in prematurely operational terms. Instead, as a “particular kind of theoretical engagement”, cultural analysis blasts spaces open for dialogue (1999: 345).¹⁰

The present-orientedness and self-reflexivity of its practice, and the dialogic relations that its technique of close reading constructs between past and present and between the analyst and his or her object of analysis: these are the elements of the methodology of cultural analysis which I found particularly useful for the present investigation. In the following chapters, I elaborate on all these elements in some detail in view of the ways in which I adopt them in my analysis of Palestinian exilic narratives. For now it suffices to say that my close readings of these narratives follow the central premises of cultural analysis. My readings do not, to borrow Bal’s terminology, “claim some sort of ‘purity’ from the object of analysis” (37). Instead, I actively interact with these narratives by acknowledging my own situatedness (or personal inflection) as the analyst, as well as the narratives’ specificity as cultural objects. This means that these narratives are both open to questioning and at the same time question the theories that I bring to bear on them. The method of cultural analysis, working in Bal’s vein, turns the cultural object into a subject participating in the construction of theoretical views. The relationship between the cultural object and the conceptual discourse of analysis is not arbitrary in the sense of haphazard but neither is it necessary: the cultural object, so to speak, theorizes on *its own* terms (13). This is why the objects in these transactions are often called “theoretical objects”.¹¹ Finally, although my readings retain close attention to the details of Palestinian exilic narratives, they do not stay inside the texts. Rather, I tentatively place these narratives in their contexts and see how the contexts are affected by these narratives and vice versa. In other words, I propel the narrative’s past context into a present one, and examine their function as part of contemporary Palestinian cultural memory. This interplay between the narratives’ text and context, from past into present, transforms them into, to borrow Barthes’ words, new objects that belong to no one.

In this interdisciplinary setting, my readings of Palestinian exilic narratives will unpack the ways in which their modes of storytelling can bear on a specific system of memory representation of *al-nakba*. What are the narrative devices and stylistic patterns through which the loss of homeland is expressed in these narratives? And what do these, in

¹⁰ For additional discussion on the premises of cultural analysis, see Bal (2002). Moreover, for a recent and valuable example of the methodology of cultural analysis in contemporary expressions of popular culture, see Peeren (2007).

¹¹ For relevant discussion of the notion of “theoretical object” in contemporary art practices, see Van Alphen (2005).

turn, reveal about the implications of literary, audiovisual and oral texts for alternative epistemic insights about the rhythm and order of Palestinian identities and memories of loss of place in the cultures of exile creating them?

Each of the following five chapters of this study addresses issues pertinent to debates over Palestinian cultural memory and identity such as nostalgia and trauma, narrative fragmentation and notions of home and forced travel, space-time configurations and the anti-linearity of memory, the play of power in memory and the meanings of silence and denial, performance as representationally performative, and “post-memory” and geopolitical continuity of loss of place in the everyday. By way of detailed readings of textual and audiovisual imagings of loss of homeland and collective articulations of identity, I demonstrate how the complex modes of memorial storytelling of *al-nakba* function as an alternative discourse of Palestinian exilic identity, which not only challenges official versions imposed by dominant Zionist discourses, but also tests the limits of literary and cultural criticism of the condition of Palestinian exile. Palestinian exilic narratives utilize memorial storytelling as a mode that scrutinizes different retellings and realizations of the same story or related stories of *al-nakba*, so that they give coherence and meaning for the aftermath of that catastrophe as “the ongoing catastrophe”. Most importantly, memorial storytelling offers a cultural envisioning that calls on a specific notion of collective memory in narrative, not only as an assertion or testimony of the past *nakba*, but as a point of departure that exposes the repetitive quality of past loss of place as well as the durability of this loss in the present. Contemporary exile: this is where we are steeped in Palestinian narratives as specific media manifestations of cultural memory in which the ongoing spatio-temporality of *al-nakba* appears particularly intense and urgent.

In chapter One, my analysis of Jabra’s novel *The Ship* examines the formations of shattered cultural memory of *al-nakba* under the concept of “nostalgia” in terms of the traumatic loss of the homeland. “Nostalgic memory”, I will attempt to show, need not always be negative. Rather, nostalgic memory can be taken as a potentially productive mode of remembering that goes beyond recovering or idealizing the past, and instead functions as a cultural response to the loss of homeland in exile; what I will call “a reconstitution of injured subjectivities”. This positive function of nostalgia is possible and offers a cultural potential of great value, because nostalgic memory, I argue, is a present-oriented memorization that links the past to the present and future: a cultural recall of a traumatic past of loss of place that constantly impinges on equally problematic immediate present of exile.

In chapter Two, I analyze Badr's collection of short stories *A Balcony Over the Fakihani* as a collection of cultural expressions that expose the psychic consequences of the loss of homeland and repeated displacements for the minds and lives of Palestinians. I base my analysis of these narratives on the assumption that in the everyday of exile the subject's memory of *al-nakba* shifts, in time and space, from a nostalgic memory of the lost homeland to a "critical memory" of his or her immediate experience of denied access to this place. Within this shifting framework of memory, my reading of Badr's short stories shows how Palestinian exile constitutes an entangled spatio-temporal condition of forced travel and undesired movement. This actual condition, I argue, involves a past loss of homeland but also, crucially, an everyday denial of access to home. Within this condition, the subject is physically denied his or her cultural space of selfhood. As we will see, in Badr's collection this condition is presented to us, the readers, through a fragmented narrativity. Multiple voices and instances of personal memories are conjured up repeatedly as concrete (verbal) imaginations. Each of these literalizes, retrospectively, conceptual metaphors of "travel", "movement" and "mobility" in Palestinian exile; these imagings of loss of place expose the subject's present denial of access to home as an effective construct of identification that prompts his or her meanings of Palestine as the (lost) homeland, not the other way around.

Chapters Three and Four focus on audiovisual narratives of *al-nakba*. My analysis of these narratives progresses from discussing how Palestinian exile constitutes an actual condition of displacement to an examination of the relationship between Palestinian identity and the exilic space itself. In other words, both chapters mark a transition from how narratives of loss of homeland assert cultural notions of a denied subjectivity in exile to the performance of space through collective images and discourses of historical uprooting of 1948 within the geopolitical continuity of exile. At the heart of this transition is the question of how audiovisual (filmic) narratives reactivate, through memory, collective flows of re-territorialisation against continuing de-territorialisation. With regard to memorial storytelling of *al-nakba*, I will reflect on Palestinian identity in its spatio-temporal negotiation of the rigorous boundaries between "home" and "not home" in two related ways.

In chapter Three, my analysis of Tawfiq Saleh's film *Al-Makhdu'un* develops a vision of the connection between audiovisual storytelling and memory of loss of homeland, a connection I will indicate with the term "exilic narrativity", as a spatially-charged mode of fragmented narrativity that has the potential to take the literary "imaging" of exile in Jabra's novel and Badr's short stories to its visual version: the image evoked in language can be shown in the film. *Al-Makhdu'un*'s exilic narrativity, I argue, connects spatial representations

of Palestinian collective memory to the exercise of political power. It exposes a transformation of the construction of Palestinian identity, from catastrophe and victimization to ideology and political movements.

What are the details of this construction? And how does it take shape in audiovisual narratives of *al-nakba*, especially in relation to the notions of Palestinian “self” and Israeli “other” and their conflicted discourses of memory? These two questions are the focus of my discussion of Bakri’s film *1948* in chapter Four. With respect to memorial storytelling, my analysis of Bakri’s film examines the ways in which exilic narrativity is put to use in a post-*nakba* culture where Palestinian identity, but in different ways also Israeli identity, is addressed, and potentially influenced by audiovisual narratives of *al-nakba*. This is what I will refer to in my discussion of *1948* as “performative narrativity”. The notions of the play of power in memory, the meanings of silence and denial, and performance as representationally performative will be crucial to understanding the film’s performative narrativity as a special case of exilic narrativity that has the performativity effect to transform, slowly and through iteration, the formation of identity of the viewer. Audiovisual narratives of *al-nakba*, I argue, not only present us with a stark example of a displaced identity, but also articulate the construction of Palestinian identity as a matter of existing “in the act” of collective re-enactments and the cultural recall of loss of place in and for exile: an exilic identity that needs to be performed through continuous practices of re-tellings and re-readings.

Finally, chapter Five explores oral narratives of *al-nakba*. Two sets of objects are central to this chapter: a collection of the narratives that was published in 1998 by the *Journal of Palestine Studies* as “Reflections of Al-Nakba”, and a selection of personal interviews that I conducted in my fieldwork in the Gaza Strip in 2004. My analysis of these narratives focuses on cultural processes of the preservation of collective memory and the roles they play in the construction of a Palestinian exilic identity. In particular, I address the question how the geopolitical continuity of loss of homeland affects our understanding of the daily exile of subsequent generations of post-*nakba* Palestinians as an ongoing catastrophe in 2008? I attempt to provide an answer to this question in two analytical parts.

In the first part in connection with the collection “Reflections of Al-Nakba”, I propose an alternative mode of reading oral accounts of *al-nakba*. Instead of treating these accounts as ethnographic fieldwork notes, I treat them like the literary and audiovisual narratives I analyze in this study; namely as narrative configurations of memory in exile. What underlies this mode of reading, as we will see, is a shift of focus from the historical catastrophe of 1948 to the everyday condition of its “catastrophed subject” in 2008, a condition I will mobilize in

my discussion as the *mankoub* (catastrophed). A reading of oral accounts of *al-nakba* as configurations of memory in this narrative framework, I argue, may provide a useful analytical tool. This tool not only attends to the nuances of loss of homeland and forced exile with which many narratives of *al-nakba* resonate, but at the same time exposes, through memorial storytelling, cultural imaginings (or when particularly audiovisual, “imaginings”) of practices of Palestinian identity in terms of an event/subject constellation between the past and present experiences of catastrophe.

I conclude this chapter, and the book, with the personal interviews that I conducted in my fieldwork in the Gaza Strip in 2004. In this section I draw on the problematic notions of “post-memory” and geopolitical continuity of loss of place in the everyday. I do so in order to derive a tentative “imaginative-discursive” framework for the analysis of the generational transmission of the memory of *al-nakba* within exile.

Within this framework, I do not use the term “post-memory” to suggest that *al-nakba* is in the past, but on the contrary, to suggest that the originating moment of the ongoing catastrophe has been transmitted to later generations of Palestinians. To put it differently, I use the term as shorthand for the presentness of a temporal, ongoing *nakba*. As I will attempt to show, narratives of subsequent generations of post-*nakba* Palestinians expose a resoundingly present-oriented model of post-memory. At the heart of this model, subsequent generations of Palestinians take the position of the previous generations in terms of the effect of the trauma of *al-nakba* in their parents’ past experience. Most importantly, the distinction between memories of what the previous generations lived through in 1948 and what the subsequent generations experience sixty years later, may become so blurred that the intergenerational continuity of loss of place can in fact be sustained both in memory and experience. This is so simply because the Palestinians’ loss of homeland, through their exile, did not stop. Hence, in the case of Palestinians, the problem of the term “post-memory” is not so much with memory, but with “post”. The “post”, I argue, is by no means constitutive of the experience of catastrophe of subsequent generations of Palestinians: they do not have just post-memories of *al-nakba*. Rather, Palestinian cultural memory is diffuse: the past and the present are more closely bound up together than in other situations. Whereas the first generations of post-*nakba* Palestinians have memories and experiences of the originating event of *al-nakba*, second and third generations of post-*nakba* Palestinians, although they have not experienced this originating moment (1948), are still “inside” the event itself living the catastrophe on a daily basis as *mankoub* subjects whose lands as much as lives are being persistently violated under Israeli occupation and in exile.

