1 Introduction

> In a situation like that of the Palestinians and Israelis, hardly anyone can be expected to drop the quest for national identity and go straight to a history-transcending universal rationalism. Each of the two communities, misled though both may be, is interested in its origins, its history of suffering, its need to survive. To recognize these imperatives, as components of national identity, and to try to reconcile them, rather than dismiss them as so much non-factual ideology, strikes me as the task in hand.
>
> Edward Said, "Permission to Narrate"

> Discursive practices are not purely and simply ways of producing discourse. They are embodied in technical processes, in institutions, in patterns for general behaviour, in forms for transmission and diffusion, and in pedagogical forms which, at once, impose and maintain them.
>
> Michel Foucault, "History of Systems of Thought"

By now, we know the images that flicker across the television screens during CNN or BBC or al-Jazeera news broadcasts about Palestinians: mournful or angry funerals of martyrs; walls papered with images of young dead men and, now and again, women; poignant or proud commemorations of collective death spoken in the idiom of battles and massacres; pasts that seem to linger; exile that is not forgotten; histories of suffering that are declared and compared. We hear about a surfeit of memory. Some claim that this mnemonic abundance is the final bulwark against capitulation – or compromise, depending on where you stand politically. Everyone may disagree about the causes and effects, but no one denies that the nationalist claims of Palestinians – and Israelis – are bolstered by stories about the past: memories and histories.

All nationalist commemoration is associated with iconic images, objects, and persons. These icons are part of a larger narrative about the nation, as the nation itself is often anthropomorphized and portrayed as having an identity, a "national character," and a biography. It is thought that the story of the nation, celebrated and commemorated in so many ways and venues, is passed from one generation to the next, forming the

essential core of the nation and its character. French nationalism has *la Marseillaise*, the Bastille, and de Gaulle. US nationalism has the flag, Fourth of July, the Civil war, and Ground Zero. Massada, the *Sabra*, David Ben-Gurion, and "If I forget thee, Jerusalem" are the emblems of Zionist nationalism. Palestinian nationalism has the *Nakba*, the *Intifada*, the Dome of the Rock, Sabra and Shatila massacres, the chequered *keffiyeh* scarf, and martyrs' posters. But in listing these recognizable yet selective icons, these nationalisms and their pageantry of memory are reified: none of these icons are stable, historically unchanging, or uncontested. National(ist) narratives – and the crucial symbols at their core – are challenged from within and without.

This study is about performances of remembered Palestinian (hi)stories and transformations in national commemoration over the last few decades. I examine icons, events, and persons commemorated in ceremonies, calendars, schoolbooks, and history-telling, and by doing so, I shed light on transformations in the character, affinities, values, and mobilizing strategies of the Palestinian national movement. In order to understand nationalist commemoration, this book has posed and pursued an array of questions. Some concern the qualitative content of nationalist commemorations: in what ways are past heroisms and tragedies celebrated or mourned? Has Palestinianness always been about martyrdom – as both detractors of Palestinian nationalism and some proponents of an Islamist version of it (Abu-Faris 1990) claim? Or is it possible that at other times, martyrdom was not so central to Palestinian nationalist commemoration? Other questions examine the internal workings of commemorations. If, as I argue, nationalist narratives are not stable, and as such, commemorations are also fluid in their object, tone, and resonance, *how* do political and social transformations affect the way Palestinian refugees remember and commemorate their history of exile, and their lives and losses? In a deterritorialized nation, where the diasporic population has resided in camps and shantytowns rather than cosmopolitan metropolitan centers, and unlike nationalists cited by Gellner (1983: 101–109) who have not been prosperous and embourgeoised, what form does nationalist narrative-making take? A final series of questions interrogate sources and discursive boundaries of nationalist commemoration. Are nationalist commemorative forms and narratives borrowed transnationally or locally imagined and reproduced? How do seismic shifts in global politics – the end of the Cold War, the rise of human rights and humanitarian politics – affect local practices? Do transnational discourses, not all of which are Europe-centered, inform local vocabularies of mobilization? What roles do these discourses play in mediating the relationships between national communities and transnational institutions?

Ultimately, this study wants to know why representations of the past are so central to nationalist movements and sentiments.

Nationalist memories

> Nationality requires us all to forget the boundaries between the living and the dead, the discrepancies between individual experience and the national history.
>
> Anne Norton, "Ruling Memory"

In his seminal work on nationalism, Benedict Anderson (1991: 6) writes that imagined communities "are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined." Accordingly, in this study, I examine national narratives – or "stories of peoplehood" in Rogers Smith's evocative phrase (2003) – promulgated by commemorative acts, events, and objects. I argue that *what* is valorized, celebrated, and commemorated in different nationalisms reveals a great deal about *how* that nationalism is formed: I focus on the mechanics of production of national stories, rather than analyze them as "natural" by-products of an already existing national sentiment. My aim is to show that, contra Anthony D. Smith (1986), even the most intensely felt and fought-for nationalisms contain narratives of the past – "memories" – that are *not* (or not necessarily) ethnic, historically continuous, and unequivocally durable. I argue that while particular events are "remembered" as the shared basis of peoplehood, the construction and reconstruction of these events, the shifting mood of commemorative narratives, and ruptures in commemorative practices surrounding these events all point to a far less stable notion of historical or national memory – and consequently national sentiment – than some might think.

To make this argument, I contend that valorized national narratives – themselves so influential in shaping political strategies and aims – are often hotly contested and their reproduction often requires institutions whose power and resources affect what sorts of discursive modes are chosen, what types of narratives are promulgated, and which audiences are engaged. Furthermore, the affinity of local nationalisms with broader transnational discourses negates the idea that Palestinian nationalist practices are *sui generis* products of a static and unique Palestinian culture. By transnational discourses, I not only indicate global discursive trends but also those discourses borrowed from neighbors such as Iran and allies such as Hizbullah. As such, I challenge the notion of an "authentically" organic and unchanging nationalism nurtured by a prosperous bourgeoisie in the hermetically sealed greenhouse of a clearly

bounded territory. I contend that in the crucial interface between the local and the transnational, nationalist commemorations, stories of peoplehood, and strategies of mobilisation are forged, reproduced, and transformed.

Histories, memories, stories

In this book, I have chosen to examine commemoration – *public* performances, rituals, and narratives – because I am concerned not with memories but with "mnemonic *practices*" (Olick 2003), not with images inside people's heads but with the *social* invocation of past events, persons, places, and symbols in variable social settings.

In his monumental work on *lieux de mémoire* in France, Pierre Nora (1996: 3) distinguishes memory from history:

> Memory is always a phenomenon of the present, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. Memory, being a phenomenon of emotion and magic, accommodates only those facts that suit it ... History, being an intellectual, nonreligious activity, calls for analysis and critical discourse. Memory situates remembrance in a sacred context. History ferrets it out; it turns whatever it touches into prose. Memory wells up from groups that it welds together, which is to say, as Maurice Halbwachs observed, that there are as many memories as there are groups, that memory is by nature multiple yet specific; collective and plural yet individual. By contrast, history belongs to everyone and to no one and therefore has a universal vocation ... Memory is an absolute, while history is always relative.

Though certain aspects of Nora's definition of memory are suggestive – namely its selectiveness and polyvalence – his descriptions of historiography as universal and of memory as essential are problematic, and the distinctions made between history and memory are hyperbolic. This view of memory and history as respectively "popular" and intellectual stories about the past ignores the mutual imbrication of these two categories of narratives and dehistoricises and sanctifies an object called memory. In this view, memory bubbles up "naturally" from the collective experiences of a group and it is absolute, emotional, magical, and as such insusceptible to reason, dynamism, or change.

By contrast, I shift the focus of analysis from metaphysical or cognitive aspects of memory, to its effect and appearance in practice. This heuristic shift *externalizes* remembering (Olick and Robbins 1998), and allows us to look at processes of remembering and commemorating in a social setting, and in relation to particular audiences and contexts (Bruner 1984; Bruner and Gorfain 1984). I historicise commemorative practices and examine their multiple sites of production and reproduction. I consider

commemoration to be constituted of *forms* – for example, history-telling (Portelli 1997), monument-building, ceremonies, – and narrative *contents*. The narrative content is of primary interest to me, because in articulating a vision of nationhood, commemorative narratives also proffer possible strategies of cohesion and struggle.

A large swathe of scholarship across disciplinary boundaries has viewed commemoration as either the site or instrument of contention. Throughout the world, different political actors have struggled over the form, meaning, and purpose of collective memory and national commemorations (Brubaker and Feischmidt 2002; Farmer 1999; Malkki 1995; Poletta 2003; Popular Memory Group 1982; Portelli 1997; Sayigh 1978; 1994; Slyomovics 1998; Swedenburg 1995; Tilly 1994; Trouillot 1995; Watson 1994; Yoneyama 1999; Zerubavel 1995).[1] Although this study is firmly located within this body of scholarship, I also hope to show the transnational affinities of nationalist commemorative practices and the profound influence of global politics on the production and reproduction of local memories. Furthermore, I emphasize the importance of narratives not only as a vehicle for transmission of memories but also as the core content of all commemorative practices. I argue that every commemoration, whether it is a ceremony, a monument, a mural, or commemorative naming, explicitly or implicitly contains a story. Much has been written about the importance of stories. Stories transform ''the mere coexistence of experiences'' (Turner 1980: 153) into meaningful narrative sequences, collate events, and organize them according not only to the actuality of the events that have passed but also on the basis of the exigencies of the present, the social and political context in which the narrative has developed, and according to the operational relations between the teller of the story and her audience. The teller of the stories ''selectively appropriates'' discrete events (Somers 1992: 601) and infuses them with meaning by sequencing, conjoining, or eliding them (Zerubavel 1995: 225). I look at the

[1] Collective memories are also said to be ''moral practices'' (Lambek 1996) that demand accountability not only in courts of law (Mamdani 2000; Osiel 1997) but also in the wider society (Tonkin 1992; Werbner 1995). Collective memories can form the basis of selfhoods (Connerton 1989) and affirm community (Winter 1995). National identities are said to be inseparable from the nation's memories (Gillis 1992; Halbwachs 1992; Le Goff 1992; Nora 1996, 1997, 1998; Smith 1986). Whether in Israel (Zerubavel 1995), revolutionary France (Ben-Amos 2000), post-Independence India (Amin 1995), Britain (Bommes and Wright 1982), or Germany (Mosse 1990), states use commemorative practices, holiday cycles, and especially textbooks ''to establish a consensus view of both the past and the forms of personal experience which are significant and memorable'' (Bommes and Wright 1982: 255–6). This shared – and crafted – memory forms the basis of communal feeling. Although this scholarship is very relevant to this project, I focus on the contentious element of commemoration and national memory narratives.

construction of these commemorative narratives, and by analyzing heroic, tragic, and *sumud* (steadfastness) stories embedded within Palestinian commemorative practices, I show the emergence of dominant narratives in particular contexts, their modes of reproduction, their subversion at other times, and their replacement by wholly dissimilar narratives when the context, institutions, and available transnational discourses have changed.

Approaching Palestinian nationalism

Palestinian commemorations are accessible openings through which transformations in Palestinian nationalism can be examined, since in the Palestinian refugee camps of Lebanon, as in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) these footprints of memory are easily visible. In both places, images of young martyred men stare out of posters pasted on alley walls alongside photographs and murals of Jerusalem. Interior walls of almost every house carry the picture of a young martyr, a son or daughter, a husband, a brother or sister. Schools, clinics, and even small shops are named after cities and villages left behind and destroyed in 1948. On the margins of most camps in Lebanon and throughout the OPT, pockmarked hulks of semi-destroyed buildings are left standing years, sometimes decades, after the bombings that rendered them uninhabitable; they are iconic objects reminding all of the violence of war. In Lebanon, grave markers in unexpected locations – mosques, schools, and nurseries – testify to urgent burials during sieges. In Beirut, sites of mass graves – even when unmarked – contain hints that render a history of carnage legible to attentive eyes: fifty-year-old olive and fig trees amidst ruins that were once camp houses in Tal al-Za'tar, flowerbeds that were once alleyways in Shatila. Stories of violence, catastrophe, and sorrow are made tangible through the constant and evolving practices of commemoration of the camp residents in Lebanon. In the OPT, stone-throwing children and political prisoners are celebrated alongside the heroic *shabab* (young men). There, martyrs' funerals are familiar commemorative events not only for the locals who participate in them but also for the international audiences who see broadcast images of the event.

Palestinians commemorate a broad range of events, objects, and persons. Some iconic objects of commemoration include olive trees, stone houses built in old villages, oranges, keys, and embroidered dresses. These objects are overwhelmingly associated with prelapsarian village life in Palestine, and were invoked as signifiers of Palestinianness once the nationalist movement re-emerged in the mid-1960s. Ghassan

Kanafani's fiction and Mahmud Darwish's poetry have been crucial in promulgating many of these icons, but so were other writers and poets, different political institutions, and the refugees themselves. In this study, I will not focus on the *Nakba* (the catastrophe of 1948) and its associated objects of memory, as a number of other studies have already examined the topic in great detail (Bardenstein 1998; 1999; Davis 2002, forthcoming; Khalili 2004, 2005a; Slyomovics 1998; Swedenburg 1990). Instead, I focus on those commemorative practices which specifically celebrate the heroisms of the nationalist movement and mourn the tragedies of endured losses since the start of the nationalist movement in the 1960s. In so doing, I investigate commemorations of iconic events such as battles and massacres, and of iconic persons such as martyrs or *fida'iyyin* guerrillas. I analyze narratives contained within commemorative practices, their production and promulgation, how some events have been retrospectively reinterpreted as heroic or tragic, the performative aspect of commemoration, and the way the Palestinians themselves sometimes subvert dominant commemorative narratives about important historic moments.

This study is based on ten months of continuous residence in the Burj al-Barajna refugee camp in Beirut (2001–2002) and several subsequent visits (lasting anywhere from two to eight weeks) to Lebanon and later to the OPT. Ethnographic work and hundreds of informal interviews and dozens of formal interviews were supplemented by extensive archival research through Palestinian factional and NGO publications. I have chosen to write about Palestinians for three distinct reasons. First and foremost, the Palestinian struggle for nationhood has been and continues to be a central question of Middle Eastern politics, especially as the Arab states were either defeated by or signed peace accords with Israel. For decades, the question of Palestine has animated discussions, passion, and contention throughout the Middle East, and the issues and concerns which arise out of it show no sign of abatement. Second, I have focused on Palestinians, especially those who have resided in Lebanon, because of their statelessness. Usually, the state is considered the basic unit of politics, yet in the twentieth century, the condition of statelessness has affected the lives of millions, among them the Palestinians, and especially the Palestinian refugees. Palestinian statelessness for much of the last few decades highlights both the mechanisms of nationalist struggle and the construction of nationalist narrative in the absence of state institutions, and it further emphasizes the importance of international political institutions and discourses to which Palestinians have appealed for support and sympathy. Third, the dramatic shifts in strategies and approaches within the Palestinian movement over time

allow an important opportunity to understand changing nationalisms. During the period known as the *Thawra* (1965–1982), or the Revolution, Palestinian refugees in Lebanon sought the attainment of their rights through their struggle for a government of their own. But in the absence of a viable nationalist movement in Lebanon, before and after the *Thawra*, the refugees have turned to the international community, couching their struggle for rights in the lexicon of international rights and obligations. The range of their political and ideological discourse, of which commemoration is a significant element, clearly evinces their ideological and strategic shifts, and the transformations in the targets and audiences of their claim-making.

The bulk of this study focuses on the Palestinians in Lebanon because of their centrality to the Palestinian national project between 1969 and 1982. Among all Palestinian communities outside the boundaries of Mandate Palestine, those in Lebanon have experienced the greatest transformations in their political and social condition. Political mobilization in the late 1960s and 1970s placed them at the very heart of the Palestinian nationalist movement. Many of the commemorative narratives and practices that have become emblematic of Palestinian nationalism originated in the refugee camps of Lebanon during the *Thawra*. Furthermore, because Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have undergone the most drastic political transformations, the shifts in their commemorative practices have also been most perceptible and open to scrutiny.

In the course of the bloody Lebanese Civil war, and after the Israeli invasion of 1982, the leaders and fighters of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) were forced to abandon Lebanon, and with the start of the Intifada in the West Bank and Gaza, the PLO shifted its focus from the diasporan communities to the Palestinians living in the OPT. Since 1987, militant nationalist mobilization – of both secular and Islamist varieties – have flourished alongside exponentially growing non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which like their counterparts in Lebanon, play a decidedly political role. Crucially, however, what distinguishes the Palestinian community in the OPT from their counterparts in Lebanon or the rest of the diaspora is the nascent growth of a proto-state therein, with all the institutional and discursive transformations this emergence entails. This study appraises nationalist practices in the OPT in order to display the full range of available and utilized nationalist narratives. In the OPT, the role of states – or state-like institutions – in providing alternative nationalist biographies is highlighted. Furthermore, whereas in Lebanon, NGOs more or less succeeded militant factions chronologically, the co-existence of militant institutions (particularly Islamist ones) alongside NGOs in the OPT

allows us to study the interplay and overlap between different nationalist narratives and practices.

The plan

To answer the questions posed at the beginning of this chapter, I first examine the transnational discourses and the local historical context of commemoration, then discuss the specific content of narratives in the refugee camps of Lebanon, and bring the study chronologically forward in a discussion of commemoration in the OPT. Chapter 2 focuses on transnational discourses that have been so crucial in shaping Palestinian commemorative narratives. I examine the Third Worldist discourse of the 1960s and 1970s, the rise of the human rights ethos in the late 1980s, and the concurrent rise of transnational Islamisms. Throughout, I weave in an analysis of gendered modes of representation in these discourses. To complement the examination of transnational factors, in Chapter 3, I provide a historical outline of the Palestinian presence in Lebanon between 1948 and 2005. While explaining the periodization I have used throughout the book and providing the local historical context, this chapter takes on a more analytical stance, interrogating the ways in which factions (1969–1982) and NGOs (from 1993 onwards) have penetrated the lives of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and how they deploy their resources to act as conduits for tragic or heroic narratives.

Following the explication of local and international contexts, Chapter 4 describes various forms of commemoration: history-telling, pedagogy, paper and electronic media, naming, organization of time and space, and ceremonial gatherings. I then probe the contents of these forms. Chapter 5 lays out my analysis of heroic, tragic, and *sumud* (steadfastness) narratives in Lebanon and attempts to explain why and how in any given period, a particular narrative tends to dominate the discourse of the refugees.

The following two chapters illustrate how heroic, tragic, and steadfastness narratives inform the commemoration of heroes and of iconic events. Chapter 6 focuses on the shift from guerrillas to martyrs as the *commemorated heroic personae*. It analyzes the various forms taken by the commemoration of martyrs and seeks not only to find the local bases of the narratives of martyrdom, but also to show the available international discourses celebrating martyrdom. Chapter 7 similarly examines how tragic and heroic narratives are inflected in the *commemoration of iconic moments*. It critically examines the centrality of the battle as an icon of Palestinian nationalism during the *Thawra* and traces the shift in

emphasis to massacres as iconic events. This chapter also interrogates the commemorative polyvalence surrounding the War of the Camps, once again outlining the historical and political bases of commemorative narratives.

Chapter 8 shifts the study of commemoration both temporally and spatially, through examining Palestinian nationalism as practiced in the OPT after 1987. Whereas in Lebanon, heroic, tragic, and *sumud* narratives appeared primarily in a diachronically sequential way, in the OPT, several different narratives coexist simultaneously and in hybrid form. These narratives are produced by the NGOs, the Palestinian Authority, and oppositional political organizations among others. The persistence of military occupation and the specificity of political relations within the OPT require that commemorative practices and narratives there appeal to *their* specific audiences.

The concluding chapter summarizes the impact and efficacy of commemorative narratives in shaping nationalist discourses and emphasizes the significance of this study in advancing our understanding not only of commemoration and commemorative practices, but also of the durable resonance of nationalist sentiments.