

Rethinking the Palestinians Abroad as a Diaspora: The Relationships between the Diaspora and the Palestinian Territories

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ABSTRACT: *This article raises a series of questions regarding the taxonomy employed to understand the Palestinians living abroad, their identity, and their relationships to both the homeland and their host societies. For many reasons, the literature on Palestinians has extensively used the term “Palestinian refugees” and considers other notions, such as “diaspora,” “forced and volunteered migrants,” or “Palestinians abroad,” as inadequately stating or weakening the defense or “the cause” of this population. Moreover, the relationship between this population and the Palestinian territories, or historic Palestine, is supposed to be ‘natural’ and ‘primordial’.*

This article proceeds as follows. The problematic issue of Palestinians abroad is first debated within the general trends of migration studies. The concept of “diaspora” is then examined in detail, particularly since it privileges as well as emphasizes the relationships with the country of origin as a major element in the web of relationships that the forced migrants are able to establish. I then go on to argue that the Palestinians abroad do not constitute a real diaspora, but rather a “partially diasporized people”. This is then examined by constructing a typology of three ideal-types: diasporized people, population in transit, and assimilated population. Finally, I develop an explicative model of the ongoing and unachieved diasporization of the Palestinian people. This model is based on two central points: the weak and fragile center of gravity of the Palestinian diaspora, and the recent crystallization of a Palestinian identity.

Introduction

This article raises a series of questions regarding the taxonomy employed to understand the Palestinians living abroad, their identity, and their relationships to both the homeland and their host societies. Categorization, it should be recalled, is never neutral: the terms or concepts that are used provide not only an operational definition; they also shape the issues with regard to identities, personal and collective memories and migration experience. For example, Luc Boltanski (1985) has shown how the creation of the category *cadres* (executives and professionals) in France and its reference to specific social classes became the object of many manipulations on the part of the French unions. Thus, in addition to influencing the exchange of knowledge, the selected categories and notions also have obvious political implications.

For many reasons, the literature on the Palestinians has extensively used the term “Palestinian refugees” and considers other notions, such as “diaspora,” “forced and volunteered migrants,” or “Palestinians abroad,” as inadequately stating or weakening the defense or “the cause” of this population. Moreover, the relationship between this population and the Palestinian territories or historic Palestine is supposed to be ‘natural’ and ‘primordial’. However, since the beginning of the Oslo process in 1993, we observe, as will be seen later on, the relative weakness in the relationships between the Palestinians abroad and the emerging Palestinian entity. This relationship is constructed and changed extensively, especially during the period of transition.

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¹ This study is part of a large research program about the social and economic networks of the Palestinian diaspora that I coordinated in 1995-2000 in the French Research Center in Cairo, the CEDEJ (Centre d'études et de documentation économiques juridiques et sociales) and Muwatin in Ramallah. See Hanafi (1997; 2001b). The typology employed here is based on

Different paradigms of migration studies

There are five main paradigms which dominate the field of migration studies and differentiate between place, rooted identity, and transnational identity: assimilation, multiculturalism, transnationalism, diaspora, and cosmopolitanism.

The first paradigm, assimilation, is embedded in the theory of modernization which perceives the migrant as an alienated agent seeking acculturation, integration and assimilation in the host countries, or one who pathologically resists these processes. The culture of the host country is characterized as modern and universal relative to that of the immigrant's country of origin, which is considered to be local, traditional and even primitive. For example, in a country like France, even if the official language recognized "integration," in practice and in the dominant sociological literature, this really meant "assimilation" or some range of tolerance for difference. Assimilation, as Michel Wieviorka wrote, refers to the idea that "the universalism of individual rights is the best response to the possibility of discrimination which is inherent to any classification of people on a cultural basis"² (1998: 894-896). The addition of tolerance "allows specificity in the private sphere and even in the public sphere provided that the requests, demands, even the visibility, are not the source of any difficulties"³ (Ibid). In this regard, the concept of "tolerance" asserts the centrality of what is called "Western culture". David Theo Goldberg argues that "tolerance" should best be considered a tool used by the colonial power to impose its laws and culture.⁴

In a country like France, this conception continues its dominance under the guise of 'republicanism,' even though some social scientists have sought to rethink the capacity of minorities or immigrants to sustain more than a single culture without feeling necessarily alienated or schizophrenic. It should be noted that this approach, which suggests a kind of multiculturalism and dual allegiance, has met with strong resistance from the scholarly community.

Multiculturalism, the second paradigm, was operative in Canada and the United States in the early 1970s, and later also became popular in Australia and Sweden. It finds expression in the social science literature and,

600 interviews of Palestinians in 13 countries in the period between 1995 and 2000. This article is based on my research and surveys on Palestinians abroad conducted in Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Syria, Israel, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, the United States of America, Canada, Chile, the United Kingdom and Australia.

² See for instance Emmanuel Todd (1994) who defends the goals of assimilation.

³ As an example of this trend, see Dominique Schnapper's (1994) *La communauté des citoyens*.

⁴ David Theo Goldberg's lecture at the Van Leer Institute - Jerusalem on September 4th, 1999, entitled 'The Power of Tolerance'.

even more significantly, in some of the policies adopted by these countries (Wieviorka, 1998: 884-6). Unlike cultural pluralism, multiculturalism grants recognition to the barriers produced by race and, therefore, posits a diversity of populations whose experiences of discrimination have given particular histories to peoples of color. The debate regarding multiculturalism commonly revolves around recognition, identity and cultural difference, and tends to place an emphasis on “cultural injustice” rather than economic discrimination. Indeed, Charles Taylor has been criticized for assuming that rectifying cultural injustice would provide “significant leverage by itself to attack the structures of power that produce economic injustice” (Bashir, 2001: 11). In Canada, for example, there is a kind of integrated multiculturalism in the sense that there is no “separation between the cultural question and the economic question. Those primarily targeted by this policy are defined in terms of economic participation, and not only in terms of cultural difference” (Wieviorka, 1998: 884-6). In contrast, the United States experience indicates a different form, which can perhaps be termed “disintegrated multiculturalism.” There the issues are seen not so much as cultural, but more as policies against social inequality based on racial discrimination. As Nathan Glazer (1997) has argued, affirmative action has “nothing to do with recognition of cultures. ... It is about jobs and admissions.”

Multiculturalism can be criticized on several grounds. First, it seeks to redress some of society’s problems, but it does not directly attack the more rooted issues of the cultural and economic hegemony of some groups in relation to others. Historically, it can be seen as a response to the emerging cultural and racial minorities in North America, and a tentative approach to the issues of cultural difference. It was important for challenging the hegemonic culture in the United States, but over time it became a mere policy-oriented concept meant to counterbalance the marginalization of minorities and reduce the program of affirmative action. As Wieviorka formulates his critique, “the preconditions for multiculturalism are such that the problem is almost resolved before having been posed, or that it is based on the Utopia of a society which has already been capable of shaping its project” (1998: 901).

The third paradigm analyzes the life experience of migrants in terms of transnationalism. The immigrant is perceived as participating in the cultural, social, economic and political life of both countries: the country of origin, and the host country. Moreover, transnationalism is an ongoing process of linkage rather than a single, unitary phenomenon. Existing between two worlds, however, does not necessarily indicate a transnational life style. As suggested by Portes, Guarnizo and Landolt, transnationalism is also rooted in extensive exchanges, new modes of transacting, and the multiplication of activities beyond the national borders (cited by Grillo, Riccio and Salih, 2000: 6). The importance of this concept is that it invites the researcher to maintain a global perspective on migration and, in addition, go beyond the classical

conception of the nation-state in order to understand the immigrants' behavior. At the same time, what can be termed "transnational life experience" concerns not only the immigrant but also those who decide to return to their original homes (Basch et al., 1994: 272). What distinguishes this paradigm from the others is that the nuanced nationalism of multiculturalism conceptually excludes political identification with and participation in other national locations by those populations that are racially different.

In common with the other paradigms, transnationalism can be interpreted in different ways. As Salih (2000: 7) argues, "while some see transnationalism as a counter-hegemonic process (Basch et al., 1994), other scholars see transnational migrants as the new postmodern *Gastarbeiter*" (Grillo, 1998). Some of the analysts who use this concept consider the existence of two states to which the migrant belongs as a condition of "the transnational life". I would argue that it is above all a feature of social behavior, and therefore a refugee migrant could also be involved in the political, economic, and social life of his/her home as well as in the host country. This is also the paradigm's weakness: no matter which interpretation is followed, the literature on transnationalism falls into the trap of generalization and tends to consider all immigrant experience as transnational by definition.

The fourth paradigm is the concept of diaspora. This paradigm stands in contradiction with the first one, assimilation, but is complementary to the second and third. The importance of this concept consists in its analytical power. It leads us to look at the connectivity between the ethnic and religious community in one particular place and the supposed same community abroad. The diaspora, in other words, is connected between the peripheries themselves and with the center as well. Connectivity means not only the possible "return to the center," but also continuous circulation and movement between peripheries and center. A good deal of research has been carried out regarding the economic and social networks established between individuals belonging to the same ethnicity. To cite a well-known example, Kotkin has made sweeping claims for the abilities and central importance of networking among certain diasporic groups. In his book, *Tribes: How Race, Religion and Identity Determine Success in the New Global Economy*, (1993) Kotkin traces the connection between ethnicity and business success - how in-group loyalties are becoming the driving force in the new global economy. These global tribes combine a strong sense of common origin and shared values - quintessential tribal characteristics - with two other factors critical for success in the modern world: geographical dispersion (within a global network) and the belief in scientific progress. Paradoxically, these two combine what liberals had wrongly thought to be intrinsically separate, ethnic identity and cosmopolitan adaptability. Kotkin maintains that in this new era, with the end of the Cold War and the reduced power of nation states, these cosmopolitan

groups will become more empowered and flourish. However, his concept of global networks is exaggerated, particularly in the sense that all ethnic groups' members are connected and there is no room for the individual outside of his/her community.

Finally, the last paradigm, cosmopolitanism, is a long-sidelined concept recently reactivated by a wide range of social, political, and cultural studies theorists. It is currently presented by way of a new politics of the left, postulating alternatives for both the ethnocentric paradigm of assimilation and particularistic multiculturalism. Here, the migrant is not seen as attached to his/her rooted identity and not assimilated to the host-land identity, but open to world-identity. The Oxford English Dictionary defines cosmopolitan as "at home throughout the world or in many spheres of interest." Thus, the cosmopolitanism-like cultural hybridist concept turns into a reaction to the debate around the politics of identity. Timothy Brennan (1997) argues for a politics of positionality in which the value of nativism is not so much placed on where a person is born, but on how an individual is "situated in the place" and, most important, his/her political position. Continuing this line of reasoning, in their discussion on the politics of non-identity, Edward Said and Jacques Derrida both claim that heterogeneity and hybridity come at the expense of identity and difference. Heterogeneity implies that homogeneity is not natural; rather it is politically crafted and fabricated for purposes of localizing and maintaining power. (Bashir, 2001:13)

Some key questions can now be raised concerning the application of these paradigms to the Palestinians abroad: How have the various host countries dealt with the Palestinians living among them? Which paradigm is most suitable as an approach to the situation of Palestinians abroad?

The assimilation paradigm has primarily been applied to two countries (Egypt and France) and in two quite different ways. In Egypt, the Palestinians' fragile status is partially the result of a kind of popular racism that has been leveled against them. Their own fear of isolation and marginality has pushed them to "become assimilated." It is probably accurate to say that the only Palestinians who speak with the exact accent of their host country are the Palestinians in Egypt. While the assimilation forces in Egypt are unorganized and essentially popular, in France they are more institutional and conform to the overall French system of Jacobean centralism. As shown in earlier studies, Palestinians, in common with other migrant communities, are also pressured into adopting a strategy of assimilation. (Hanafi 2001a; 2001b)

With regard to multiculturalism, one can argue that this paradigm is appropriate only for the Palestinians living in Western countries where Palestinian culture is markedly different from that of the majority. However, it may also be relevant to those Arab countries where the local culture and power structure can be said to inhibit cultural diversity. More generally, the problems of Palestinian refugees in the Arab World are not in the realm of

culture, but rather in the economic arena. Just as the other immigrants working and living there, they are exploited by an economic system in which they are discriminated against and have few legal work rights. This is the case in Israel, Lebanon and the Gulf States.

Transnationalism is a paradigm that challenges the classical concept of nation-state and, in our particular case, the relationship between Palestinian identity and the presence of Palestinian territory. As the transnational studies' authors emphasize the economic aspects of migration and how transnational practice related to global capitalism and the accumulation of capital by its de-territorialization, here, in the Palestinian case, I will show how these practices have completely different meanings.⁵

The recycling of a de-territorialized Palestinian capital reveals lines of fault in the international global market rather than beneficial workings of globalization. For instance, the geographical de-localization of Palestinian economic transactions can best be understood as improving the fragile legal status of the refugees, regardless of their wealth. As such, most of their investments reflect more of an economy of survival rather than the exercise of true political and economic power in the global economy and the world system. As Grillo, Riccio and Salih (2000: 19) argue, "Economic dislocation in both developing and industrialized nations has increased migration, but made it difficult for migrants to construct secure cultural, social and economic bases within their new settings." Therefore, transnationalism, whether in reaction to global capitalism or preceding its triumph (as in the case of the Senegalese communities in Italy), does not exhibit a straightforward relation to global capital (*ibid.*). The experience of Palestinians recruited through the UNDP's⁶ TOKTEN (Transfer Of Knowledge Through National Expatriates) program shows that many of them come to Palestine because of their precarious situation in their host countries. Accordingly, their return expresses a model in which constrained people seek to improve their flexibility, rather than one of people who have a straightforward choice between the country of residence and the country of origin.

My research among Palestinians indicates that transnational networks are not an expression of global capital; rather they mainly constitute strategies of survival. In many transnational experiences around the world, for example the Chinese in the U.S.A (Ong: 6), the quest to accumulate capital and social prestige in the global arena, emphasizes and is regulated by practices favoring flexibility, mobility and repositioning in relation to markets, governments and cultural regimes. In the Palestinian case, however, this acquisition of capital disproportionally reflects a struggle for economic survival. While a New York businessman may not require expending more than a fraction of a

⁵ For more details about the Palestinian economic transnational practices, see Hanafi, 2002.

⁶ United Nations Development Program.

second of his time on a million dollar transaction, thanks to the time-space compression enabled by new information technologies information (Harvey, 1990), a transnational refugee in many Middle-Eastern countries will most likely expend days on a much more modest transfer. In contrast with the euphoric tones of many recent transnational studies, my own research stresses the crucial importance of the particular class stratification that is linked to global systems of production. Accordingly, the cultural flows described by Arjun Appadurai (1996) do not involve the entire population in question, but only a small segment. As Friedman (1997) argues, Appadurai:

ignores the political economy of time-space compression and gives the misleading impression that everyone can take equal advantage of mobility and modern communications and that transnationality has been liberatory, in both a spatial and a political sense, for all peoples. What is missing from these accounts are discussions of how the disciplining structures - of family, community, work, travel, and nation - condition, shape, divert, and transform such subjects and their practices and produce ... moral-political dilemmas.

If the accumulation of foreign passports for some businesspeople is “a matter of convenience” and “matter of confidence” in uncertain political times (Ong, 1999: 1), for almost all Palestinians residing abroad it is a matter of survival. Not having a passport can render them immobile and force them to live clandestine lives. (Hanafi, 2001b) For those who have never possessed a passport, but have had to make do with a travel document, a passport signifies and allows basic connectivity to their family, as well as participation in labor markets.

In contrast to the above, the diaspora paradigm takes into account the possibility of the Palestinians’ transnational life abroad, and it also emphasizes the importance of the multi-polar connectivity between the different peripheral communities, and between these and the Palestinian territories. However, this connectivity is not necessarily real or evident. The dispersion of a people, due to their forced emigration, is usually conceived as a source of their transnational networks. Diasporas have also been viewed as contributing to the reshaping and emergence of new economic networks. For instance, the Palestinian-Israeli Oslo Agreement was seen as fostering the re-establishment of local and international economic links after an extended period of conflict. In this respect, the discourse on diasporic networks has been overstated and almost mythic. Little attention has been paid to the absence of networks or to networks that were damaged or torn, disconnected as a result of many factors (such as the impermeability of the inter-state borders, absence of relationship following a long period of separation, and so forth). A careful examination of the Palestinian communities in their diaspora

would show many forms of networks with varying degrees of institutionalization: familial networks that sometimes include a family council, village clubs which continue to be important (especially in the United States), national and nationalistic-religious networks usually based on the different popular organizations associated with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) or pro-Hamas. In addition, in both Europe and North America one can also find active supra-national networks, such as Arab or Islamic religious, which include Arabs from many different national origins.

If the first three paradigms minimize the relationships between the migrant community and the host land, the advantage of the diaspora concept is that it emphasizes these links, as well as the connectivity to the real or mythical homeland. Before turning to examine the extent of connectivity between the Palestinian diaspora and its center, I raise the question of whether the Palestinians abroad can be considered to be a diaspora. I will argue that the dispersion of the Palestinian people has created a partial diaspora, and that the Palestinians abroad continue to be an extremely fragile people.

Diaspora, population in transit and assimilated population

Given the complexity of the Palestinians' status abroad, what concepts best express their present situation? An outline for useful classification can be found in the model suggested by Bassma Kodmani (1997), although the definitions used also differ from the original model. The classification is based on three ideal-types that constitute a continuum within which the Palestinians can be said to be situated as: diaspora, population in transit, and assimilated people.

Diaspora

The concept of diaspora is used here in two different ways. First, it is employed in a generic sense, to conceptualize the study of the Palestinians as a temporary community settled in a number of host lands and longing for their homecoming. The second meaning is more analytical. A group of dispersed people, far from their homeland, can be considered a diaspora when it fulfills two necessary conditions: first, the group has an accepted legal presence in the host country, and second, members of this group are tied together by a variety of different networks which also link them to their real or mythical homeland. In the latter, members of the community are conscious of sharing a common identity.

For diasporized people, their identities refer to both homeland and host land and the relationship between these identities is not necessarily hierarchical. The quest for original identity need not be measured by their attachment to the homeland or the will to return. Many empirical studies about the refugees challenge the "idealized" and "nostalgic" image of voluntary repatriation home (Warner, 1994: 160). In the course of time,

dispersal distorts the meaning of community and with it the memory of the homeland as well (Zureik, 1997: 80). Warner, like many authors of cultural studies who emphasize the transmigrants' cultural hybridity, argues that in a postmodern world the "politics of space" is transformed: in the past much of the communitarian argument focused on attachment to the land, while in the present, space has become more elusive and is not necessarily associated with any fixed locale, such as the refugee's original home (ibid.). Without adopting this extreme politics of non-identity, I would say that the diasporized people search for better socio-economic opportunities that are connected with their territorial-identity or spiritual homeland. This means that the quest for a geographical position and a socio-economic basis takes into consideration the multitude of factors that are beyond the original group identity. As a result, the ontological question for the diasporized community becomes more "where am I" than "who am I."

It can also be argued that the more one is diasporized the more one is able to transcend the identification between territory and nation: one considers oneself a Palestinian, among other identities, even if she/he lives voluntarily outside of Palestine. For some authors, the memory of a nation and the associated ego-conscience appears to continue to work even when they are in a "non-space" (*non-lieu*) (Ma Mung et al, 1998; Kodmani, 1997). For example, when some diasporized Palestinians return to the homeland they develop an alternative view of homeland-nationhood: they may continue to maintain their allegiance to their hostland in ways that are reminiscent of "a transnational life". In contrast to Kodmani's approach, diaspora need not be regarded as the negation of the notion of "refugee" (1997). To her, "diaspora" is how, through the manipulation of terms, the need for resolving the question of return and analyzing the population's integration in the host countries is set aside, while the term "refugee" means that this population and its return remains an issue to be resolved juridically. This polarization seems overstated. The category of "refugee" is more legal and administrative, while the category of "diaspora" is more sociological. The definition of refugee could clarify this distinction. According to the United Nation High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) a refugee is:

any person who is outside the country of his nationality ... because he has or had a well-founded fear of persecution by reason of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion and is unable or, because of such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of the government of the country of his nationality (Goodwin-Gill, 1983: 5).⁷

⁷ The Palestinian refugees did not benefit from the protection allocated by the UNHCR. They received services from United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the Middle East (UNRWA). This Agency defines a Palestine refugee as "a person

Thus, a refugee remains a refugee even if she/he adopts the nationality of the host country, and even if she/he has acquired some resources or wealth.⁸ The classification “refugee” is hence related to the condition of dispersion from the homeland and does not concern the juridical status or living standard in the host countries (Hanafi, 2001b). “Diaspora” does not mean abrogating the necessity to change the Palestinians’ situation outside their home country, but rather emphasizes the importance of analyzing the relationship between this population, their host-lands and homeland.

The issues are, of course, filled with contradictions and dilemmas. If the Palestinians maintain a strong relationship with their homeland because of the ongoing Israeli colonial practices, it is also because their legal acceptance was not fulfilled in the majority of Arab countries that have been their “hosts” (absence of civil rights in many of these countries and fragility of their refugee status there). While there are “diasporized Palestinians” in both North and South America and in Europe, the Palestinians in the Arab world have not accomplished their process of diasporization.⁹ Instead, they have had to struggle for the right to work and reside there permanently. For this reason, Palestinians in the Arab countries, who also constitute the main population of Palestinians abroad, continue to be in a precarious situation.

Population in transit

The second ideal-type can be termed a “population in transit”. This type of population lives in a precarious juridical status in their host country, even though some may have attained a relatively high standard of living. According to UNRWA statistics (see Table 1), Palestinians living in various refugee camps constitute about 32.4% of 3,737,494 Palestinians residing in the countries neighboring Israel/Palestine. As Elias Sanbar (1989) has shown, this population is characterized by a condition of permanent liminality and a psychology of continuous transition.¹⁰ Some among them wish to return to

whose normal residence was in Palestine for minimum of two years preceding the conflict in 1948 in one of the countries where UNRWA provides relief.”

⁸ This confusion between the legal status and socio-economic position of the category of “refugees” is relevant not only to the Palestinians. For example, when I wrote an article in the French newspaper, *Libération*, about the economic situation of the Palestinian in exile, the editor changed the title to “The Palestinian in exile: refugees and business people.” (Hanafi, 1995)

⁹ See (Picard, 1998; Gonzales, 1992) for the situation of diasporized Palestinian and Arab community in South America, (Hanafi, 1997) for North America and, finally, (Hanafi, forthcoming) for Europe.

¹⁰ Concerning the general relationship between emigration, exile and liminality, see the analysis of Anja Hansch (1998) regarding Arab and Franco-Arab literature, and also the analysis of Hamid Naficy (1995) that describes the Iranian exile liminal culture in the United States.

their village of origin or to the Palestinian Territories, while others wish to have the choice to stay in the host countries or to return. Their liminality is manifested both in their daily life in the camps, and in their economic activities as well, characterized by small projects or endeavors and diversification of investments in different fields and countries.

Assimilated Population

The third ideal-type refers to what can be called “the assimilated population”. This means the dilution of an individual into the host country’s identity. In some cases and places persons who, according to the common definition adopted by international organizations, are considered to be of Palestinian origin, choose not to identify themselves as Palestinians. Assimilation can be observed in Latin America, as demonstrated in many studies (Hanafi, 2001b; Picard, 1998; Gonzalez, 1992) and, to a lesser degree, also in the United States. As is well known, this process is not necessarily irreversible: the sociological literature contains many instances in which the third and subsequent generations of assimilated emigrants embark on a quest to define their personal and collective identity. Nonetheless, at present these assimilated populations cannot be considered as part of the Palestinian diaspora.

This typology of Palestinians abroad (diaspora, population in transit and assimilated population) is intended to indicate a dynamic process rather than describe a static, accomplished position. Diaspora culture is not a given, but is rather continually being constructed. Moreover, the reality is even more complex, since among these ideal-types there are also different groups. For example, between “being in transit” and “being diasporized” there is another group, which can be defined “not-yet-diaspora.” The Palestinians in Syria are an example of this last group as they are well integrated in the Syrian society; but Syria maintains their refugee status with temporary identity papers as well. In addition, the status of any given Palestinian population may change over time. This is essentially what took place among the Palestinians in the Gulf countries following the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. The extreme vulnerability of these long-term migrants was made clear by the return of some 300,000 Palestinians to Jordan, Palestinian Territories and several other countries during the second Gulf War in 1990.¹¹ Finally, it should also be kept in mind, these different ideal-types can “cohabit” alongside one another in the same country.

Palestinian communities abroad can also be seen as divided according to their time of arrival in the host lands (1948, 1967, etc.), and as a

¹¹ In fact, the five Arab nationalities whose governments have opposed the military option against Iraq adopted by the United States and its allies (Palestinians, Yemenis, Sudanese, Iraqis and Jordanians) have been subject to a real exodus from the Gulf States, as well as members of many South Asian nationalities.

consequence of the different political-legal status that their new host countries assigned them (deported persons, refugees, economic migrants, and so forth). In some instances, their specific geographical origin also plays a role. For example, in both Syria and Jordan nearly all of the Palestinians from Gaza were placed in a special status; these countries feared a large migration of Gazans since they were formerly Egyptians, a country which restricts the access of these refugees.

The classification of Palestinians abroad is not only based on their situation in the host country, but it is also linked to the homeland, in particular to their exodus or flight from Palestine-Israel. Three different categories can be distinguished in this regard.

The first category refers to those who migrated before 1948, mainly due to economic reasons but also to escape from Ottoman military service. They migrated in particular to Latin America and North America, although some moved to various Arab countries as well. This population essentially lost its right to return to Palestine-Israel because of various Israeli legal and administrative measures that hindered their return. Moreover, after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, many of these immigrants were without a passport with which they could return to Palestine. Consequently, the difficulties of their return transformed them into a forced migration, resulting in many of them becoming assimilated within their host countries.

The second category concerns the 1948 exodus of Palestinians who also lost their right of return.¹² According to Palestinian historians and to a number of Israeli “post-Zionist” historians as well, Jewish paramilitary groups and the Israeli Army expelled this population.¹³ This was a forced migration in the narrow sense: that is, these were expulsions and deportations of individuals and groups that were overpowered by superior forces and had no alternative except to flee. The Palestinians who left during the 1967 War (estimated at some 350,000 persons) are included in this category, and we must also add those who lost their residence rights by “being absent” during an Israeli census. For all of these persons it is fair to say that the act of leaving was more important than the location of their subsequent arrival. This forced migration was characterized by a lack of options; as Maurice Goldring and Piaras Mac Einri remind us regarding the Irish immigrants, what was

¹² According to the United Nations’ figures, the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict displaced 726,000 Palestinians, who left Palestine/Israel for the Arab countries.

¹³ The birth of the refugee issue and thus the motives of the Palestinian exodus in 1948 was for many years a highly charged subject of debate between Palestinians and Israelis. If the Arabs consider the exodus as an expulsion from their land, the Israelis consider it voluntary migration due to the Arabs’ appeal to their “brothers” to move to the neighboring Arab countries. A concealing thesis (which shows the process of expulsion has been occurring in many places) remerged with a new generation of Israeli historians such as Benny Morris (1986), Tom Segev and Ilan Pappé.

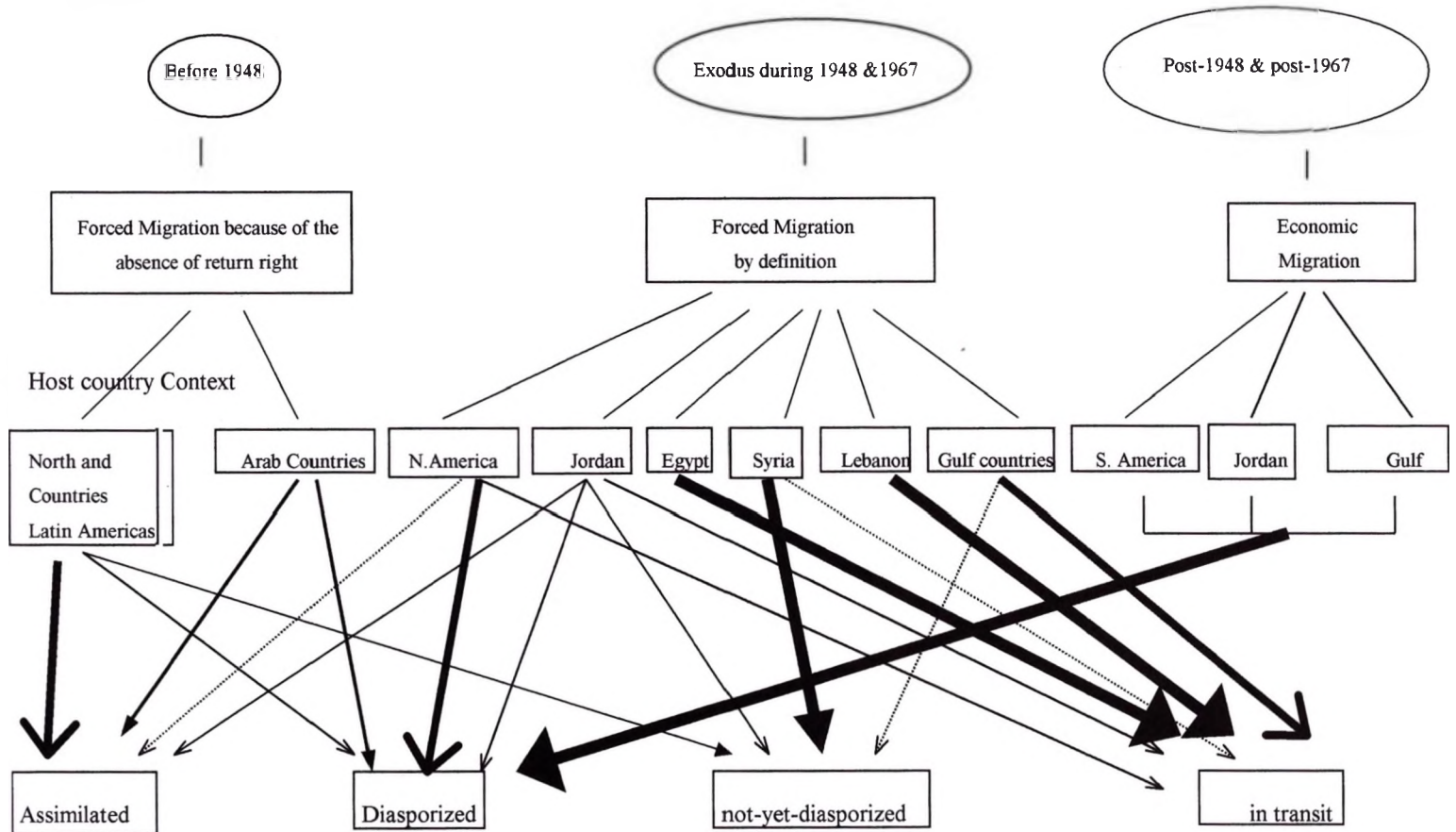
important was not the place where the Palestinian refugees went but the fact that they left the scene of war. (1989: 173)

The third category concerns the Palestinians who immigrated for economic reasons, mainly to the Gulf countries, but to the United States as well. In contrast with the forced migrations, this voluntary migration is an individual migration, even though it is often not based upon individual decision. The family tends to act as a unit when it comes to migration decisions; it is the family member with the best chances of obtaining a well-paid job who is sent abroad. These economic migrants held on to their Palestinian/Israeli identity papers and travel documents that allowed them to return to the Palestinian Territories. In this sense, this category is distinguished by the migrant's possibility to choose between a set of options, including the alternative to return to one's homeland. It is relevant to point out that some of these voluntary migrants to the Gulf were those who previously had been among the 1948 forced migrants (residents in the West Bank and Gaza as refugees).

The following flow chart (Figure 1) represents and summarizes general trends of Palestinian migration, with regard to period of time, type of migration, and relationship to both the "homeland" and the host countries.

Figure 1: The Palestinians Abroad

Palestine Context



Several different conclusions can be drawn from Figure 1. First, the majority of Palestinians in North and Latin America and a portion of the Palestinians in the Arab countries who emigrated before 1948, can be classified as “assimilated.” Their assimilation may be due to the long period of time that has ensued since their original emigration — their descendants are now fourth and fifth generation in the host countries (Picard, 1998; Gonzales, 1992). The considerable distance between places, and the difficulties of travel during the early years of the last century, also aided in the severing of relationships between the overseas populations and Palestine. In addition, the concept of “Palestinian identity” is relatively recent, which also facilitated their assimilation.

Second, having or obtaining citizenship is not necessarily a factor in the assimilation process. For example, Palestinians who fled to Jordan after 1948 and are now Jordanian citizens have not become assimilated. In fact, the apparent relationship between citizenship and assimilation was used as an argument against awarding citizenship to the Palestinians refugees. According to my empirical fieldwork in Arabic countries, the majority of my interlocutors distinguish between citizenship and nationality and they understand citizenship as a guarantee of minimal rights (civil and social, such as access to education, services, rights for mobility, permanent residency) as nationals. In many states in the Middle East, citizenship remains linked to nationality and non-citizens are in principle denied access to the public sphere defined by the state.

Third, in some instances the host countries legally absorbed Palestinian refugees in the sense that they allowed them the right to work, as well as an open-ended resident permit. At the same time, however, this did not include citizenship or the possibility to institutionalize their ethnic or communal life. This can be seen among the Palestinians in Syria.¹⁴ Some of the Palestinians in Jordan also maintain a special status of “Jordanians.” In these cases, the Palestinians can be considered as “partially diasporized” or “not-yet diasporized.”

Fourth, the weak diasporization of the Palestinians in Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and the Gulf Countries is also due to the continued conflict with Israel. Since Israel does not acknowledge the right of choice for Palestinian refugees and the possibility of some of them returning, this encourages the Arab countries to keep the Palestinian refugees in their present status quo.

Finally, from a numerical point of view, the Palestinians “in transit” constitute the most significant category. As can be seen in Tables 1 and 2, this mainly refers to the Palestinians in the Arab world, with the exception of those in Jordan.

¹⁴ However, since 1982, the Syrian government does not allow the PLO to conduct any activities within its borders.

Conclusion: the Specificity of the Palestinian Diaspora

This final section turns to developing an explicative model of the Palestinians' "unachieved diasporization." Two central points are emphasized: the fact that the Palestinian diaspora has a weak center of gravity, and the relatively recent crystallization of a Palestinian identity.

A Diaspora with a Weak Center of Gravity

A classic diaspora is defined by a *center of gravity*, which has two functions: it channels the flux of communications between diaspora members in different peripheries, while it also provides a location where members (especially family) can meet. The first function does not necessarily require a physical site; the meeting location might be a service provider or institution such as the National Jewish Fund for world Jewry, the Tunisian Base of the PLO for Palestinians, and the PKK in Germany in the Kurdish case. In regard to the second function, a physical, geographical location is a necessity and an important factor for communitarian (ethnic) economic transactions. Thus the center of gravity has nothing to do with the symbolic weight that represents a mythical or real homeland, but a center for connecting between members of the diaspora belonging to the same economic and social networks. In this respect, the historical Palestine continues to fill an important role in the imagination of the Palestinian diaspora, although not necessarily playing a role for every body in connecting the members of Palestinian communities abroad. The Salomic Jews, expelled from Spain, who kept their house keys in exile to remember their home, did not go back even when Franco allowed it.

My research on Palestinian business people in the diaspora demonstrated the importance of a physical meeting place. A Palestinian originally from Nazareth (as Nazareth kept its Arab population), for example, can have a very active economic network based in Nazareth capable of drawing those from Canada, the US or Australia for meetings with remaining Palestinians in Nazareth. In contrast, Palestinians originating from Haifa (an example of a city in which the quasi-total of its Arab population was deported by Israeli forces in 1948) do not have access to such a network due to the absence of any relatives there. Such inaccessibility to the territorial reference point effectively hinders the possibility of meeting. A Haifa family dispersed throughout Damascus, Montreal, Amman and Abu Dhabi would have little interest in meeting in Syria where only one member of the family lives. Those in Arabic countries may also find the cost of traveling to Canada or the Gulf prohibitive long before the equally daunting dilemma of acquiring a visa ever enters into the discussion. These torn networks, due to the absence of territorial reference, are not exclusive to the Palestinians. It was also studied in the case of Gypsies who migrated from Paris to New York. Williams (1987) reports that only a few years after this migration the family relationships were broken.

The total inaccessibility of historical Palestine makes it impossible for it to function as a center of gravity (except for those who hold foreign passports or a permit to travel from the Palestinian Territories to Israel). Since this is the case, might the Post-Oslo Palestinian Territories play this role? These territories would be considered as the 'natural' center of gravity for Palestinians. A combination of factors, however, has prevented the Territories from assuming this role (See Figures 2, 3, 4). The Territories are not accessible to the majority of Palestinians abroad, while, in addition, many in the Palestinian diaspora have lost confidence in the Palestinian National Authority's (PNA) efficacy at state-building. Though the diaspora has played a major role in the nationalist issue and in supporting the PLO during 50 years of resistance, it consciously refuses to transform its role into that of "a Rothschild." Though willing to support the homeland economically and financially, the diaspora also seeks a decision-making role regarding the process of institution building. Here two nuances should be introduced. First, in the context of the second intifada (from 2000 to present) the Palestinian territories obtained some centrality: the lack of economic investment from the diaspora was compensated for by huge solidarity with the population living under Israeli occupation and repression. This solidarity is manifested again by more connectivity on the level of family and village networks. Moreover, the PNA's image has since been rehabilitated and again become the center of Palestinian struggle. Even for the political opposition (Popular Front for Palestinian Liberation, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, etc.) whose leaders are historically located in Syria, the center of decision-making comes from the Palestinian territories and not from abroad.¹⁵ The Palestinian security forces were not seen any longer as the gendarme in the service of the Israeli security. The second nuance concerns the different level of importance of the Palestinian territories as a center of gravity. There is a notable difference between the Palestinians originally from West Bank and Gaza Strip, and those whose origins are in historical Palestine. The first group remained connected to each other because of the greater accessibility of the Palestinian territories. While the majority of the second group is not allowed, by Israeli Authority, to live in Palestinian territories or even visit their place of origin.

¹⁵ Concerning the Popular Front for Palestinian Liberation, for the first time the head of this organization lives in the West Bank. Since the second intifada, for the Hamas and Islamic Jihad, the weight of leadership inside is more important than the leaders of these organizations who dwell abroad.

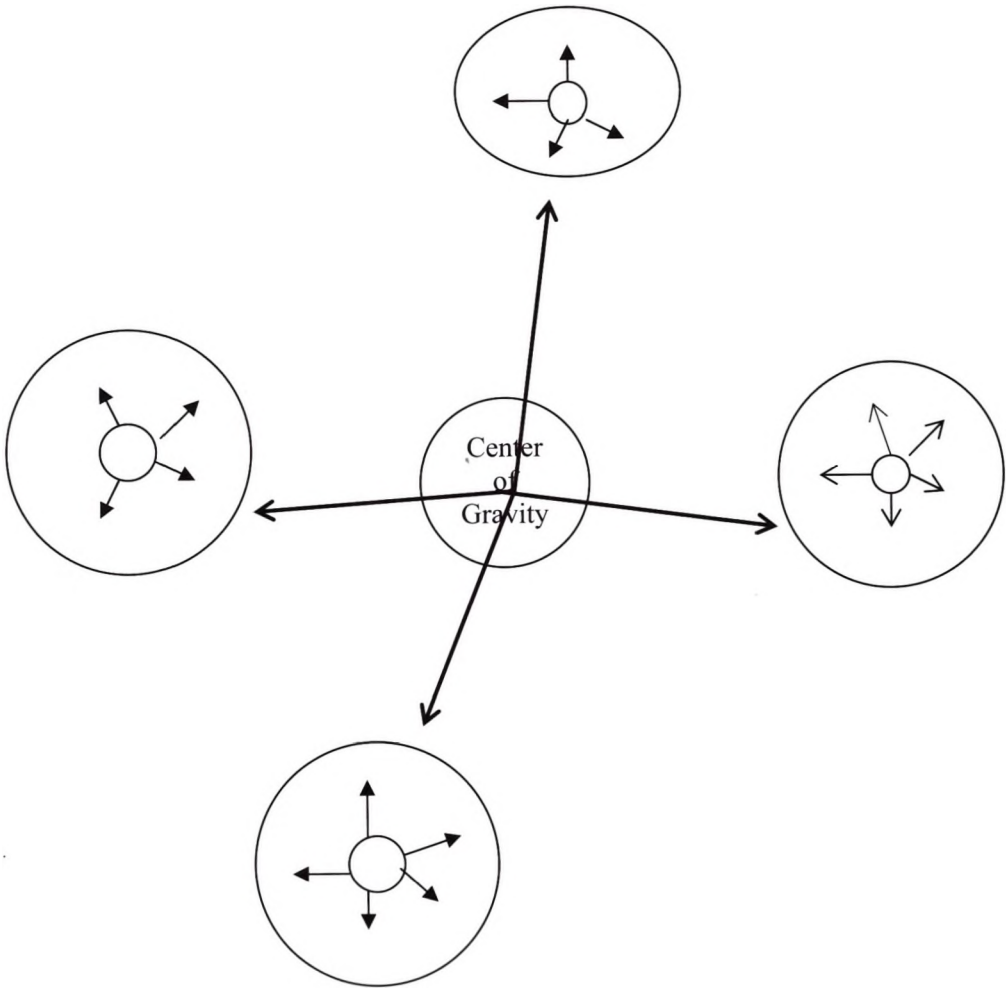
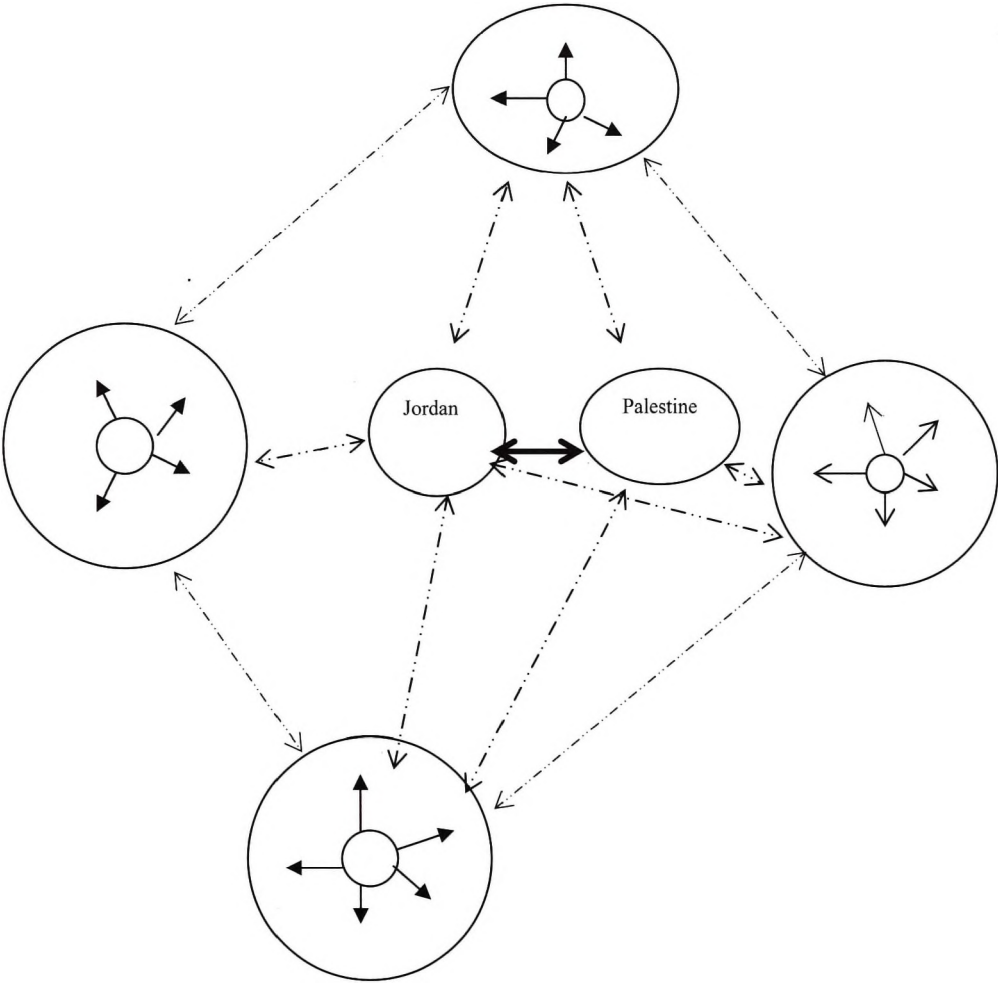


Figure 2
Diaspora with One Center Gravity

Strong Relationship $\longleftrightarrow$



Weak Relationship $\longleftrightarrow$

Strong Relationship $\longleftrightarrow$

Figure 3
Palestinian Diaspora with a Weak Two Centers of Gravity

Weak Relationship $\longleftrightarrow$

Strong Relationship $\longleftrightarrow$

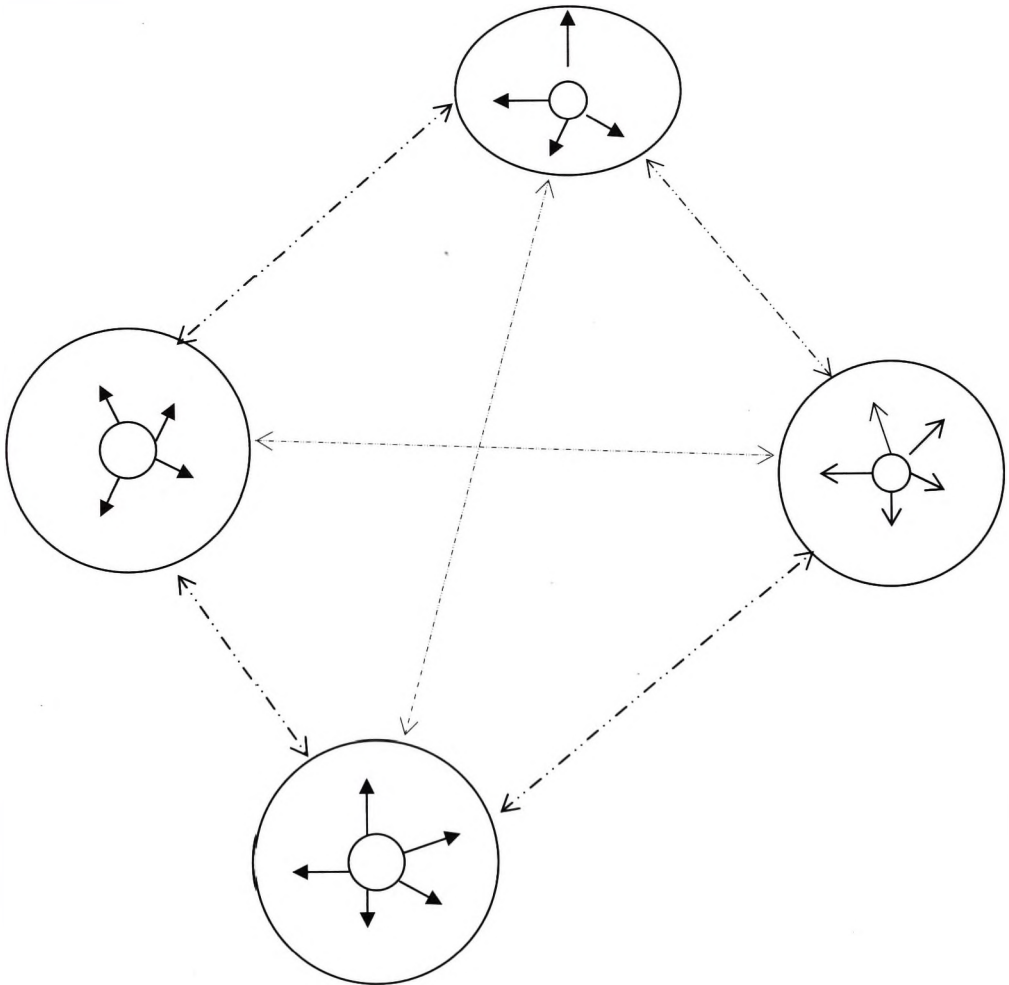


Figure 4
Diaspora without Gravity Center

Based upon my studies of Palestinian social and economic networks, I suggest that Jordan could fulfill the role of a 'small' center of gravity. Many of the business people from North America and Latin America who were confronted with the unfavorable atmosphere in Palestine, transferred their investments to the two countries, which are closest to Palestine—namely, Jordan and Egypt. Egypt, however, has until now had a negative policy towards the Palestinians living on its territory. Jordan might constitute a good candidate as the central node of Palestinian networks, since it is the only Arab country that awarded Palestinian refugees citizenship and since it has a large Palestinian community living there. For example, my study showed that among the businessmen who decided not to invest in Palestine because of its political and economic situation, some decided to invest in Jordan instead.

However, this potential new center of gravity is actually weaker than the Palestinian Territories, and both are likely to become weaker still were they to compete with one another as rivals (See figure 3).

A Very Recent Palestinianness

Although the construction of Palestinian identity began after the establishment of the British Mandate in Palestine, the crystallization of this identity - which occurred within a multi-layered context of space and time - is a relatively recent phenomenon (Khalidi, 1997). The same can be said for Arab and Israeli identities, which emerged during the same period. Because of the relative tenuousness of this crystallization process, the state in the Arab world became a nationalizing state (*Etat nationalisant*). "After making Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan ... it must make the Syrians, the Lebanese, the Jordanians..." as suggested Basma Kodmani (1997: 217). The same of course could be said of Israel and the making of the Israelis. Thus, as Morawska argues in relation to Eastern Europe, we are far from a "civic-universalist type of nationalism which has relied in principle on voluntary-commitment and therefore flexible criteria of membership in the national collectivity, and on the legal-democratic, consensual process in resolving inter-group tensions" (1998: 8). In our own case, and generally speaking, migrants are not encouraged to (and are often hindered from) declaring allegiance both to their countries of origin and to the host countries (Hanafi, 1997: 13; Hanafi, 2001b). This fact informs us of the manner in which some Palestinians are assimilated into the new society, while others retain a sense of non-declared double identity, without adopting feelings of alienation or dissonance.

The weakness of the center of gravity of the Palestinian Diaspora, along with the newly established Palestinian national identity, poses many complex questions regarding the specificity of the Palestinian case as diaspora. However, this does not suggest the uniqueness of the Palestinian diaspora in comparison with other diasporas. One of this article's objectives is to move away from the mythology of uniqueness, which has characterized

many of the previous studies of Palestinian refugees, and to achieve this result, the Palestinians abroad have been examined in the framework of many of the paradigms that are presently categorized in migration studies. This mythology relates not only to the Palestinian scholarly field, but also to a great deal of the research on Israel. (Shuval, 1998) Indeed, both Israeli and Palestinian scholars employ nomenclature, which is overloaded with ideology and unspoken issues in such a way that it blurs the borders between research and policymaking.¹⁶

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¹⁶ While Israeli scholars did not employ the term ‘refugee’ with regard to Jews –since they rejected the idea that Jewish immigrants would be categorized as ‘refugees’ in their homeland – their Palestinian colleagues used only the term “refugee” in juridical and sociological works, reminding us that the Palestinian abroad “has to return home”. Similarly, Palestinian scholars did not use the concept of “diaspora”, since it was seen as replacing the category of refugees. Palestinians are guests in the host countries, while the Israelis defined the Jews as exiles in their countries of origin who feel a sense of homecoming upon immigration to Israel. If the choice of categories distinguishes the Palestinian from the Israeli scholars, they both share the perception that Palestinian and Jewish refugees, respectively, can be absorbed evidently and naturally in Palestinian territories and in Israel. The Israeli research focused, especially in the 50s, 60s and 70s, on the success of immigrant absorption and the associated social and psychological factors. The first book published by S.N. Eisenstadt, in 1954, was entitled *The Absorption of Immigrants*. For a critical point of view of the Israeli migration studies see Shuval 1998.

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Table 1: The Palestinian refugees registered at UNRWA (June 2000)

Region or Country	Number of Camps	Refugees inside the Camps	% Refugees inside the Camps	Total Number of Refugees
Jordan	10	280,191	18.4%	1,522,777
West Bank	19	157,676	26.5%	595,003
Gaza	8	451,186	54.9%	821,832
Lebanon	12	210,715	54.6%	385,925
Syria	10	111,712	29.2%	382,575
Total	59	1,211,480	32.4%	3,708,112

Source: UNRWA, June 2000.

Table 2: The distribution of the Palestinian population in the World

Palestinians of the Interior (Palestine / Israel) *	
West Bank	1,869,818
Gaza Strip	1,020,813
Residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip	325,258
Israel	953,497
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>4,169,386</i>
Diaspora **	
Jordan	2,328,308
Lebanon	430,183
Syria	465,662
Egypt	48,784
Saudi Arabia	274,762
Kuwait and other Gulf countries	143,274
Libya and Iraq	74,284
Other Arabic Countries	5,554
American Continent	203,588
Other countries	259,248
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>4,233,647</i>
Total of the Palestinian population in the World	8,403,023

* Source: PCBS, Population Census, 1997

** Source: Palestinian Diaspora and Refugee Center, Shaml estimation. See www.shaml.org