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**THE PALESTINIAN DIASPORA:  
NATIONALISM AND ETHNICITY AMONG PALESTINIANS IN NEW YORK**

by  
BASIMA AHMAD AHED

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1995

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Date



Chair of Examining Committee

April 25, 1995

Date



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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Abstract

**THE PALESTINIAN DIASPORA:  
NATIONALISM AND ETHNICITY AMONG PALESTINIANS LIVING IN NEW  
YORK**

by

Basima Ahmad Ahed

Adviser: Professor William Kornblum

This study explores Palestinian nationalism and political consciousness, and its saliency for Palestinians living in the United States. It seeks to determine whether nationalism is responsible for maintaining ethnic identity among Palestinians living in the United States, and delaying their assimilation into American society. It suggests criteria and techniques appropriate to analysis of Palestinian-American ethnicity.

For years the dream of a homeland, has impeded the natural progression of assimilation for Palestinians. They have resisted assimilation preserving their traditions and clinging to their identity as Palestinians. They have not cut off ties with their own towns and villages of origin. Everything that they have accomplished in the United States is in preparation for their return to Palestine.

This study demonstrates how Palestinians have maintained a diaspora existence, and a diaspora mentality and how the consciousness of a people, with a powerful sense of their Palestinian national identity, are trying to resist

assimilation into the American mainstream.

Basic elements from the research methodology of participant observation, interrelated with fifty-five in-depth interviews, were conducted with first and second generation Palestinians, living in New York. The interviews sought to understand; the rationalizations and defenses that Palestinian Americans have developed, individually and collectively, to the threat of assimilation; the connection to the politics of their home society and the effect that their political consciousness has on maintaining their ethnic identity; and the frustrations of living "two lives" in two different worlds.

Despite differences between and first and second generation Palestinians, in terms of political values, all were concerned about events in the West Bank, the Israeli military occupation, and the Intifadah. There were no significant differences between first and second generation American-born Palestinians in terms of their commitment to the "Palestinian cause" and their attachment to the land.

The mystique of return or 'El-Awda," has sustained the Palestinians in New York. The second generation, however perceives the return as a step into the unknown. Although they are proud of their ancestral roots and their heritage, they realize that America is also part of their existence and identity.

**To my mother and father**

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study bears responsibility for any of its shortcomings or misjudgments. However, whatever merit this study may have is due to them and shared with them.

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With this dissertation I would like to honor the memory of my grandmother, Shonara Miakel, and my grandfather, Ahad Ahmad, who planted in me the value of education as the key to life's opportunities. They will always live in my heart.

- Basima A. Ahed

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**CHAPTER I**  
**INTRODUCTION**

As a displaced and transplanted group that has ancestries and religious bonds and that is unlike other immigrant groups who may turn their backs on their past, there exists for Palestinians in the United States, a powerful bond that sustains and heightens their consciousness. For them nationalism, and political ties to the "Question of Palestine," and to political events in their home society, are key elements in their ethnic consciousness and ethnic identity.

By looking at the lived experiences of Palestinians in New York whose lives may span two different societies we may be able to understand what defines the identity of Palestinians and what constitutes the continuous linkage with their home society. And why that linkage is maintained through generations. One of the questions that will be examined is what constitutes Palestinian ethnic identity in the diaspora?

This study explores their nationalism and political consciousness and its saliency for Palestinians living in the United States. It seeks to determine whether that dimension

is responsible for maintaining ethnic identity among Palestinians living in the United States and delaying their assimilation. This study will suggest criteria and techniques appropriate to such measurement of ethnicity and to the analysis of Palestinian American ethnicity in particular.

I will also examine the degree of involvement and ties of Palestinians to their "home society." With the signing of the Peace Treaty between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel, Palestinians living in New York may be confronted and challenged by the idea of actual return. Will there be rush to return or does a greater sense of ambivalence exist for Palestinians living in the United State? These are questions that will be addressed in this dissertation.

Most Palestinians are not politically active and the vast majority may not attend local political functions. At the same time, it is rare to find a Palestinian who is ignorant of the origins of the Palestinian problem or unaware of the political issues involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

There has been a constant migration of Palestinians since 1948 between different communities in the Arab World and beyond, either for work, study, or marriage, just as there have been periodic expulsions of Palestinians from Palestine and from Arab countries (most recently from Kuwait), depending

on the prevailing political climate. The resulting configuration of Palestinian society is that of a series of scattered and diverse communities that has been called by some the "Palestinian diaspora."

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~~As a transplanted group that has ancestries and religious~~  
bonds, unlike other immigrant groups who may turn their backs on their past, there exists for Palestinians in the diaspora, a powerful bond that sustains and heightens their consciousness. For them, politics and political ties to the "Question of Palestine," and to political events in their home society, are key elements in their ethnic consciousness.

For Palestinians living in New York, nationalism and/or political involvement; and ties to politics of their country of origin continues to reinforce their ethnic identity and their linkages to "Palestine." Their nationality gives them a collective feeling of belonging to a "Palestinian people" which persists among members of the ethnic community living in the United States.

Unlike other immigrant societies who may turn their backs on their country of origin, Palestinians do not dissociate from their native society when they move to the United States. Family ties that have been a prominent mainstay of Palestinian social structure are maintained. Sending money to their

families "back home" reinforces their positions in the various towns and villages that they come from, by giving them the means to increase their land holdings, build new houses and thus increase their status. Family members left behind and intense politics which keep the Palestinian Israeli conflict in the news headlines, contribute to the dual situation of having left a society while retaining a deep connection to it.

The ongoing conflict and their political and emotional connection with it seem to keep ties alive. The Palestinian/Israeli conflict, and their powerful loyalty to the "Palestinian Cause," also tends to put a break on their assimilation into American society. This characteristic distinguishes them from other immigrant groups in that Palestinians in the United States, maintain a continuing relationship to Palestine.

Although first-generation Palestinian immigrants tend to make a rapid adjustment to American society, they remain, to an unusual degree among immigrant communities, highly conscious of and deeply involved in the politics of their native land. The American-born second generation Palestinians also tend to exhibit a high and growing degree of political consciousness and ethnic pride. Although failure to speak Arabic in the home, the ability to speak unaccented English, marriage to a non-Arab, socializing with non-Arabs may appear on the surface to be a loss of ethnic identity, it does not

indicate the loss of a Palestinian identity.

For many Palestinians, submerging their national identity in order to become "American" has been less possible than for any other refugee group fleeing its country, not voluntarily, but to escape political oppression. Many Palestinians are in the U.S. not by political choice but because there is no where to go. For these Palestinians, becoming American is not a choice made enthusiastically but a passive act, that is reached because there is no other or no better alternative. Other refugees seem, in general, not to harbor a lingering attachment to their homelands to the extent that Palestinians do. The reason being that in Vietnam, Cuba, the Soviet Union, and other countries from which large numbers of refugees have fled to the U.S., foreign occupation and alienation of land are not issues as they are for Palestinians. For Palestinians there is Palestinian land but no homeland because that land is under occupation, and because Palestinians have refused to accept that occupation. Thus, there is for a great many Palestinians a sense of incompleteness in the adoption of any other homeland. There is a sense of something still to come that perpetuates the vision of a homeland and thus differentiates them from other immigrant Americans. For them being Palestinian is not just a nationality but it revolves around gaining an identity. For Palestinians, an identity, the sense of belonging to a smaller unit, the "Watan" (homeland)

operates. For Palestinians this attachment to parental birthplace translates into political nationalism. One Palestinian writer Fawaz Turki (1974), recounts:

"If I was not a Palestinian when I left Haifa as a child, I am one now. Living in Beirut as a stateless person for most of my growing up years, many of them in a refugee camp, I did not feel I was living among my "Arab brothers." I did not feel I was an Arab, a Lebanese or, as some wretchedly pious writer claimed, a "southern Syrian." I was a Palestinian. And that meant I was an outsider, an alien, a refugee, burden. To be that, for us, for my generation, meant to look inward, to draw closer, to be part of a minority that had its own way of doing and seeing and feeling and reacting."

For the very reason that there is no sovereign Palestinian state, Palestinian Americans tend to be acutely conscious of the "Palestinian problem" in all its aspects, and it is virtually impossible to be a Palestinian in America without also being political about it. Nationalism is a key element in their ethnic consciousness.

This dissertation explores the strength of nationalism and its saliency for Palestinians living in the United States. It will seek to determine whether that dimension is responsible for maintaining ethnicity among Palestinians living in the U.S.. This study will also explore the degree of involvement and ties of Palestinian Americans to their "home society."

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There is no consensus among social scientists on the essential elements of the concepts of ethnicity and ethnic groups. The "Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups" (1980) describes the difficulties in defining the concept of ethnicity, by stating that, "If the demands for pure categories were to be extended to the indicators generally used in the social disciplines, acceding to it would bar most research." It states that indicators of ethnicity have included "race", "language", and "region." It also points to the insufficiency of these indicators and their lack of defined borders: "none of the group characteristics cultural or physical that are used to denote ethnicity set off any group sharply. It goes further to state that great contrast is likely only when several indexes overlap "ethnic differentiation is typically both important and imprecise...an impressionistic account of how one ethnic sector is set off from others can be more accurate than one based on sharp divisions."

Researchers have emphasized different dimensions as bases for ethnic identification. Glazer and Moynihan emphasized the "religious" aspect that "serves as the basis of a subcommunity and subculture." (1963:313) Spicer defined the essence of a

persistent people as a separate identity based on shared symbols that define the group in opposition to others (1971:795). According to Spicer, such symbols may coalesce around race, language, territory, or religion; their common denominator is that they provide a basis for the division between "ingroup" and "outgroup." In sum, persistent peoples are ethnic groups that have endured over time in different cultural environments.

Ethnicity is also used by social researchers as a process or consequence of social interaction. Researchers use it as an independent variable in the analysis of processes ranging from assimilation to discrimination. Ethnic differences are used to explain or clarify different social consequences such as those associated with family roles (Kluckhohn, 1958), social status levels (Warner and Strole, 1945), religious involvement or political preferences (Levy and Kramer, 1972). In such research, ethnicity is a classification which designates persons, groups relevant to the dependent variables under investigation. For example, the "ethnic" listed in a breakdown of ethnic Democratic voting patterns in U.S. elections are "Irish, German, Italian, and Polish Catholics" in comparison to "all Americans" (Greeley, 1974). For purposes of such studies, persons or groups are either ethnic or not in a nominal sense.

But when the research is on the nature of ethnicity, when ethnicity is a dependent variable, the "either-or" designation is less relevant since ethnicity is assumed to exist in terms of arbitrary, integrative elements, such as a common culture or shared national origin. As a dependent variable, ethnicity is strong or weak or less intense, and present in varying degrees in distinct social settings. For example, an article titled, "On Studying Ethnicity," refers to research stressing "psychological dimensions of ethnicity.... measuring the saliency of the group to individual (Plax,1972). Polish American ethnicity, described in terms of several dimensions, in the Los Angeles area was stronger in the working class than in other status categories (Sandberg, 1974). When ethnicity is a matter of degree, rather than a convenient basis for nominal classification, it seems appropriate that empirical indexes of ethnic phenomena be considered in terms of intensity differences measured at the ordinal and interval levels.

Whatever the basis for establishing ethnic categories, such categories often are used as independent variables or intervening variables related to social processes, such as assimilation or conflict; and institutional patterns such as political involvement or religiosity are treated as dependent variables.

Two conclusions emerge from a review of sociological literature dealing with ethnicity or the ethnic group. First, that ethnic distinctions have some causal or correlative bearing upon the social phenomena under investigation. Less attention is given to ethnicity as an "effect" or consequence of specific social interaction.

Second, because of the view of ethnicity as an independent variable, it is assumed to exist by definition in common sense terms or within conventional indexes. Thus the ethnic group samples which generate survey research data consist of persons of similar "nationality." In such cases, ethnicity is not so much a matter of degree as research design.

Scholars of nationalism approach the problem of defining Nationalism from differing points of view:

To Hans Kohn(1944), nationalism is "first and foremost a state of mind, an act of consciousness, ... the individual's identification of himself with the we-group' to which he gives supreme loyalty."

According to Pfaff (1993:41) "Nationalism is connected with the absence as well as the existence of nations. A violent "nationalism" is often an unsuccessful or unachieved nationalism. The search of a nation to establish political existence, or to separate itself from the foreign political

body encompassing it." In the case of the Palestinians both those in the Diaspora, and in Palestine, the nation struggling to exist, is forced to fight against everything that does not recognize its claim, or occupies its territory.

Isaiah Berlin believes nationalism "expresses the inflamed desire of the insufficiently regarded to count for something among the cultures of the world."

Carlton J.H. Hayes (1931) views nationalism as "a fusion of patriotism with a consciousness of nationality." It is, he says, a product combining "a common language or (closely related dialect) and ... a community of historical traditions. According to Hayes, nationality is the product of remembered or imagined factors from a people's past which together produce the conviction of being a separate and distinct part of mankind.

Boyd C. Shafer (1953) points out that everywhere men seeks realization of their dearest dreams, whatever they may be, within their nations. Everywhere they erect their nation into bulwarks, no matter how weak, against adversity. This devotion to their nation he calls "nationalism."

Karl W. Deutsch approached the problem with the help of communication theory and cybernetics. In place of the conventional political, economic, and cultural factors, one or more of which seems always to be missing, Deutsch proposed that the test of nationality (a term he prefers to

nationalism) be the ability of a people to communicate more effectively with their fellow members than with outsiders.

Benedict Anderson (1990) saw the development of the printing press and the standardization of language, and the emergence of written vernacular literatures which followed making possible "imagined communities" much grander than the actual ones which existed before. For this reason, the modern nation, national consciousness, and eventually nationalism, developed. The bourgeois intelligentsia brought into being by the print revolution "invited the masses into history." He claims that the rise of nationalism has coincided with the decline of religion as a social force.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1993) states in his book Pandemonium, that a distinction exists between ethnic group and nation, between ethnicity and nationality, but that "it is a distinction of degree. The nation is the "highest" form of the ethnic group, denoting a subjective state of mind as regards ancestry, but also, almost always, an objective claim to forms of territorial autonomy ranging from a regional assembly to full-blown independence."

Almost every activity and idea seems to conspire to promote Palestinian "diaspora nationalism" which is a term defined by Snyder (1982) as, "The nations sentiment of a

special group dispersed among another people and resistant to assimilation (Snyder, 1982:xv). Everything they see and hear reinforce this; television, home societies, weddings, funerals, and music. He believes that if nationalism is to be substituted by some new loyalty such as religion, some other realities, some new myths will have to provide as much and touch the citizens as deeply.

The criteria most often used to define an ethnic group are culture, language, religion, race, or region. (Rothschild, 1981). Palestinians after the 1948 period are, however, a puzzlement. They live throughout the Arab countries in the Middle East, in Europe and the Americas and are therefore no longer residents of a single region. Palestinians may be Sunni muslims, Shiite muslims, Druze, or Christians of various sects. Although dialect may possibly identify them, they have in many cases adapted to the dialect of the country where they live. In terms of customs, food, clothing they are not significantly different from other Arabs in the Middle East.

#### **The Case of the Palestinians**

Although Palestinian Americans are difficult to pinpoint numerically, it is estimated that there are between 150,000 and 250,000 Palestinians in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> This figure accounts

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<sup>1</sup> No reliable Immigration or Census figures exist for Palestinian Americans because the U.S Immigration and Naturalization Service has only rarely recognized "Palestinian" as

for approximately 10% of the 2 million Arab Americans.

In the 1980 census, the first in which respondents had an opportunity to list their ancestry, only 21,288 individuals listed Palestinian.<sup>2</sup>

The Palestinian Statistical Abstract for 1983 lists 108,045 Palestinians as living in U.S. But educated guesses by those active in Arab-American organizations fall in the 200,000 - 400,000 range.

There has been a constant migration of Palestinians since 1948 between different communities in the Arab world and beyond, either for work, study, or marriage, just as there have been periodic expulsions of Palestinians from Palestine and from Arab countries, depending on the prevailing political climate. The resulting configuration of Palestinian society is that of a series of scattered and diverse communities that has been called by some the "Palestinian diaspora." The term "diaspora" has most often been used to refer to the dispersed condition of world Jewry, but it has also been applied to other ethnic communities such as the Armenians and Palestinians. In Arabic, the most common word for diaspora is

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a Nationality.

<sup>2</sup> Many reasons can account for that: many Palestinians hold Jordanian, Lebanese or Syrian passports, others continue to hold Israeli Identity cards (Hawiyah) -and many prefer not to divulge that information for fear of repercussions by the American government.

**Shatat** (dispersal). However the word **Ghurbah** (a state of exile and alienation- The Palestinian equivalent of the Jewish Diaspora), the root of which carries the meaning of stranger or outsider, is also used. Several other words are also used to describe the Palestinians' condition: **Manfa** (exile) and **Tasharrud** (banishment).

Researchers typically have studied Palestinian diaspora communities in the Arab World (Brand, 1982) and have concluded that the family network and village ties that held pre-1948 Palestinian society together have continued to function in the diaspora, along with a wide array of popular organizations formed after 1948 specifically to bring the diaspora together, and have accounted for the Palestinians' political survival "without the family and other basic social relationships." If it were not for that, one researcher (Ghabra, 1987) concludes, "Palestinian society would have been totally fragmented and almost non-existent after 1948." Survival has also required, according to another researcher (Yusuf, 1973), "a new framework capable of mobilizing a once unified, now scattered people to reassert their identity and national rights," Organizations developed out of needs and efforts from both the communities in the diaspora and from initiatives of the PLO leadership. The goal was to mobilize all members of the diaspora communities to serve the national cause. "As the bridge between the vast majority of Palestinians and the

"revolution," they were to assume responsibility for creating experienced, capable, and politically aware cadres to lead the political work." (Yusuf,1973: 145)

Naseer Aruri and Samih Farsoun (1980), in discussing diaspora Palestinian involvement in politics, summarized it as:

"Palestinians were most active in creating and participating in student's, teacher's, women's, and worker's unions and syndicates in nearly all all the host countries. These organizations took on political coloring in addition to their economic and organizational functions. Furthermore, the Palestinians were first in the streets in support of progressive political and social demonstrations and strikes. In short, because of their tragedy, Palestinians, became and continue to be a highly political people.....Hence, recognizing this general political thrust of Palestinians is crucial for understanding the behavior and relationships of Palestinian communities to the host governments and people."

The concept most central to understanding the position of a Palestinian diaspora community in a host society such as the United States and their mobilization through the elaboration of separate organizations, is that of "marginality." Marginality, refers to a condition of lack of integration into the political or productive economic structure of the host society.

In the United States, this has taken the form of a variety of sociopolitical organizations of students, women, laborers, teachers and so on. Family and village networks and sociopolitical institutions also operate in the U.S. and serve

to forge a common political identity.

According to Farah (1977), who studied the political socialization of Palestinian children in Kuwait, the Palestinian children are taught the symbols, rituals, myths, and values of their identity. The author concluded that Palestinians, despite differences due to gender and socioeconomic background, are still attached to the Palestinian cause and identify themselves as Palestinians.

Rosemary Sayigh (1977) in one study, demonstrated that Palestinian identity among camp residents is based on a number of factors including historical background different from other Arab nations, displacement, poverty, oppression, uncertainty about Arab support, development of national identities within the Arab World, establishment of the PLO, and kin and neighborhood solidarity. The author considered displacement a central factor that led to consolidation of Palestinian relations and supported their identity.

According to Brand (1988:11), "More likely, both processes personal choice and imposition from outside activate a given identity, with the degree of input from each source variable and depending upon the individual and his or her situation. Furthermore, the identity a person or group will choose or have chosen for it is not predetermined or fixed.

While religion may prove salient in one period, language, class, or region may take on greater significance in another, depending upon the configuration of economic and political forces in society and how they affect the individual. Therefore, the historical experience of direct and continuing confrontation with Zionism and the resulting dispossession and statelessness have been the most basic factors that have shaped-not created - a Palestinian identity and nationalism as distinct and separate from other Arab nationalism.

Don Peretz (1972) in discussing Palestinian success in the Diaspora states, "Despite their successes in the material world, few Palestinians have abandoned attachment to their homeland. Indeed, it is often the successful who are the most outspoken advocates of irredentist policies, providing substantial financial support for guerilla activities against Israel such as those of al-Fateh. Often, like Jewish nationalists who settled in America or Europe, Palestinians who have gone abroad, or who have become successful in countries distant from their homeland have been most militant in support of nationalist aspirations."

According to the criteria most often used to define an ethnic group- culture, language, religion, race, or region (Rothschild, 1981; Geertz, 1963) - Palestinians in the post-1948 period are an enigma. They have come to live throughout

the Middle East, Europe and North and South America and thus are no longer residents of a single region. Palestinians may be Sunni Muslims, Druze, or Christians of a variety of sects. Although dialect may automatically identify them, in many cases they have adapted to the dialect of the country of their residence or have at least been influenced by it. Culturally, they do not differ significantly from other communities of the Middle East, either in clothing, food, or customs. Additionally, regional differences do exist; indeed the rural/urban distinctions are often the more salient. However, such regionalism are viewed as subcultural variations and not as bases of ethnically distinctive communities.

For Palestinians more than any other ethnic group, political consciousness and political solidarity with the home society, are important factors in their ethnic identification. In this study a distinction must be made between political activism and political consciousness. Most Palestinians are not politically active, for reasons that include fear of repercussions in the U.S and/or repercussions in their home society if they return. The vast majority may not attend local political functions or participate in demonstrations. At the same time, it is rare to find a Palestinian who is ignorant of the origins of the Palestinian problem or unaware of the political issues involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

For Palestinians in the United States, political consciousness, political involvement, and ties to politics in their country of origin continue to reinforce their ethnic identity. Their nationality gives them a collective feeling of belonging to a Palestinian nationality which persists among members of the ethnic community living in the United States.

Palestinian Americans tend to be more active in church or mosque groups and social organizations particularly town associations than in explicitly political organizations' but it is difficult to draw the line between the social and the political or to say with any certainty that a social gathering is not by its very occurrence a political statement.

According to Linda Basch (1980), "The literature on voluntary or ethnic associations demonstrates that these organizations provide an important mode of adaptation for immigrants in new urban environments. One focus has been, on the role voluntary associations play in fostering immigrants' links to the home society-through encouraging a continued involvement in the community and political life of the home society. This has been demonstrated by Dominican immigrants in New York (George, 1984) and Vincentians and Grenadians (Basch, 1980) . According to Basch, these associations are continuously involved with the economic development and political life of the home societies.

Although for many Palestinians adjustment and adaptation to American life has been relatively easy, the degree of Palestinian adaptation to American society covers the spectrum from rejection or resistance to assimilation according to Kathleen Christison (1988):

- 1) Rejection/resistance to American Society:
- 2) Accommodation
- 3) Assimilation

**Rejection:** Total rejection of American society is rare but it is still possible to live in the United States without ever becoming a part of it. According to Louise Cainkar (1988), cultural alienation is more often the case with Palestinian women, who, because of Arab cultural and religion strictures, are often prevented from integrating in American society. In her study of Muslim Palestinian women in Chicago, she concluded that because women are the principal protectors and transmitters of Palestinian culture, they are often deliberately kept apart from the American mainstream. According to Cainkar, "Many Palestinian men and women fear that the entire familial foundation of the society will collapse if women focus their energies elsewhere than the family."

Rejection is also true of the elderly, who might come to the United States accompanying grown children who immigrate. These elderly immigrants most often live with their children,

never learn English, do not work, depend on family for transportation, and socialize only with family or other Palestinians. (Christison, 1988)

**Accommodation:** There is a larger middle ground of Palestinians between the alienated and the fully adapted, who are comfortable in the United States but regard it as a kind of temporary stop on the way to a full Palestinian identity. Within this middle area the degree of social adjustment varies. There are Palestinians who feel comfortable socializing with other Palestinians but who regard themselves as socially well-adapted to the United States. On the other hand, Palestinians who socialize easily with non-Arabs may even count non-Arabs among their close friends. (Christison, 1988)

**Assimilation:** As total rejection is not the norm; total assimilation is not either. Although there are a few who join various American clubs, vote for the Republicans, and serve in the army, U.S. support for Israel still angers them; the Intifadah still fills them with pride as a symbol of their own will to survive as a people.

Additionally, first and second generation Palestinians relate to their Palestinian identity and their Arab identify in distinctive ways. In general, their adjustment to life in

America differs. These differences may stem partly from the fact that individuals in each group were born and raised during different periods of Palestinian political history. However, for Palestinians, regardless of their degree of adaptation to American society, generally maintain a strong ethnic identity as a result of their political consciousness and solidarity with their home society. This study examines the strength of political solidarity with the home society and whether politics is the key element of Palestinian American ethnic consciousness.

## METHODOLOGY

Ethnography is the task of describing and understanding a particular culture in its own terms. The goal is "to grasp the natives' point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world....Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people" (Spradley 1979:3)

Western scholarly investigation of the Arab world and of Arabs has been extensive. However, Arab investigators question the validity of this research as a description of their societies. The critiques of orientalism, expressed especially sharply by Edward Said (1979), was directed at the Western scholarly study of Islam and Arab society. The critiques, whatever its merits as accurate historiographic research, voiced a strongly felt and widely believed perception of modern arab social theorists: that the documentary approach of many Western scholars, with its pervasive emphasis on Islamic tradition, lacks empathy with and understanding of and the changing nature of Arab society.

This is an ethnographic study - qualitative rather than quantitative. This study encompasses basic elements from the research methodology of participant observation, interrelated with ethnographic interviews which take place in a social situation. In this type of research, the researcher sees the data unfolding rather than fixed. Instead of going in with a

preconceived notion of what to find, the researcher lets the continuous discovery of clues and data guide the study. It is in the analysis of the data that categories and concepts take shape and patterns begin to emerge. My purpose in conducting such research was to tap all sources whether it be from references, informants, statistics or by observation and interviews. The premise is that the greater the variety of sources, the wider the perspective gained on the issue.

I have devised a dual research strategy: The first part involves historical research, synthesizing existing written sources to gain a comparative view of the processes of change since 1948. Second, I decided it was important to probe in depth into how the Palestinians perceived their own situation. Because major changes have been so rapid and so recent in Palestinian history, the Palestinians could talk about how they viewed the resulting shifts in personal status and in local and national organizations and the effect of Muslim Fundamentalism on their ethnic and political identity.

As a supplement to the historical materials, the interviews provide an essential glimpse into the lives of Palestinians living in New York. Because political conditions have been changing so quickly, there probably is no ideal time to interview, and any other timing would have been, in all likelihood, similarly unrepresentative.

## Participant Observation

"To the extent that a participant observer can participate and still retain a measure of non-involvement, his technique provides a basis for an approach to the problem of validity. The background of information which he acquires in time makes him familiar with the psychology of his respondents and their social milieu. With this knowledge he is able to evaluate their validity on the basis of standards extraneous to the immediate situation" (Vidich 1970: 172)

Participant observation will be a key part of this study thus allowing for conversations with palestinians in a natural and informal way. I have developed informants who are in strategic places in the community. Selecting representative voices is a function of the participant observation.

Conducting research among Palestinians is bound to be fraught with problems involving access to accurate and reliable data as well as a variety of cultural considerations. The subject matter "politics" is a very sensitive topic for Palestinians and may arouse suspicion as a topic of investigation for a Palestinian researcher and even more for a non-Palestinian researcher. Myron Glazer wrote of the situation of the field researcher from the United States, "As 'strangers', they are lightning rods, often attracting free floating suspicion and hostility." (1970:313)

Among Palestinians living in the U.S., these problems of suspicion and hostility are only compounded. In pilot interviews that were conducted in 1992, I experimented with

not taking notes during the interview itself and instead trying to reconstruct the interview later on. However, the respondents seemed to be more comfortable when I did write their answers. Seeing me take notes during the interview, in addition to recording the interview probably made them more secure that I was recording their views accurately.

In the interviews, Palestinian Americans saw my research as a function that could fulfill their own needs. They felt that their point of view needed to be heard. They felt that American political leaders were distorting the issues in a pro-Israeli way. Thus they took the role of spokesman of "their cause" and saw me as a conduit to further that "cause" without bias. Although I explained to them that this was an academic endeavor, they still viewed me as a "Palestinian" who was on their side and who could transmit their feelings, attitudes, and dilemmas without bias. They also assumed the role of national spokesman which gave a particular hue to their responses initially, but was tempered with the progress of the interview.

As a Palestinian who was born and raised in Palestine and who has many connections in the Palestinian community in the United States and in the West Bank, I feel that I am more sensitive to the nuances of the culture, which has, I believe, allowed me better access. Conducting some of the interviews

in Arabic (classical Arabic and different colloquial dialects) was very helpful. The value of knowing the language in the Palestinian community cannot be overemphasized, especially when one is conducting research among recent immigrants.

### **Representative Voices**

Ofcourse, there is no typical Palestinian. The best that could be hoped for was the selection of respondents similar enough to most others so that some reasonably valid generalizations could be made. The first criterion for selection was that the respondent be Muslim, which eliminated Christians from my generalizations. Palestinian Christians have been a distinct minority (they make up about 5 percent of the West Bank population), differing from Muslims in many social and demographic characteristics.

Second, geography was a consideration. I selected respondents who were originally from towns and villages spread over the entire West Bank, representing the Jerusalem, Ramallah, Hebron, and Nablus regions. Fourth, no Palestinians from Gaza were "Arab Israelis (from within the 1948 Green Line)" were to be selected. However some of my interviewees who had been born in Jordan or Lebanon identified themselves as "Arabs of 1948" and from the towns within that area which was where their parents originally came from before). I consciously did not want to include "Arab Israelis", because

they represent a different pattern of social and political life, and require research with their unique situation in mind.

Prior to the "Intifadah", Palestinians in the West Bank and in the diaspora, could be seen as divided along political lines -their groupings tended to parallel divisions in the PLO. Some were supporters of Fateh, others of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (P.F.L.P), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (D.P.F.L.P) or various other factions and some were Ikhwan (Muslim Brethren). Since the "Intifadah", the divisions have not been so clear cut. The two divisions that have emerged have been the nationalists who support the PLO and the Ikhwan who may or may not support the PLO. Whether or not these divisions actually exist among Palestinians living in the New York area, is further explored in this dissertation. Other divisions such as male/female; political activists/non activists; business owners/employees; and Ikhwan/ muslims; first generation/ second generation Palestinians; and Palestinian refugees from Arab Countries/ West Bank Palestinians, will also be examined.

Most respondents were reached through a network of personal contacts. Respondents were located with the assistance of friends and relatives. Interviews were obtained

from persons of different social classes, districts of origins in the West Bank; and religious and political orientations. This method was employed as respondents could not be selected randomly because of the physical dispersal of Palestinians living in New York and immediate suspicion of a stranger calling them for an interview.

### **The Interviews**

This study implemented ethnographic interviews with Palestinians. The main purpose of the ethnographic interview is to learn and hear about the lives of these Palestinians in their own words. These interviews were conducted in either Arabic or English depending on the respondent's level of speaking comfort. In-depth interviews sought to understand the rationalizations and defenses that Palestinian Americans have developed, individually and collectively, to the threat of assimilation; the ambivalence of living in the United States while retaining deep emotional ties to their home society; the frustrations they experience of living "two lives" in two different worlds; and the relationship of ethnic identity to the past and the pull of the "American dream."

The interviews also covered such matters as work experiences, linkage with relatives and friends in their home societies, involvement in ethnic and political associations, linkages of these associations to the home society, the

purposes they serve, their functions within the community, attitudes and beliefs held about the Question of Palestine, and their view about the Palestinian -Israeli conflict and plans of "return."

## CHAPTER II

### HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF PALESTINIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY

What are the origins of Palestinian national identity? How and why did it emerge? What were the causes and mechanisms that produced it?

For Palestinians, their own reflection on their history - the meaning of self determination, liberation, and struggle against Israel even in their exile sets them apart from other immigrant communities. One of the factors that Palestinian identity is based on is its historical background and its distinctiveness from other Arab nations. Displacement and Dispersion are a central factor in the shaping of Palestinian identity.

Few countries in recent history have undergone the displacement and dispossession experienced by the Palestinian people. Since the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, the Palestinians have been deprived of their homeland -- Palestine. "Their yearning for a homeland in Palestine continues to be at the heart of the Palestinian ethos throughout the diaspora." (Massarueh, 1986:27)

Anthony Smith (1991), has a perspective that stresses the

historical and symbolic-cultural attributes of ethnic identity. He states : "An ethnic group is a types of cultural collectivity, one that emphasizes the role of myths of descent and historical memories, and that is recognized by one or more cultural differences like religion, customs, language or institutions. Such collectivites are doubly 'historical' in the sense that not only are historical memories essential to their continuance but each such ethnic group is the product of specific historical forces and is therefore subject to historical change and dissolution" (Smith,1991:20). Using this definition, the Palestinians prior to 1948 may have had little consciousness of being a separate collectivity, a separate Palestinian identity -separate from an Arab identity or an Islamic identity. In many cases the local identities of kin, region or village were more important. This is what Smith (1991) calls an "ethnic category" in which a myth of common origins, shared historical memories, a sense of solidarity or an association with a designated homeland were largely absent but whom some outsiders considered to constitute a separate cultural and historical grouping (1991:21). An ethnic community, according to Smith (1991) is distinguished by six main attributes: a collective proper name, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more differentiating elements of common culture, an association with a specific 'homeland', and a sense of solidarity for significant sectors of the population. (see

Horowitz, 1985 and A.D Smith, 1986)

Smith also contends that the more a given population possesses or share these attributes the more closely it will approximate the ideal type of an ethnic community. (1991:21) The 'shared historical memories' that Smith talks about may also take the form of myth. The line between the two is often blurred. "Even today the line is not as clear-cut as some would like it to be." He states: "It is not only that widely believed dramatic tales of the past serving present or future purposes grow up readily around kernels of well-attested events: in addition myths, myths of political foundation, liberation, migration and election take some historical event as their starting-point for subsequent interpretation and elaboration." (Smith, 1991:21-22)

Also the attachments to a specific stretch of territory in this case- the whole of Palestine, and to certain towns and villages within this territory has a mythical and subjective quality. It is the attachments and associations, rather than residence in or possession of the land that matters for ethnic identification according to Smith (1991). "It is where we belong. It is also often a sacred land, the land of our forefathers, our lawgivers, our kings and sages, poets and priest, which makes this our homeland. Besides, the sacred centers of the homeland draw the members of the ethnic

community to it, or inspire them from afar, even their exile is prolonged. Hence, an ethnies may persist, even when long divorced from its homeland, through an intense nostalgia and spiritual attachment." (Smith, 1991:23). This describes the situation of the diaspora Palestinians.

It is important to analyze the Palestinian diaspora and its causes, because central to their feelings of being Palestinian and their nationalism is the fact that Palestinians living in New York do not see themselves as true immigrants but as members of the Palestinian Diaspora.

Palestinians have existed as a people in a specific territory They perceived themselves to be, and were referred to as Arabs of Palestine. The people of Palestine were identifiable, prior to 1948 by a specific territory, a patterns of speech, and some kind of shared experiences, however brief. Their political participation fluctuated depending on the level of their political structure.

The events of 1948, in addition to dispersion, also demoralized the people of Palestine: they lost their territory and whatever political participation they had before that . But as Spicer correctly observe (1971) losing the territorial component does not lead to the breakdown of the group's identity; on the contrary it has the opposite effect.

Actually, what happens in such situations is that the land component 'jumps ' to the conscious level and becomes one of those meaning-laden cultural symbols which serve to strengthen the threatened identity. (1971:798)

The land here becomes a more comprehensive symbol than a mere source of subsistence; it becomes a symbol of autonomy, stability and return. Also, the sharing of this symbol spreads to the whole group, those who lived on the land and those who did not.

Palestinians continue to be traumatized by their expulsion in 1948, and the continuous seizure of their land and homes by the Israelis. This had intermittently intensified this dispossession on a daily basis for more than 40 years." (Said 1992, 89)

The wars that have involved or affected Palestinians, played an important role in what (Smith 1991) sees as the central role of warfare as "the mobilizer of ethnic sentiments and national consciousness, centralizing force in the life of the community and a provider of myths and memories for future generation" (see Tilly 1975 and Smith 1981). Hence the protracted war with Israel and conflict with Israel and with other Arab regimes have also been important in the persistence and crystallization of Palestinian national identity.

### Early History

The land of Palestine is home to one of the most ancient of all civilizations. "Palestine gave birth to a unique culture. In this period in Palestine, as far as we know, the earliest permanent villages in the world were built." Palestine is also "the only place in the world where a town is known to date back nine thousand years." Riha or Jericho is the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world, being four thousand years older than any other urban settlement at present." (Anati, 1963:241-241)

Palestine became predominantly Arab and Islamic by the end of the seventh century. Its boundaries and its characteristics—including its name in Arabic Filastin—soon became known to the entire Islamic world, as much for its fertility and beauty as for its religious significance (Said et al, 1985)

In the late tenth century for example we find this passage in Arabic:

"Filastin is the Western most of the provinces of Syria. In its greatest length from Rafah to the boundary of Al Lajjun (Legio) it would take a rider two days to travel over; and the like time to cross the province in its breadth from Yafa (Jaffa) to Riha (Jericho). Zugar (Segor, Zoar) and the country of Lot's People (Diyar Qawm Lot), Al Jibal (the mountains of Edom) and Ash Sharah as far as Ailah--Al Jibel and Ash Sharah being two separate provinces, but lying contiguous one to the other--are included in Filastin, and belong to its government.

Filastin is watered by the rains and the dew. Its trees and its ploughed lands do not need artificial irrigation; and its only in Nablus that you find the running waters applied to this purpose. Filastin is the most fertile of the Syrian provinces. Its capital and largest town. As Ramlah, but the

Holy City (of Jerusalem) comes very near this last in size. In the province of Filastin, despite its small extent, there are about twenty mosques, with pulpits for the Friday prayer." (quoted in Said et al Ibn Hawkal 1890: 28)

In 1516, Palestine became a province of the Ottoman Empire. All through the years it retained its fertility as well as its Arab and Islamic character.

After 1882 there was a steady arrival of Jewish colonists. It is important to realize that not until the few weeks immediately preceding the establishment of Israel in the spring of 1948 was there anything other than a large Arab majority (Said et al,1985)

Most of the Palestinians were Sunni Muslims although there were a Christians, Druzes and Shiite Muslim minorities among them. All of them spoke Arabic and considered themselves Arabs. Approximately 65 percent of the Palestinian Arabs were agriculturalists, living in approximately five hundred villages where grains as well as fruits and vegetables were grown. The principle Palestinian cities--Nablus, Jerusalem, Nazareth, Acre, Jaffa, Jericho, Ramleh, Hebron, and Haifa-were built in the main by Palestinian Arabs who continued to live in them, even after the expanding Zionist colonies infringed upon them. Also in existence by that time were: A respectable Palestinian intellectual and professional class, the beginnings of modern industry; and a highly developed national consciousness. "Modern Palestinian social,

economic and cultural life was organized around the same issues of independence and anti-colonialism prevalent in the region, but the Palestinians had to contend with the legacy of Ottoman rule, then the Zionist colonialism, then British mandatory authority (after World War I) prevalent in the region--more or less all together. (Said et al, 1985)

Palestinian writers and intellectuals, political organizations such as the Futtowa and Najada, the Arab Higher Committees; and the League of National Liberation (which argued that the Palestinian question could only be solved by Arabs and Jews together (Abu Ghazaleh, 1973). All these formed national blocs among the population, focused the energies of the Palestinian community , and created a Palestinian identity opposed to both British rule and to Jewish colonization. This identity was strengthened by a sense of belonging to distinct national group with a language (The Palestinian Arab dialect) and a specific communal sense of its own (Said,1985)

Abruptly, Palestine was erased from the map of the world. This Palestinian society was eventually dismantled and dispersed. The historic fact of Palestinian existence as an entity was questioned and the existence of Palestinians as a people was also questioned.

**Historical Overview:**

Four hundred years of Ottoman Turkish rule came to an end during World War I. This was followed by thirty years of British rule. Palestine as part of the Ottoman Empire and until the end of World War I, had not been independent. Yet for many of the inhabitants of Palestine, their country had its own character and identity and referred to themselves as Palestinians and distinguished themselves from the Syrians and the Lebanese. "The things that had been taken for granted--the structure of the society, village and family identity, customs, cuisine, folklore, dialect, distinctive habits and history--were adduced as evidence, to Palestinians by Palestinians, that even as a colony the territory had always been their homeland and that they formed a people. (Said, 1980:117)

And as soon as the British Mandate ended on May 15, 1948 a new colonial settler regime was declared on 78 percent of Palestinian territory. Most of the Palestinian Arab population was removed to eastern Palestine (which was renamed the "West Bank" in 1950) and Gaza. About 780,000 Palestinian Arabs were made homeless as a result of the creation of Israel in 1948. After the June 1967 War, Israel occupied the rest of Palestine and expelled some 186,000 additional Palestinians. (Said, 1985)

As Palestine ceased to exist as a political community, it continued to exist in the collective consciousness of its own people wherever they were. Said (1980) writes, "If we think of Palestine as having the function of both a place to be returned to and of an entirely new place, a vision partially of a restored past and of a novel future, perhaps even a historical disaster transformed into a hope for a different future we will understand the word's meaning better" (1980:124)

#### **Political Status and Organization of Palestinians**

There are approximately 4.5 million Palestinians in the World today which include those born in Palestine and their children born there and in other countries after dispersion. These people do not enjoy or exercise any political rights as Palestinians. Yet they are deeply committed to the attainment of a normal and legitimate political status. They are committed to a struggle for national self-determination, including the right to independence and sovereignty in Palestine, the right of return, and the right to national identity. Over the past four decades, the Palestinians have largely succeeded in maintaining that identity and in designating their own representative, the Palestine Liberation Organization, despite attempts to obliterate both. (See Edward Said 1980)

### **The Beginning of the Palestinian Diaspora**

The Palestinian population totalled 1.3 million in Nov. 1947 at the time of the U.N. resolution to partition Palestine. The War that followed uprooted and dispersed more than 700,000 Palestinians. At the end of the war only 150,000 Palestinian arabs remained in the territory that had become the state of Israel.

In addition to the major population movements resulting from wars there has been constant migration either for work, study or marriage, just as there have been periodic expulsions of Palestinians from Israel and the occupied territories and from arab countries as well. The result has been a configuration of Palestinian society and communities that constitute the Palestinian diaspora. (see Table 1)

Since the 1947 U.N. Resolution to partition Palestine and the dispersal that followed, several factors have contributed to bind

Table 1  
Estimated Palestinian Population Distribution

	1949 <sup>a</sup>	1970 <sup>b</sup>	1975 <sup>c</sup>	1987 <sup>d</sup>
1948 Palestinians	133,000	363,600	436,100	650,000
West Bank (org.) <sup>e</sup>	440,000	683,700	785,400	875,000
West Bank (ref.) <sup>f</sup>	280,000			
Gaza (org.)	88,520	345,600	390,300	550,000
Gaza (ref.)	190,000			
Lebanin	100,000	247,000	288,100	400,000
Syria	75,000	155,700	183,000	245,000
Egypt	7,000	33,000	39,000	
Iraq	4,000	30,000	35,000	
East Bank	70,000	591,000	644,200	1,127,000
Kuwait		140,300	194,000	320,000
Saudi arabia		31,000	59,000	250,000
Rest of Gulf		15,000	29,000	
Libya		5,000	10,000	
U.S		25,000	28,000	
Other countries				340,000 <sup>g</sup>
Other Arab countries				220,000
Totals	1,387,520	2,665,900	3,121,00	

<sup>a</sup>Figures for 1949 are taken form United Nations: Report of the Economic Survey Mission of the Middle East (New York, 1949), p.22

<sup>b</sup>From Nakhleh and Zureik, The Sociology of the Palestinians, table 1.4, p.31.

<sup>c</sup> Ibid., Chart 2, p.27.

<sup>d</sup>1986 estimates are from The Palestinians: Exiles in the Diaspora by Abdul Salam Y. Massarueh . Middle East Insight Vol. 4, No. 6. 1986

<sup>e</sup> Original population

<sup>f</sup> Refugee population added as a result of the 1947-49 War.

<sup>g</sup> The category used was rest of world including the U.S. and excluding the Arab World

Palestinians together: the shared loss of homeland; the struggle to preserve and assert traditions and history despite their exile; and the desire to return.

The present situation of the Palestine people has its roots in a concrete historical event-- the dismemberment of Palestine in May, 1948. Israel's emergence on a portion of Palestine had two consequences. First, Palestinians were expelled from areas that came under Israel's control and jurisdiction; this population then became known to the world community as the Palestinian refugees. They numbered about seven hundred and eighty thousand originally; they are now more than two million. The social, educational and economic development of the refugees became the shared responsibility of the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA--created by the UN in 1950), the "host" Arab States, and later on, the Palestine Liberation Organization. Second there was the administrative incorporation of the remaining areas of Palestine by Jordan and Egypt. That part of Palestine that came under Jordan's control was eventually legitimized by an act of the Jordanian parliament in 1950, and became known as the West Bank; the southern part of Palestine came under Egypt's control and administration and is referred to as the Gaza Strip. Both parts came under Israeli occupation in 1967. Thus the entire area of Mandate Palestine is now exclusively controlled by Israel.

Between 1948 and 1967, Palestine ceased to exist as a political and administrative entity. Only in the Gaza Strip was it possible to use the term Palestine without incurring political punishment. Israel displaced its portion of Palestine, and Jordan gradually phased out the term -- (a decree issued by its postal administration in 1950, prohibited use of the word "Palestine" to refer to those portions under its jurisdiction, substituting for it the term, "West Bank"). The cessation of the use of the term Palestine has a corresponding political, and social meaning. Palestinians who continued to reside in Mandate Palestine acquired by a series of Israeli decrees, a new legal designation. By its nationality and naturalization law, Israel made it possible for Palestinians who were physically present in their normal residences when the first Israeli census was conducted in 1949 to acquire Israeli national status. These individuals together with their descendants are today's Israeli Arabs. A large number of Palestinians who were physically present on the territory incorporated by Israel, but who were not in their normal residences at the time of the census became known in Israeli law and politics as "absentee present" persons. Palestinians living on the West Bank, irrespective of place of origin, were naturalized in accordance with Jordanian law; similarly, Palestinians who found refuge in Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt became stateless but under the control and subject to the rules of

the countries in which they resided. A limited number of individuals in this last category succeeded eventually in acquiring the nationality of the country in which they lived. But today the vast majority of this category of Palestinians-- probably numbering over a million- remain stateless.

In the 1950's as Palestinians tried to recover from the financial as well as political consequences of the 1948 war they began to move to areas offering some way to make a living. The East Bank of Jordan was particularly hospitable because as citizens, Palestinians of the West Bank were entitled to live there. Others gained entry into economically more prosperous areas, such as Libya, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait (which were benefitting from oil), and Lebanon. Still others immigrated to the Americas, Europe and Australia.

As a result of this fragmentation and dispersion, the Palestinian people have ceased to possess any real authority to guide, direct, and sustain a national life. They have no control over their cultural, social and economic institutions; any rights they may have follow their new status than form an integrated Palestinian polity. (Rubin, 1981) However, these difficulties have not prevented the Palestinians from engaging in political activity, activity primarily motivated by two broad imperatives; first to continue the struggle to regain national rights, second to direct existing political

opportunities toward improvement of social, economic and educational conditions. These overriding concerns have led to the emergence of two types of political organization; first those representative of Palestinians everywhere; second, those more specific to the countries in which Palestinians lived after their diaspora.

Dov Ronen (1979) views individuals as "bundles of identities." According to Ronen, the fact that people choose to group together on the basis of language, religion, race, and the like results from their interaction with other groups.

Another analyst, Jeffrey Ross (1980), contends that outside factors actually impose a group's identity upon it. He argues that a group identity is exogenously defined and coercively enforced by the dominant group. It is likely that both processes -personal choice and imposition from the outside produce a given identity. Moreover, the identity that a person or group will choose or have chosen for it is not pre-determined or fixed. While religion may prove salient in one period, language, class or region may take on greater significance in another depending upon the configuration of economic and political forces in society and how they affect the individual. Therefore the historical experience of Palestinians of direct and continuing confrontation with Zionism and the resulting dispossession and statelessness have

been the most basic factors that have shaped and not created a Palestinian identity.

The impetus to forge a national political organization was important for Palestinians. Active discrimination against Palestinians everywhere; abject social and economic conditions within Israel and in exile; routine control and manipulation of Palestinian polities by "host" country security agencies; these were the major factors shaping the Palestinian political will, sharpening the desire to regain national rights.

While "Palestinians have always had to adjust their ways to the demands and political needs of outside powers," (Nassar, 1991:21) their nationalism has in time, evolved to the point where some Palestinians perceive themselves as member of a Palestinian rather than Arab "umma" or nation. In the process, they have come to be seen as a potential threat to Arab regimes. Palestinians nationalism has become so strong that Palestinian loyalty to the PLO often far exceeds their loyalty to the states in which they live or even to the Arab 'Umma.' It is clear that bitter experiences at the hand of Arab regimes have contributed substantially to this phenomenon. (Divine, 1980:214)

#### **Who are the Palestinians?**

Palestinians now number some 4.5 million persons. These

include the survivors of the 1.4 million Palestinian Arabs alive in 1948, together with their children and their children's children. This figure is neither totally accurate nor simply unreliable-- it is approximately correct, plus or minus a few hundred thousand. The fact that it has been impossible to make a true count of Palestinians is symptomatic of their plight, for in few places where Palestinians live are they enumerated as "Palestinians" in national censuses. Ironically, it is only inside the borders of Palestine now completely occupied by Israel, that it is possible to obtain a relatively firm estimate of their number, although in Israeli statistical sources they are referred to as "non-Jews."

More significant than the precise number of Palestinians is the fact of their continual displacement. The Gulf War was only the most recent episode in a series of tragedies that progressively denuded Palestine of its indigenous population, and forced Palestinians to find refuge in places increasingly remote from Palestine. Palestinians are displaced persons whether they live "at home" or "abroad". Each passing year since 1948 had taken them farther from their homeland. Because they are denied political rights, each passing year since 1948 has brought more oppression and injustice. Yet Palestinians do not forget their heritage-- they continue to identify with their native towns or village, even though they

may never have seen them. Although the older generation with memories of Palestine is fast dying off, now that forty six years have elapsed since the first expulsion sent seven hundred eighty thousand Palestinians into exile, younger Palestinians in the diaspora are no less attached to the idea, if not the substance, of Palestine. The successive wars that have occurred in the region and the growing toll of death and destruction have served to intensify, rather than to diminish that attachment to a "Watan" or a homeland.

The present situation of the Palestinian people is fundamentally unusual. The Palestinians have all the attributes of nationhood-- a common history, language, and set of traditions, a national culture, national institutions, a national representative, the Palestine Liberation Organization, a common framework of aspirations and values -- but they do not control Palestine, the natural site of their projected independent state (Said et al, 1985)

The sufferings consequently imposed upon the Palestinian people in its dispersion and political difficulties are legend. All these sufferings derive, however from the inability of every Palestinian man, woman, and child to exercise a fundamental set of unalienable rights. No Palestinian has a Palestinian passport, no Palestinian has a Palestinian nationality, no Palestinian can vote in a national

election as a Palestinian, no Palestinian can voluntarily return to Palestine and take up residence there. In most places, the very word " Palestine " is either denied or in some way made the object of particular political, social and cultural discrimination. Thus, for example, there has never been a Palestinian census. However, as a people, the Palestinians are among the most advanced in the world so far as their political consciousness is concerned. Every Palestinian shares with all other Palestinians a history of dispossession and a history of determined struggle. The reality about the Palestinians today is not that they are exiled, dispersed and punished, but that they have advanced beyond these negative attributes as to have articulated a positive vision of the future. Collectively the Palestinian people in the diaspora have formulated their own sense of themselves and of their future as intending the establishment of an independent Palestinian state on their historical national soil. (Said et al, 1985)

#### **Palestinian sense of Distinctiveness**

An ethnic group or community is a group or community whose members are aware that certain characteristics set them apart from other groups or communities for instance, language, religion, culture, or historical experience (Hourani, 1961)

To talk about the Palestinian sense of distinctiveness is

to relate it to their dispersal and their diaspora. Although prior to 1948 they did constitute a group that had a crystallized ethnic identity- cultural, religious or based on community, life style, or language. Pre- 1948 Palestinian society was divided both horizontally and vertically. It was characterized by noticeable regional differences that distinguished northerner from southerner, hill dweller from valley dweller, nomad from permanent settler, urban dweller from village and christian from Muslim ( Peretz, 1977; Tamari, 1982)

Massive Palestinian population movements that were discussed earlier, both forced and voluntary took place during and in the aftermath of wars in and around Palestine: the 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973 Israeli-Arab wars. Additionally, economic dislocations and population pressure led to massive emigration of Palestinians from Palestine to the Arabian peninsula, the Gulf, and overseas.

In general, the Palestinians objected to assimilation within the host societies and worked at maintaining their social, cultural and political identities while at the same time expecting the goodwill and understanding of the host countries. (Galtung 1964; Turki, 1972). The host countries did not fulfill these expectations, and the result was disappointment on both sides. In reaction, the Palestinians

developed a sense of non-belonging and alienation (Tibowi, 1963, Turki, 1972)

Another Palestinian reaction was preservation of their cultural-social distinctiveness. Until the mid-1960's, however, there were no attempts to establish separate political institutions. On the contrary, the Palestinians were active in parties and governments that stressed pan-Arab nationalism. Because Palestinians believed that unification of the Arab people was their only guarantee of liberation and return to their homeland they were the Arab world's strongest proponents of unification (Sayigh, 1966)

Until the beginning of the 1960's it was these Palestinians who were interested in blurring the differences and stressing the similarities with the host societies and in becoming as much like them as possible (although without assimilating), all in the spirit of pan-arab nationalism. But the Arab states and people stressed the dividing factors, "in order to preserve Palestinian identity and the Palestinian problem." They isolated the Palestinians in every way and at all levels and so helped to maintain their sociocultural distinctiveness.

In the mid-1960's, however, the Palestinians realized that the Pan-Arab frameworks had failed. Palestinians'

national institutions were established because of changes that improved circumstances within the Palestinian population. Palestinians who acquired education and skills were able to get out of the camps and integrate themselves into the economics of the Arab countries, especially the oil-producing countries. The enthusiasm for study was one reaction to the attitude of the Arab societies (Badran, 1980).

As a result of the relatively high standards of education and their contribution to the development of the Arab countries, which became noticeable in the 1960's, the Palestinians began to see themselves in a new light. They began to see themselves as the "chosen" among the Arabs, they became aware of the important contribution they had made to the advancements taking place in the Arab world. This new perception had in it a recognition of the pride resulting from the demand of the oil-producing countries for skilled Palestinian labor, the large number of educated people within their ranks and the important strides made by Palestinians in the academic and commercial worlds (al-Qassim, 1987)

The June 1967 war contributed much to these changes and feelings. The failure of the "revolutionary" Arab governments led the Palestinians to stress their social- cultural- political exclusiveness and more and more they pointed out that Palestinians were not responsible for the outcome of this

war. The Arab countries, on their part, supported, the Palestinian political and military frameworks and praised the Palestinians in their struggle for liberation.

From this point on, distinctive Palestinian identity in the social, cultural, national and political sense became an accomplished fact for the Arab people as a whole and for the Palestinians in particular. Their self image was now the antithesis of what it had been when they first made contact with the host countries (Dhaher, 1981).

#### **Arab Immigration to the United States**

No one knows with certainty how many Arab- Americans - Arab immigrants and their descendants born in America- live in the U.S. today. The best informed estimates put the number at 2.5 million, with the reservation that the actual number may vary by half a million on either side of that figure. One reason a more precise total for Arab Americans cannot be arrived at is that early immigration records often listed Arabs as Turks. Another reason is that Arabs who go first to non- Arab countries and then immigrate to the U.S are listed by the nationality of the last country they lived in.

But whether the correct figure is two, two and a half or three million, Arab americans form an important ethnic

minority in the U.S, about half the size of the Jewish population of the country. Yet of all American ethnic groups of substantial size, Arab Americans probably are the least known and least understood.

The 1990 census counted 870,000 Arab Americans. However, Arabic sources estimate the population of the Arab- American community as exceeding 2.5 million. It is a community that generations ago survived by peddling dry goods, operating small stores and working in the textile and steel mills of the industrial Northeast and which has now successfully entered the American mainstream.

The Arabs who came to America in the early period of immigration from the Middle East came for essentially the same reasons that motivated European immigrants during the same years. In almost all cases the Arabs were poor. They saw in America the prospect of economic opportunity and hope of a better life. Many planned to stay only a few years in America, make a great deal of money, then return to their towns and villages to live the rest of their lives.

Most of the Arab immigrants to America were young men, the average age about 24. The Arab or Palestinian immigrant usually got his start as a peddler through the help of a countryman- often a family member or a friend- who had already

established himself as a seller supplier or even manufacturer, of the kind of merchandise needed in the peddlers trade. The newly arrived immigrant peddler worked long hours seven days a week and saved his money. After a few years of borrowing and repaying, he had accumulated enough capital to go into business for himself. In time, he usually graduated from peddler to store owner, often beginning with a small grocery store (Naff, 1985).

Historians have no clear answers as to why so many of the early immigrants became peddlers. Some explanations were that peddling was a trade that did not require much money- in most cases the goods could be got on credit and there were almost no overhead costs.

Arab immigration to the United States has come in two great distinct waves. The first occurred around the turn of this century when Arabs of every class, profession and trade--merchants, farmers, intellectuals and artists among them began emigrating. The second wave of Arab immigration sparked to a large degree by political turmoil in the region continues even now.

What also seems to have set the Arab American experience apart from that of other groups was the relative degree of affluence these immigrants quickly achieved in the period 1910

to 1914 when miners, factory workers and farm laborers earned around \$600 per year. Arab American pack peddlers were earning about \$1000 a year. (Naff, 1985)

Another unique feature was the relative degree of ease with which Arab Americans assimilated into the mainstream. According to historian Alixa Naff (1985), this tendency appears to be part of the Arab character from centuries ago; "Throughout its history the Arab World has undergone many changes yet Islam and Arab culture have endured. The Arabs have always had to work hard to draw a modest living from their reluctant lands, but they have seldom starved. They have alternately dominated and been subject to many different empires and have assimilated rather than rejected these diverse civilizations. This tendency to integrate rather than reject or destroy other cultures has allowed the Arabs to thrive and to develop a rich heritage of their own."

Muslims constituted a small percentage of some of the first wave of Arab immigrants to the United States. In addition to sharing the economic motivation of their Christian countrymen they also sought (after 1908) to escape the Ottoman policy of drafting Arab Muslims into the military. This group which came at the end of the peddling era in the 1920s (and the rise of the mass retail consumer market) flocked to the industrial cities of the heartland, like Toledo and Detroit/Dearborn.

The second wave of immigration began after World War II and continues today. Like many of the first wave of

immigrants those who came in the second wave, also intended to stay only for a short period. But many of these immigrants found a permanent home in the United States.

In contrast with the first wave of Arabs in the 1870s who came from the rural areas, and spoke no English, the second wave of Arab immigrants in the 1960s was comprised of educated professionals fluent in several languages and possessing a well-developed ethnic identity and Arab consciousness. They have lived in dispersed patterns and have not formed neighborhoods.

Unlike the early immigrants who for the most part were farmers and artisans in the old country, this post war group is comprised of many with college degrees or those who have come to earn them. And unlike the first group, the second wave comes from all over the Arab world, dominated by displaced Palestinians, the largest post-World War II group. Furthermore those of the second wave come from independent nationstates and arrived in America with an Arab political consciousness unknown to earlier immigrants. Their heightened awareness of a region in conflict, the defeat of the Arab nations in 1967, the continuing occupation of Arab lands by Israel has served to produce an Arab American political community.

It is these second wave immigrants whose political consciousness and public pride played a key part in mobilizing the Arab American community and refocusing its energies on political and social issues.

### **Palestinian Immigrants in the United States**

Palestinians make up a substantial percentage of Arab Americans. First arriving in the late 1800s, they followed a familiar pattern of Arab immigration-- one family member brought over others, until entire family networks (in the case of the muslim Palestinians, it was usually the males in the family) and village networks were re-created in the New World. For example, many Palestinians in Detroit came from the West Bank town of Ramallah (Detroit is the national center for the nation wide 20,000 member American Federation of Ramallah Palestine). Palestinians began to come to the Detroit area during the early 1920s and their numbers have expanded dramatically since the loss of their homeland and the creation of Israel in 1948. In this way entire extended families and village networks were transferred from Palestine. Palestinian early immigrants were both Christian and Sunni Muslims who sought opportunities in the United States voluntarily.

The central economic activity for these first wave immigrants was peddling. According to Alixa Naff (1985), this

had functioned as the major factor in the rapid assimilation of Arabic speaking immigrants before World War I resulting in a high degree of Americanization among first generation Christian Syrians and a low degree of ethnic consciousness in the second generation. This however, was not the case for Palestinian Muslims - money that they made peddling, was systematically sent "back home" to family members to acquire more land and /or to build primary residences or money making rental properties. Building houses for rent after 1948 was a result of the War, when thousands of refugees had been forced out of their homes. Unable to return to their homes within the 1948 borders, refugees who had the resources were forced to set up residence in the West Bank creating a sudden demand for housing. This was a major impetus for Palestinian immigrants to make money and to send it back home to build rental properties on the West Bank.

Palestinian immigrants to the United States in the 1960's, were different in that many were educated, bi-lingual and familiar with western customs and traditions. They also tended to settle in towns and cities where members of their families or villages were already established, or where Palestinian communities already existed. These immigrants possessed a pride in their Palestinian identity that was nourished by decades of struggle for political independence, by a closer link to Islam, and by their conscious pursuit of

cultural autonomy within the American mainstream. Many Palestinians who had emigrated to the United States in the early 1900s considered themselves transients; they came here to earn money and intended to return eventually to the homeland. Many families sent one or two male members to the United States hoping they would become prosperous and eventually return. The rest of the family was usually left in Palestine. These first wave immigrants usually peddled in southern states during the winter and northern states during the summer and stayed in motels or rooming houses for as long as a month at a time. In the 1970s, 1980s Palestinians who immigrated to the United States, usually immigrated as a family unit.

#### **Palestinian Immigrants in the New York Metropolitan Area**

The total population of the New York metro area, which includes the five boroughs, northern New Jersey and Yonkers, is more than 8 million. The estimated Arab-American population of the New York metro area is 180,000. Palestinians constitute a large portion of that number with estimates of 30,000 to 40,000.

The earliest Arab-American settlers in New York arrived from the region of Greater Syria (which included Palestine) between 1880 and 1924.

The majority of Palestinians who arrived in New York in

the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s were from the muslim towns of El-Bireh and Beit-Hanina and the neighboring muslim villages.

Most of New York's Palestinian community has changed neighborhoods in the past 90 years. Economic successes may account for many of the moves -- from Atlantic Avenue to Brooklyn Heights to Park Slope and finally to Bay Ridge-- but the moves also illustrate changing attitudes from one generation to another.

Realizing that with the new immigrants comes a new faith, the Palestinian muslim community has mosques in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Westchester, Jersey City, Patterson, Newark and Pasaic. As recently as 1992, 'Masaeb Ibn Omaier Mosque' was founded to serve the growing Palestinian population in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. The mosque was founded by a group of Palestinian businessmen and professionals with hopes of preserving their Muslim faith and transmitting it to their children.

### CHAPTER III

#### STATE OF EXILE, LOSS AND YEARNING TO RETURN

Edward Said (1984) captured the social psychological condition of Palestinians wherever they have come to reside after their dispersal, in 1948 and 1967. He described this condition as a state of 'exile' which he defined as the 'unhealable' rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home.' He characterized exile existentially as a 'condition' of terminal loss caused by a 'discontinuous state of being (Said,1984:49,51)

In general Palestinians living in New York feel that they are in a state of 'exile.' During my field-work, none of the individuals I interviewed mentioned the word 'immigration' or 'mohajara'. They all referred to themselves as in a state of "Ghourba" or exile. However the degree of exile varied for these individuals. For example, a person who can never go back to his home in Yaffa (within the 1948 borders) feels the sense of exile more intensely than a Palestinian from the West Bank who still retains her or his "Hawiyah" (the Israeli identity card that establishes residency in the West Bank). And a Palestinian who had to be displaced several times in his lifetime from his village within the 1948 borders to the West

Bank, to Jordan and then to Lebanon or Kuwait, may feel the sense of exile even more acutely. Said (1980), in describing Palestinians in the various locations in which they have come to dwell: those within Israel "Proper" or Palestinians within the 1948 borders, Palestinians who are under military occupation in the West Bank, Palestinians living in Jordan or Lebanon or Egypt, and Palestinians living in the United States or Europe, states:

" Anyone of these people ...would say that he or she is in exile, although its perfectly clear that the conditions and the type of exile may vary greatly. Nevertheless, behind every Palestinian there is a great general fact: "that he once and not so long ago lived in a land of his own called Palestine, which is now no longer his homeland."  
(Said,1980:115)

This sense of exile is clearly illustrated in one 50 year old woman's remarks. A Palestinian originally from El-Lod, she had become a refugee for a second time after the 1967 War when she left the West Bank for Jordan:

"A Palestinian in Jordan, what is he? What is she? Are they part of the country? Who are they?. What is their status? There is this feeling I think every Palestinian feels, totally displaced, they feel homeless. We all feel homeless. You don't feel homeless (referring to me as a Palestinian from the West Bank whose family is still living in the West Bank.) But we

feel homeless.... Ask any Palestinian who's lived in the Arab World."

According to Smith (1986), "Communities are inseparable from particular habitats. This is true even of diaspora people whom persecution, commerce and adventure scatter across many communities. Even they once possessed a landscape of their own which continues to suffuse their collective consciousness by its imprint on their liturgy, education or oral traditions" (1986:181)

For many of the first generation Palestinians I interviewed, the United States, may not have been a place they came to by choice but because there was no other alternative. The choice to be in the United States was a choice not made enthusiastically in many cases. Whether they came here for work, to better themselves or to give their children a better life it is still difficult to draw a clear line between what Abu-Lughod (1988) called the 'pushes' of exit and the 'pull' of entrance. Many blamed "the occupation", "Israelis" and "Arab countries for what they considered their "exile" and not their immigration. Abu Lughod states, "Only forced exile creates that unhealable rift between the "self and its true home" which leaves the mover in limbo, unable and unwilling to become fully part of his life in exile for fear that in doing so he will forfeit his life in

his 'native' place (1988:62)

Their feeling of dislocation, discontinuity and loss exists, even though many of the individuals I interviewed immigrated to the U.S voluntarily. For many however, the inherited state of exile is part of their existence. Although they may not have directly experienced displacement, they still feel the same loss. "Exile to the Palestinians is neither transitional nor transitory; it is an inherited state" (Abu-Loghod 1988:63). Abu Loghod estimates that as much as 80 percent of the persons who identify themselves as Arab Palestinians have never directly known their 'native place.' Palestinians sense of loss, loss of a homeland, loss of a home loss of political and human rights contribute to this sense of exile.

Even those who came voluntarily to New York in this last decade, citing work as the main reason, continue to blame the "Israeli occupation" for forcing them to make the decision to leave. The most common reasons that they gave for coming to the New York were "Military oppression," "Conditions in the West Bank", "lack of jobs," "difficulty of obtaining permits to start their own business in the West Bank." But they emphasized that if it were not for the "Israeli occupation" non of these factors would have convinced them to leave their homeland.

The lingering connection and attachment to their homeland, which although many were not allowed to return to physically, is what makes their national identity complete for them.

" A Palestinian carries a heavy burden wherever he goes," explained a 48 year old real-estate broker who came to the U.S in his early twenties. "because our land is occupied, because it was usurped from us, we don't feel we can be part of any other society."

This utter preoccupation with the 'Palestinian cause' is illustrated in one 42 year old grocery store owner's comments: "Being a Palestinian - your whole life revolves around being a Palestinian, and around the Palestinian cause and the struggle. We are trying to regain our identity. Whether you are a doctor, a student, or worker your whole life revolves around being a Palestinian -It takes precedence over whatever else you are." A 39 year old homemaker, who came to New York ten years ago from Jordan explained: "I never felt Jordanian, maybe because I was never allowed to be Palestinian or to have my full identity as a Palestinian. Another 23 year old student who was born and raised in New York interpreted his "non assimilation into American society": "... because it isn't resolved (the Palestinian Question)

maybe that's why I don't feel American although I was raised here."

Undoubtedly, however, the single most significant contribution to the rise of Palestinian nationalism has been their diaspora and their yearning to return. Soon after their diaspora began, Palestinians "developed a whole mystique of "The return." (Hirst, 1977:266) The dream of a return to their homes became a Palestinian obsession. More than a bit ironic, was the fact that just as Zionism was achieving its zenith, Palestinian nationalism was being polished in the Diaspora. The nationalism of a people's search for a home or the liberation of home, in this case Occupied Palestine. The nationalism of the Palestinians is an example of nationalist ideas. The Palestinians see themselves as having suffered various forms of discrimination.

According to Minogue (1967), "Nationalism is a political movement which seeks to attain and defend an objective we may call national integrity. It seeks 'freedom', but freedom can mean many things. The demand for freedom already carries with it the suggestion that nationalists feel themselves oppressed. Out of this freedom-oppression complex of ideas we may extract a general description of nationalism: it is a political movement depending on a feeling of collective grievance against foreigners" (1967:25)

Let us consider the nationalist phenomenon that Palestinians either brought with them when they came to the United States or developed. It consists of currents of feelings- anti- Israel, sense of loss and exile, and dreams of return. According to Minogue (1967) there is no need to define a nation precisely, "A nation as a living component of nationalism is something to be found largely in the aspiration of nationalists. It consists of all those people who have been persuaded that they share in the national grievance.(1967:31) Despite the fact that for Palestinians their community is a dispersed community without any territorial sovereignty it continues to be alive in their aspirations.

In the absence of their own government, Palestinians in the diaspora-even those who have acquired the citizenship of the host country they lived in whether that was Jordan, Australia or America tried to reassemble their political, economic and social country. They were rebuilding on the basis of an identity based on a shared uprootedness, dispersal and statelessness and shared national aspirations.

For one 48 old teacher, whose family had been forced out of Haifa in 1948 and lived in another Arab country--Syria, the sense of loss of a homeland is compounded. Rather than attaining integration into the new environment which in her

case was "Syria" they remained Palestinians. They retained their own identity rather than becoming full-fledged citizens of the countries they were representing. In some instances, this was because of difficulties in acquiring citizenship, in others because of reluctance to abandon their Palestinian identity.

".... people like us who went and lived in the Arab world, I think have a very different view of what it is like to be a Palestinian because it is different. There are similarities in the sense of how do you fit in the Arab World. We never felt that we belonged there and they never felt that we belonged. You could say the feeling was mutual."

She continued, "Last year is the only time in my life when I felt that I had to make a decision to belong somewhere even to say to myself this is going to be mine, you know my apartment, mine, my home- the word home- I had never used the word home in my life, in any real meaning, because I was homeless... Now I have resolved to make New York my home."

Another 43 year old, businessman who had live in Jordan after his family was forced out in 1948:

"I had no home- especially Palestinians who went to places like Kuwait. Some of the people who went to Jordan might feel that they had a home because they could buy and own land but if you lived in a place like Kuwait you couldn't. That's why I say we are a whole group who are different. We feel homeless

and all my life I've felt homeless and that I don't belong anywhere."

A 39 year old grocery store owner who had resided in the West Bank and in Jordan:

" Landlessness, statelessness I feel that Palestinians are lost because we have no home to return to ... especially Palestinians from the '48 borders. We literally have no home to return to. Jordan is not my homeland. It isn't my ancestral land."

As mentioned earlier, attachments to specific stretches of land in "Occupied Palestine" and to certain places within them, have mythical and subjective qualities for Palestinians. The start could have been the real village or town they belong to, or the house they lived in which may or may not be mythologized partly. It then moves to take in the disappearance of a collective identity. It is the attachments and associations rather than residence in our possession of the land that matters for ethnic identification (Smith 1991). Palestinians feel that 'Palestine' belongs to them and they belong to it.

This attachment along with other attributes such as a sense of loss and yearning to return become more salient and as that does, so does the sense of ethnic identity and ethnic community. Following from this argument, if this attachment

decreases with later generations, the sense of ethnic identification and therefore the ethnic community itself would be absorbed according to Smith (1991).

#### **Attachment to the Land**

Coming from a rural tradition, Palestinians have a close almost mystical relationship with their land. In rural societies possession of land has always symbolized authority and security. A man who acquired wealth, reinvested it in land and similarly, the sale of land symbolized impoverishment and loss of status.

This bond between Palestinians and their land was frequently transformed into a collective bond. Holding on to the land which is a national Palestinian possession makes the fact of "returning to Palestine" a part of their Palestinian consciousness.

The importance of owning land and "building" in the villages and towns was reiterated in interviews time and again in the interviews. Ownership of land has always been a symbol of status and one's own self worth for centuries. However, it became even more important in Palestinian life after the Israeli occupation, the creation of the refugee problem and the loss of land after 1948 and the 1967 wars.

Abdulla M. Lutfiyya (1966) who studied a Palestinian village in Palestine, wrote on the meaning of land ownership for Palestinians, "As in all landed societies there is a strong attachment between the villager and the land he owns. The land is much more than just a source of income, it is a status symbol. The land is also a sacred bond that links the villager with the past and the future. He inherits the land from his ancestors and expects to pass it to his own children. Land is the most coveted kind of property in the community. The villager, regardless of his occupation or station in life, seldom hesitates to invest any money he has or gets in a few more acres of land." (Lutfiyya, 1966)

According to Migdal (1980) "With the unfavorable man-land ratio that existed following the doubling of the West Bank population in the years surrounding the 1948 War, land became even more valuable and took on heightened importance as a sign of social mobility " (1980:64)

This problem has multiplied since the Gulf War when over 200, 000 Palestinians were forced out of Kuwait. Although many were resettled in Jordan, many with Israelis I.D.s (Hawiyas) returned to the West Bank, which forced land prices to skyrocket.

The close identity of the actual physical land with

national consciousness is evident in a 62 year old man's statements:

" Land is very important to us as Palestinians. We do not willingly give up our land ... In our culture there is a saying 'ardi aardi" (my land is my honor), that is why land is important to us. We keep it from generation to generation."

In my interviews, I observed that the attitude to the land remains unchanged despite the distance. Palestinian's emotional and political investment in the land and opposition to territorial appropriation by Israel continue in the diaspora.

Members of the older generation consider their land both a symbol of their country and a link to their villages or towns. The land has acquired a symbolic value since it no longer provides a major source of livelihood to many of them.

Together with the newly built villas that many have built, it represents to the Palestinian living in America a sense of identification with the village or town of origin. It still represents a source of social prestige and a measure of success in the life of Palestinians living in New York.

The orientation of many Palestinians to Palestine is expressed most clearly in their insistence that they will one day return. One 27 year old graduate student who came to New

York four years ago:

"The world wants us to accept our plight and behave as refugees should behave and accept resettlement in Kuwait, or Jordan or Tunis or America. But we are determined to go back (to Palestine)."

For some, especially first generation Palestinians, there is a deep nostalgia for a way of life that they believe to have existed before their departure. In some cases that life style may be very much idealized. In what Smith (1986) called the collective diaspora consciousness, there are often two or more sets of landscapes at work particularly when generations are forced to flee their lands of birth: the land of origin, the land of destination and land of ancestry. The last, often never seen, is nevertheless vividly envisaged and idealized (see Seton-Watson, 1977). One thirty year old Palestinian born in a refugee camp in Jordan, who had never been to Palestine and whose family were forced out of its village in 1948 and settled in Jordan, said "My home is not Jordan, its Palestine. All my relatives still live in Beit Rima, my family still owns land in the village ... and that is where I want to go back eventually."

### **Yearning to Return**

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The annual summer return for many of the Palestinians I interviewed, is similar to what Anderson (1991) described.

For Anderson (1991), the journey that young Latin American Creoles took to the colonial capitals of New Spain were "meaning creating experiences requiring interpretation ..." (1991:54) Barred from careers in Madrid because of their New World birth, the journey to the capital began to unite otherwise unrelated localities in the minds of these young creoles. Eventually they came to think of themselves as Peruvians, Mexicans, etc, and to claim to speak on behalf of those within Peruvian or Mexican borders. Similarly, the summer returns of New York Palestinians maintain the bond of Palestinians in New York to the Palestinians in the West Bank. The return makes it possible to maintain a community as one.

New technologies have also allowed Palestinians in New York to be connected with the communities of their home society. In Anderson's (1991) "Imagined Communities: Reflection on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism," he posits the development of national markets for the print media as essential in fostering the imagination of a nation. He uses the image of a Mexico City businessman reading the paper as an important ritual in the creation of a national culture, and a sense of shared borders and common time. New technologies in the form of videotapes, telephones etc, continue to connect Palestinians in New York with friends and relatives in Palestine. This has implications regarding the Palestinian community in New York in terms of the generation

of a sense of community and oneness with Palestine. Hence the generation of a sense of community does not need to be linked to a possession of the territory on which one resides but instead to the practice of certain ways of belonging in a community deriving from and focused on a given home (Smith, 1991)

It is not only the feeling of belonging to the same past that makes Palestinians feel that they belong, but the feeling that they belong to the same present. One forty five year old man illustrates the feelings of oneness with Palestinians in the West Bank: "I watch CNN .... I see Israeli soldiers shoot at 10 and 12 year old children and I think these could have been my children... My children participated in demonstrations with the other 'Shabab' (young men) when we went home last summer."

Palestinians living in New York, yearn to return to Palestine but each has his or her own lived history and each has a collective history that he shares with other Palestinians in the Diaspora. Many elements may also shape one's lived history. A major contributing factor that has shaped individual Palestinian life histories, is where they have come to reside after leaving Palestine. Palestinians who reside in New York may have lived in refugee camps in Lebanon and Syria prior to coming to the U.S, or lived within

"Israel Proper," or resided in the West Bank directly under Israeli occupation.

Along with this element, there exist for Palestinians other attributes that shape their identity: There are Palestinian Muslim fundamentalists, Palestinian Christians, Palestinian bourgeoisie and Palestinian socialists. There are Palestinian men and women whose feelings and political ideas may vary.

#### **El-Awda -The return**

Closely associated with total liberation is the concept of 'return.' Writing fifteen years after the destruction and exile of the Palestinian community, the late Palestinian historian Abd al-Latif Tibawi (1963) analyzed the intensity of Palestinians' emotion concerning the return. The sentiment of return, he noted, has a comprehensive hold on the Palestinians: "It (return) embraces not only those adults, men and women and their children who now homeless, but also children of refugees born into exile. All are being thoroughly and systematically instructed in the mystique of "the return" in schools and through all the modern media of communication." (Tibawi,1963)

The visions of liberation and return, reflect the psychological and emotional forces that motivated the

Palestinians: the deep sense of injustice, the pain of exile, the powerful attachment to all of Palestine, and a deeply ingrained historical belief in the justice of the Palestinian cause. For the Palestinians, life outside their homeland meant that they would remain a people condemned to eternal suffering, a people without credentials, without the means of self defence, and without any freedom to determine their own fate. (1963:73)

Who and how many members of the diaspora community will actually relocate in a Palestinian state? Their fate is largely a function of the absorptive economic capacities of that state. Even dispossessed people are unlikely to leave their stable environments for an unknown situation, based on national and sentimental attachment to the "land of their fathers". The scenario is likely to be one where the refugee populations of Lebanon and Syria will relocate in Palestine, while those in Jordan will be divided by class lines, with the middle classes remaining integrated in the Transjordanian society. It is too early even to speculate on the fate of Gulf Palestinians in the aftermath of the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. Ultimately the answer to this question depends on the access of the state to resources, including capital and control over land and water, and on the form of a settlement.

But what of Palestinians in New York? Palestinians in New York have been debating the ideological character of this Palestinian State. Questions of the ideological content of the Palestinian state will need to be addressed before many return. They will need to know the broad political character of the state. Will it be (secular/fundamentalist)? What socioeconomic orientation will it adopt (social - democratic/state capitalist/free enterprise)? What range of political/social freedoms will it offer its citizens? Although these questions are more pressing from the perspective of the professional middle class, businessmen, and the intelligencia, they nevertheless play an important role in determining the future of the New York Palestinian returnees.

What is the nature of Palestinian diaspora intellectuals, for example, who will decide to relocate their bases from cities in the Middle East, the United States and Europe? (One should keep in mind that the size of these social segments among the Palestinian is large relative to equivalent groups in the Arab world.) Finally the degree of control by fundamentalist Muslims over issues of sexual segregation in schools and work will determine how attractive the state will be for future returnees (Migdal, 1980:214)

Does the accumulation of wealth and success in exile lead to a reassessment of their vision of return?

Some Palestinian Americans may immerse themselves in the language and the culture of America and may establish intensive contacts with Americans, yet want to return to their towns of origin in Palestine. Samar - is a 36 year old administrator (female):

"All my best friends are American, my associates are American. But I don't feel that this is my country. I go home (to Palestine) every year..... My husband's family has a house there. We go there every summer. Last year we started building a house there... I would like to eventually move there."

Some have every interest in maintaining continuity with their ethnic origin and their past. They evaluate their own success against the social norms of their home region or the immigrant community in which they live. "Hasan" is but one example. He is a 56 year old man who has been living with his family in New York for the past 30 years. He owns a house in Brooklyn and several businesses. He visits Palestine every year where he has built a house in his hometown and bought some land for "future investments."

" This (New York) is not my home.... I have never had American friends...I've only had business contacts with Americans. All my contacts are with Palestinians from my hometown. One day (Inshallah) God willing we will be able to go back and live there permanently... now its difficult with the political situation the way it is."

For some second generation Palestinians "returning home" to the home region of their parents may be difficult. They can find the culture of their parents, but it will be a culture that has evolved and is now different from the culture of the immigrants. Also, these young people have been raised in an urban or semi-urban setting and have assimilated the life values and style of America. For some, whose parents originally came from tiny villages or refugee camps in Palestine, they do not easily return to a rural setting where they will feel themselves to be foreigners, even though members of their family still live there.

A 21 year old college student whose family comes from 'Betoonia', a small village near Ramallah illustrates this feeling

" No, I cannot go back to live there. I will work to help (Palestinians) but I cannot live there." She later explained that whenever she had gone to visit during the summer vacation:

"..... I felt like ninety percent of the time- ninety five percent of the time, I felt totally suffocated because I didn't feel that there was anyone that I could talk to in the generality of times. So in that sense I feel that this (being in America) is much more comfortable for me-- much more natural for me...."

For one 20 year old young woman, whose family had fled in

1967 and settled in a refugee camp in Jordan, "returning" means returning to a refugee camp. In her summer returns to Jordan she revealed that she "could not live under those conditions:"

"My family lives in a refugee camp- Jabal el Husein. I have gone to visit but I don't want to live there. It's very sad but I can't live like that. I feel that I can help my people more by staying here." Suheir is one example of the displaced Palestinians who were forced to live in refugee camps. To the world, the Palestinians who lived in the refugee camps were the most visible symbol of Palestinian suffering. It is the Palestinians of the camps who have provided the revolution with its 'Fedayeen.' But it is also those who more than any other group who have paid most for the Palestinian cause. It was apparent from my conversations with this woman, that life in a refugee camp is a harsh life that cannot be romanticized by its inhabitants.

For the second generation, it may be easier to return to an urban setting in the country of one's parents because in towns and cities, many elements of Western culture have seeped in, but for a person of the second generation this still means a step into the unknown. One 30 year old woman felt that the rise of Islamic Fundamentalism in Palestine would make her think twice about returning:

"I cannot live in a society where I will be treated like a

second class citizen. Last year I went home and people in my village started asking me why I don't wear a Hijab. As a woman its very difficult to live there. Women don't have the rights that we have here."

Some realize that living in the U.S. has shaped their identity and acknowledge that America has become part of their identity and that even if they decide to live in Palestine that the rise of fundamentalism in the West Bank, would be a factor that they would contemplate in their decision to return.

One 26 year old who was born in the West Bank town of El-Bireh explained his hesitancy about returning:

"I've been here for 17 years and I've been brought up in this culture and I've had to accept the fact that this culture is going to have to be part of my identity for the rest of my life no matter where I go-- whether I stay her or I go there (to Palestine)

Another 21 year old woman who came to New York when she was three years old from "Beit Oor" in the West Bank:

"I'm Suheir, Suheir is a Palestinian who was raised in Brooklyn and there's nothing that anyone can say be they Palestinian or otherwise that can take that away from me....I don't know about returning - a difficult choice I really love living in the United States. I'm willing to visit over there

but not to live."

The ethnic identity of Palestinians cannot be studied isolated from social context. The importance of interaction with the social environment for the formation of their ethnic identity was clearly illustrated when one forty-eight old woman said:

"It's (referring to New York) so anti Arab- so anti Palestinian that it forces you to feel your Palestinianity. You can't ignore it- so you have to say I have to connect with my Arabnesss or with my Palestinianess because it is just too overwhelmingly negative against you.... I think because of this Jewish-pro-Israeli stance... in American in general but New York specifically. So I think you have the worse of the worst here. As we know this guy, Goldstein (referring to the Brooklyn born man who massacred 48 Palestinians while they were praying in a mosque in Hebron) came out of Brooklyn. This is where they make these people. So really that's what makes you feel more, ..... a need to connect to my ethnic background. I think I would feel less need for it if I were living in a less hostile place"

The delay or lack of assimilation may be connected to their sense of exile. That may be due to the idea that Palestinian identity sprang out in exile wherever that exile was, whether that was the exile of 1948 Palestinians into 1967

borders or the identity in Arab countries before coming to America.

The post-1967 period has brought Palestinians and united the community in exile around certain goals. Palestinians have struggled to maintain their identity in America on two levels: As Palestinians who have lost a homeland and whose land was occupied by Zionists and as Palestinians who feel pressures of assimilation in America.

**CHAPTER IV**  
**THE PALESTINIAN FAMILY IN NEW YORK**

This chapter explores the importance of the Palestinian family and the importance of kinship ties for maintaining the relationship among members of the Palestinian community in the U.S. It also explores the ongoing relationship of Palestinians in New York to their home society in Palestine.

The Palestinian family in New York has been undergoing significant changes and needs to be examined in the context of these changes. It is being shaped by the confrontation with the different value systems that it is encountering in the United States.

How are the families that made up a village or town in Palestine surviving as a unit in New York and what are the mechanisms that revive the Palestinian population that exists in New York. There are two social occasions that Palestinians in New York participate in, that extend from the family to the village or town community: marriage and death. In my interviews, most of the respondents stressed the importance of these social bases to the survival of the community. My field work and my own participation in such social events have confirmed that. Without these two social bases, the Palestinians in New York would not have evolved and maintained

their village and town networks. These ceremonial occasions provide a mechanism for the continuous reproduction of village and town social relations in America. The extent to which customary social obligations and ceremonial practices surround the life cycle in each village and town is elaborate.

### **Reconstitution of Ties in New York**

Family ties are of immense importance to Palestinians. According to Sayigh (1979: 128), who studied camp dwellers in Lebanon, "the time and money they put into sustaining these ties cannot be easily be imagined, and the fact that the dispersion separated kin groups did not prevent the contact from being kept up. Indeed, the difficulty of meeting probably stiffened Palestinian determination to maintain family ties, as part of their cultural identity, apart from its practical benefits. While Palestinians reacted to dispersion by holding tightly to their family and village ties, the political forces that had expelled them from Palestine continued to press upon them in the ghourba." Although Sayigh was writing about refugee camp residents and Palestinians in the Arab "Ghourba" or diaspora, this sustenance of ties continues to apply to Palestinians in the American "Ghourba."

In my interviews, both men and women, first and second generation Palestinians, discussed the importance of family

ties and village ties and connectedness to their towns and villages of origin for their continuity as a people.

The Israeli occupation did not only tear many Palestinians from their lands, it also tore the natural groupings of clan and village and family in the process of displacement and dispersion. For Palestinians in New York reassembling these groupings was considered the most important element in "keeping Palestine alive."

Horowitz (quoted in Smith 1985), has likened ethnic groups to 'super-families' of fictive descent because members view their ethnic community as composed of interrelated families, forming one huge 'family' linked by mythical ties of filiation and ancestry. Such a linkage between family and nation reappears in nationalist mythologies and affirms to the enduring centrality of this attribute of ethnicity. Without such descent myths it is difficult to see ethnic communities surviving for any length of time. The sense of 'whence we came' is central to the definition of 'who we are.' (Horowitz, 1985)

Usually when discussing family types within urban areas we arrive at the conclusion that the nuclear family is the predominant form, however among Palestinians in New York, kinship ties are not breaking down to the nuclear level, the

extended family continues to function. Happy occasions and sad occasions usually involve the whole extended family.

Family cohesiveness observed among Palestinians in New York requires an understanding of those characteristic features of the Arab family in general and the traditional Palestinian family in particular. According to Sayigh (1979), "Traditional Palestine is a highly family oriented society that gives precedence to informal and personal ties. It provided occupational security for family members, organizing working the land, distributing its fruits. Marriage and divorce, death and burial were all family issues, part of the sacred domain of uncles, grandparents, and paternal blood relatives" (1979:19-20)

The family is a basic institution in all societies. The family occupies a focal point in the social organization of the Arab World (Goode 1963). In the Arab World, "the dominant group structure has been the informal group" (Bill and Leiden 1984:77). However, "informal groups are noncorporate, unofficially organized collectivities that articulate their interests in a relatively diffuse manner. This category includes kinship, status, and regional groups" (Bill and Leiden 1984:76). At the center of the informal group is the family, which is "the basic unit of social change currently in progress throughout the area." (Fernea 1984:18). The family

, which is "the basic unit and building block of groups in the Middle East," (Bill and Leiden 1984:90) is "at the center of social organization in all three Arab patterns of living (Bedouin, rural, and urban) and particularly among tribespeople, peasants, and urban poor." (Barakat 1984:28)

Janet Abu Lughod (1961:31) states, "Middle Eastern culture places a high value on personal relationships, even at a sacrifice of privacy and internal development. This combined with a system of relationships based on the extended kinship group, serves to increase the number of primary ties far beyond what western sociologists, reasoning from their own experiences, dare to assume possible. This network of personal associations enmeshes not hundreds but thousands of individuals."

For the majority of the people in the Middle East, "nothing yet has replaced the family as a source of support and alliance." (Fernea 1984:26). Despite social change, the family persists as a cohesive system of relationships. It remains functional economically, socially, culturally, and politically (Springborg, 1982). It continues to get the support it needs for survival from its members in return for what it can provide them.

A network based on old friendships and on village ties (that is ties not determined by blood) has become part of the extended social network in New York among Palestinians. The villagers' and townspeople' strong sense of community allow them to depend on such ties in New York. According to Lutfiyya (1966), who studied a Palestinian West Bank village of 'Betyin' in the mid- 1960's, villagers "tend to relate themselves to one another. 'We are all cousins', is a remark often made to a stranger who may ask a villager if he were related to someone in the village who is not a close relative. The villagers refers to themselves as 'we', as against all others, who are 'they.' This community feeling stems from the biological as well as cultural resemblance that the villagers bear to one another." (Lutfiyya 1966:175). This continues to be the case among Palestinians in New York. In my interviews, if I recognized the last name of the person I was interviewing I usually asked the respondent if a certain individual was related to them. They would invariably reply "he (she) is of our relatives" or "of the family" or "we are all relatives ... We are after all from the same town." In many instances I later found out that the person that I had inquired about was not directly related to them but was a member of the 'Hamula' or 'clan.'

Thus a clustering of social networks around village, place of origin, and kinship produces a predictability of the

relationships. According to Jacobson (1971) this predictability is a function not only of "past associations, but is also based on the implications of future interaction." (1971:633) According to Jacobson, "One strategy, therefore, for coping with uncertainty of urban life is to limit interaction to those with whom association at a future time is expected." (Jacobson 1971:633). Expectations lead migrant villagers and townspeople to seek first family then village relationships. According to Joseph Gugler and William Flangan (1978), migrants first seek "the extended family, [the] home village, village group to which it belongs, 'subtribe', 'tribe', 'supertribe', nation, race." (1978: 75). As a result, the city becomes a reflection of rural towns and villages, as if each had been uprooted and replanted.

For Palestinians, transnational family ties have been a backbone of Palestinian social structure. The persistence of extended family networks across borders are important to their persistence as a people. According to Migdal (1980) "The steadfastness of fairly extended kinship relations over great distances for considerable periods of time may be related to the destruction of Palestinian centers in Jerusalem and in the coastal cities in 1948 and to the inability of the West Bank towns to develop as new centers." (1980:66) Eisenstedt (1968) had developed a hypothesis that the strength of local institutions such as families and clans, is inversely

proportional to the strength of a country's major center. So for Palestinians the lack of a centralized base may have forced Palestinians to build strong family networks to provide Palestinians in exile with a sense of security and identity.

Palestinians in New York have retained many aspects of traditional Middle Eastern culture, especially in terms of family and religion. As Abu Lughod (1967) has pointed out, "it is indeed possible for migrants to reside in sections of a large city yet retain basic similarities to village life. It appears that one of the major facets associated with retention of traditional cultural elements, is the nature of the community to which the immigrants gravitate." (1967:388)

The Palestinian community in New York has become much more than a total of its families. Each village or town network in New York has become almost a replica of the former village or town in Palestine. Abu- Lughod (1961) observed in the case of Egyptian migrants to Cairo, "with a lower capacity for assimilation, they tend to build from themselves within the city a replica of the culture they left behind." (1961:23) But these recreations are not literal but are created through the social networks and bonds which exist for example between the individuals and families of the two West Bank towns of 'El-Bireh' and 'Beit Hanina,' in New York.

Apart from the mere physical features of the community and aspects of religion and kinship, there are certain indications of community identification. Similar to Tannous' (1942:268) findings for an Arab-American community in the South, the existence of gossip and secondary group relationships among Palestinians in the New York area are an indication of this identity. Residential and business locations of each family and individual are known by other families. Similarly, personal histories and current happenings to individuals are general knowledge possessed by most Palestinians residing in the area.

In the following section, I will explore how events like weddings, funerals, mediations and 'visits' are ways to maintain traditions, togetherness, means to introduce Palestinian youth into the society. They are also opportunities to 'remember', 'remind' and 'reaffirm ties.'

### **Marriage**

Family, residence and religion have traditionally been the main factors determining who marries whom in Palestinian society. Social class as measured by education and wealth has played an important role in contemporary Palestinian society. Cohen (1970) suggests that two principles underlie successful marriage agreements in the Modern Middle East. "A woman should be married within her own patronymic group (to a real

or classificatory father's brother's son; and she should be betrothed only to a man who is of the same social, political, and economic status as that of her father and her brothers. During the British mandate period in Palestine, the wealthy of one patronymic group began to marry the wealthy of others, thus emphasizing social class over kinship" (Cohen 1970:196,203). In Palestinian society in New York, social class as measured by wealth is increasingly becoming less important, with compatible educational levels becoming more important as a result of women acquiring higher levels of education and rejecting uneducated suitors.

Palestinian marriage festivities in New York have continued to involve the whole town or village of origin despite their dispersion in the United States. For example whenever marriage involves a member of the town of El-Bireh or Beit Hanina, all members of the town living in the New York metropolitan area and other states are invited and expected to attend. Almost all members attend (usually members of the same "Hamula" and /or very close friends attend from out of state). All ages and both sexes attend.

Wedding receptions or "haflat el-ors", provide an opportunity for Palestinians in New York to refresh and renew village ties. The marriage ceremony is usually conducted privately with the bride, groom, their parents and close

relatives (usually the bride and groom's paternal and maternal uncles, several witnesses and the "Sheik" who conducts the marriage ceremony).

In marriage 'Haflas' or 'receptions' as in other family gatherings the group is not separated by gender as they traditionally were. After the initial seating, people break up into groups to converse and exchange information. The "wedding reception", also provides parents with an opportunity to introduce their children into the network. In addition to the contemporary Arabic band which plays contemporary arabic songs, participants sing folk songs and dance the traditional dances of the particular village or town. Marriage ceremonies are also occasions for parents to introduce their marriage-age daughters to the network and for parents with marriage age sons to look for wives for their sons. One woman explained how her American -born son had gotten married, "I saw the girl that my son is currently married to on a videotape of a wedding in Ohio.. I showed him the video and he was interested .. .. so my husband called her family to set up a meeting and my son met the girl and liked her and she liked him."

Thus a wedding reception provides a linking function for the village or townspeople in New York. It re-establishes traditional ties of the original village or town in the Diaspora by reinforcing the sense of belonging and unity.

## Death

As they share their celebrations, Palestinians in New York also meet to demonstrate their grief over the death of a member of their community. By the continuation of traditional customs associated with death, they demonstrate the continuity of past ties (Ghabra, 1987). According to one informant, "When a death occurs, one person is selected to call key people in different states who in turn notify the townspeople in their state... Usually a representative of each family attends the funeral."

For three days, people of the same village or town, and acquaintances from other towns gather in the house announced for mourning "Beit al- Aza" (usually the house of the deceased or a close relative). In addition to the show of support and the offering of condolences, ties are renewed in the midst of the sad occasion during this period of mourning. The most important aspect is its impact on the social network. During the mourning period the village or town network gathers. Death, like the celebration of a wedding, brings young and old together and reaffirms relationships. Mourning creates an atmosphere of solidarity. Also as a result of the support network that is created, relationships are strengthened and recharged and the networks' cohesiveness and solidarity are enhanced. The gathering of mourners and the communication between them provides an occasion for renewal of ties. A

mourning period is also observed by relatives of the deceased in his or her town or village of origin in Palestine.

There are other social events that contribute to the strengthening of the village network in New York for example - Mediation or "Sulha" in which the community tries to resolve any conflicts among its members. Through mediation the community unity is reaffirmed and strengthened. It is a very reintegrative process in terms of family and community solidarity. Because mediation operates directly out of the community, accessibility and expense do not act as constraints. Accessibility, reaffirms for Palestinians in New York their place within the family or community group. This function is inferred from the function of all group rituals to reaffirm and reestablish group solidarity (Mauss, 1906, Durkheim, 1954). Durkheim (1954) argued that ritual composed the interface between external moral constraints, such as the formal legal system, and the internal feelings and emotional constructs of the individual.

While families occupying the same residence is not common among Palestinians in New York, it is common to find members of an extended family living in close proximity to each other. The majority of the respondents in this study had some members of their extended family living close by. A very interesting pattern observed was the prevalence of the extended family

members visiting one another and the extent to which leisure time was spent together especially on weekends.

Individuals and families reinforce ties by spending time together. Some visiting might be prompted by special occasions, a son or daughter's graduation, the birth of a child. For instance, after the birth of a child many members (usually women) of the town or village will visit to offer their congratulations. When relatives leave or return from the West Bank, relatives are expected to fulfill their 'Wajib' or obligation, by visiting to bid them farewell (Tawdi'e), or congratulate them on their safe return when they come back "Tahneia bi- al-Salameh". The arrival of a family member from the West Bank provides yet another occasion for members of the same town or village to come and inquire about relatives and friends "back home" and about the political situation in the West Bank. Visiting also occurs without a special occasion.

The need to visit usually increases in a crisis situation related to events in the Middle East in general or the West Bank specifically. After the "Hebron mosque massacre" in 1994, I observed and participated in many visits that were specifically arranged in different homes to debate the implications of the brutal event and what the PLO's response should be.

The visiting pattern of Palestinians in New York are similar to the visiting patterns of the Palestinians in Palestine and the Middle Eastern family in general. These visiting patterns including those associated with death and marriage, have reinforced and strengthened the ties and relationships of the Palestinian network. As Hildred Geertz (1979) suggests in the Moroccan context, such visits amplify "public comment on these ties. Discussion of personal affairs continues uninterrupted by spatial scatter. Relationships are not permitted to weaken through disuse, as more distant outposts are continually drawn back into the effective web of obligations, expectations, aid, and criticism." (1979:335).

One first generation respondent stated:

"There is nothing like our traditions - your own people are the only ones who will be there for you when you really need them." Several commented that Americans "don't have our close knit ties" or have, "superficial relationships with each other" and "cannot be relied on in your time of need." One forty five year old woman who has been living in New York for the past twenty three years explained, "You don't know who your next door neighbor is. I've lived in the same house for the past fifteen years and when I see my next door neighbor we only say Hello ... no one cares about their neighbor in this country."

**Preventing Assimilation - The Job of Women:**

The Palestinian women I interviewed usually came to the U.S. to join fathers, brothers or husbands. They usually moved into an established network of relatives and townspeople. In many ways, their values are similar to American values in terms of education of their children, their homes, and their goals. They still value the extended family and its support and solidarity.

They view "the American style of dating" as a major negative aspect of the U.S culture that causes many of the problems they perceive American society experiencing such as "high divorce rates, "single mothers," and "broken families."

Women whom I interviewed felt that the burden of preventing assimilation was placed on their shoulders. They realize that preserving their culture and traditions in the diaspora is important to their survival as a people. They however feel that too much of the responsibility has been placed on them to maintain traditions and Islamic values and to prevent their children from assimilating in the American culture. They confided that they were at a loss of what to do. Their children usually spoke English at home and refused to speak Arabic although they consciously spoke to them in Arabic. Several indicated that they have sought out and pressed for Arabic to be taught in their children's school, some send their children to Islamic school on the weekends.

One had a private tutor come once a week to her home to teach her three children Arabic and the "Koran." But they still felt that their children were being influenced by American values of which they did not approve.

In my interviews, Palestinian women noted that the constant visiting of relatives and acquaintances was a conscious effort on their part to reduce the assimilation process among their American born children by making them aware of the Palestinian community in the area. One woman said " I want my children to socialize with Palestinians -- because we have seen what happens when kids socialize with Americans." She was referring to an incident in which a girl from her town had left her Palestinian fiance and eloped with an American boyfriend.

Generally, respondents with teenage children, hoped to "go back" "because of the children." Many cited the "temptations" and "freedom" in America. One respondent who has been living in New York for the past twenty years and had two teenage daughters and one teenage son stated: "we want to go back because we don't want to lose our children." Another stated, "It's easier to raise them 'back home' because children know what's expected of them."

Some middle class women agree that their children are "partly American." One woman felt that she understood the dilemma her teenage children were encountering, "We tell our kids don't do this and don't do that, but we don't offer them alternatives.. we don't have social clubs for them. They're with American kids all day at school and then we tell them, you can't do what Americans do because we're Arab."

Different groups tried to address issues of alienation for Palestinian youth. One such organization was "ROOTS"- a Palestinian- American Youth organization that was established in 1986, and was based in Washington D.C. Since its inception, this organization has dedicated itself to promoting among Palestinian- Americans an "awareness and pride of their culture and identity." Root's main objectives were to "instill and nurture" in young Palestinian-Americans a consciousness of their language, history, culture, and heritage and to develop a stronger link between Palestinian youth from the United States and their "brothers and sisters in Palestine."

To achieve these objectives, 'ROOTS', developed programs that brought together Palestinian- American youth from all parts of the United States and abroad. These programs were designed to foster friendships among the participants and to educate them about "Palestinian national aspirations." One

of these programs was an annual ROOTS Summer Camp. Through this annual camp, the organizers aspired to help Palestinian-American youth overcome their feelings of alienation and "not really belonging to either culture." However, organizers complained that most participants came from middle class families who are less restrictive.

### **Kinship Ties**

#### **Reciprocity**

The sense of family among Palestinians encompasses the individual in a web of reciprocities and obligations (Ghabra, 1987). These reciprocities can be confining, restraining, require sacrifices and impinge on privacy, but at the same time provide the support and comfort in moments of crisis. As Prothro and Diab (1974) note, in the Middle East, "one turns to a member of the family for assistance in almost any area, whether it be a question of health, financial need, quest for a wife, employment, admission to school, starting a business, forming a corporation, or even emigration. (1974:71)

Celebrating a wedding or mourning a death elicits a reciprocal response. Each person knows that the fulfillment of these obligations will result in a reciprocity in his time of need. Those who do not follow the ways of the group are informally isolated by the majority. This is especially true among Palestinians in New York. Those who do not honor the

values of the village or town of origin are thought of as 'too Americanized' or 'arrogant' and therefore not part of the group.

These social foundations form the bases for the survival of the Palestinians as an ethnic group in New York.

### **Social Controls and Mutual obligations**

The Palestinian family in New York embraces an elaborate system of social controls and mutual obligations to which its members more or less conform. As Philip Hitti (1942) noted for Arab families in the United States: "the continuing sense of obligation and family commitment has remained with Palestinian immigrants inspite of the long distance which separate them from their land of birth." (1942:178)

The family networks that evolved and the family relationships are maintained through a system of duties (Wajib), obligations, services, and commitments. The fulfilling of the traditional family obligations, makes family a continuing relationship both in New York and in Palestine. In death and in marriage, family is there to support. In visiting and weekly social relationships as on religious occasions. The family is strengthened by "repeated intermarriage, residential proximity, and continual visiting," (Geertz 1979:336) and in the continual honoring of family "Wajib' (obligation) to each other." (Rugh 1984:89-101)

Palestinian families in New York mirror a blending of the old and the new, the traditional and the contemporary. This reflects differences in generation, birthplace, gender and education. In order to understand this blending, it is important to examine the Arab family patterns which provide the base and that influence what occurs in Palestinian families in New York. The influence of family forms from the Arab World for instance mate-selection, kin ties, authority patterns, male female interactions have produced distinctive patterns in the Palestinian family in New York.

#### **Emerging Patterns of Parent Involvement in Mate Selection**

In traditional Arab families, the institution of arranged marriages reflects the power of the larger family unit and the strict control of male-female interaction. Usually the selection of a spouse is made by parents, and then children are consulted and they can accept or reject.

Palestinian women in general are not allowed to date, although there are exceptions in some middle class families in which the parents are college educated. Marriages of Palestinians in New York are arranged in some way similar to what has been described. Most marriages are arranged among Palestinian Muslims. Marriage of a Palestinian woman to a non-Muslim or a non-Arab is frowned upon by the community.

The power of the extended family is reflected in this practice. Premarital dating and complete freedom of mate selection are not usual. The opinions of the prospective partners are given consideration, and may rule the final choice of mate, however. Even with a degree of increasing individual freedom, endogamy remains the prevailing practice particularly with regard to religious origin (Abu-Laban 1980).

Among Palestinians in New York, marriage age men are "shown" a "potential girl" either at a wedding, or family gathering or annual village or town convention. (Videotapes of weddings have become the latest method of finding out who has marriage age children.) Videotapes of other townspeople's weddings are circulated among the community within and outside the state.

Romantic-individualistic patterns of mate selection which may be preferred by the American-born generation still gives way to the traditional arranged marriage with the child having veto power in rejecting or accepting the potential partner.

In contrast to El-Kholys (1976) field study of Arab Americans which found that marriages were no longer arranged among Arab Americans and followed the American pattern of dating, courtship and romantic love. My fieldwork indicates that for Palestinian muslims living in New York, that is not

the case: Marriages continue to be arranged by parents in some manner approximating the traditional pattern of arranged marriages. The predominant pattern is a relatively strict control over male-female interaction especially when it concerns females. The rules are applied less to Palestinian men. If a Palestinian man dates or marries an American woman, although it is still frowned upon and becomes a subject for community gossip, it is quickly forgotten by the townspeople.

This may differ slightly among the better educated parents in New York who may allow their children a certain degree of freedom in the selection of a mate, as long as the mate selected satisfies the parents criteria which is - religion. One woman who told me at the outset that she considered herself "very progressive" said, "I gave my daughter her freedom ... as long as she brings home a Muslim boy..."

The pattern may also differ among college educated females and males who may reject the traditional way of arranged marriages. All the American born young men and women who were interviewed expressed their frustration at the idea of arranged marriages but felt obliged to accept it because their parents would not allow the dating alternative. They also felt that the pressure toward in-group marriage is stronger for females than males. Many voiced their

dissatisfaction and frustration at the freedom their brothers are allowed. In light of the permissiveness perceived by parents of American society, girls are more protected. Second generation young women feel that their parents have a more conservative attitude than they would if they were raising them in Palestine. They also are more protective of their female children than their male children. A typical response was made by one twenty year old woman, "My brother is allowed much more freedom than I'm allowed. He's allowed to go out with his friends...and stay out late while I have to stay home and help my sisters with their homework."

For parents fear of losing complete control makes parents prone to tolerance of the son's behavior in terms of staying out at night. Parents attitudes towards daughter however are much more restrictive.

The traditional Arab family is patriarchal and emphasizes sex role differentiation. Women are socialized to be dependent and submissive vis-a-vis male members of the family. The domestic role is stressed for women and from an early age, young girls are expected to assume responsibilities around the house. In contrast, young boys are given greater freedom from numerous responsibilities in the home and they are also given freedom to explore the larger society (Al-Hamdani, 1971). Eventually however male children will conform and parents will arrange their marriage as well. One respondent, a twenty

six year old college graduate, who was born in New York, was introduced by his family to a "suitable girl" but he rejected her as a potential partner because as he explained, she was "too Americanized... did not speak Arabic and did not want to return to live in Palestine eventually." I saw him two months later and he informed me that he was going back to his hometown in Palestine to find a "traditional girl." His false assumption is that social patterns in Palestine have remained static and that the Palestinian girl who remained in Palestine held on to traditional values.

### **Changes in Women's Status**

The wives of the early Palestinian immigrants had stayed "back in the old country," raised the children, took care of the home and of all family affairs during the time their husbands came to America to make their fortune. In interviews that I conducted in the West Bank in 1993, several women spoke of the hardships of raising children on their own while their husbands were 'Fi Amerka' (in America). Some however, oversaw the building of new houses, and the purchase of land. One eighty five year old woman narrated how she had purchased dozens of acres of land, built two apartment buildings and several houses from remittances that her husband had sent her.

During the early 1970's it became more acceptable for women to accompany their husbands. One reason was the reconstitution of the community in New York and the fact that women were becoming more assertive and refusing to stay behind. The change in the social structure resulted from the changes of relations between men and women. It is now rare for a married man to come to the U.S. without his wife as the early immigrants once did. One woman told me that she had accompanied her husband when he came to New York 20 years ago, because she didn't want her children to grow up without a father, the way she and her siblings had done when their father had gone to seek his fortune in America.

Family remains an institution that is an integral part of the Palestinian immigrants life in New York and continues to exert influence on the identity formation of its members. However, the first generation Palestinians are beginning to complain that this influence is gradually diminishing as a result of living in America. Their American- born children are beginning to challenge this influence. They are becoming more independent economically and therefore less likely to rely on the family for economic support. Many are not choosing to work in the family business or live in the same area that their parents are living in.

**CHAPTER V**  
**NATIONALISM AMONG PALESTINIANS IN NEW YORK**

In this chapter, the Palestinian community living in New York is assessed in the context of its relationship to the Palestinian cause and to the nationalism of its members. As a result of the 1948 and 1967 Israeli occupation of their land, Palestinians realized that returning to the homeland was practically impossible. Palestinians in the United States have realized that preserving their nationalism in the diaspora is vital for their survival as a people.

According to estimates by Palestinian organizations in the United States, there are approximately 150,000 Palestinians living in the United States and of those, approximately 40,000 live in the New York Metropolitan area. They are immigrants, students, diplomats, grocery store owners, mothers, fathers and children who are building and maintaining a united community halfway around the world from their homeland. They are resisting assimilation, preserving their traditions and clinging to their identity as Palestinians. For them the relationship with Palestine remains basic to their existence and continuity as a group. Palestine is a state of mind, a concept and a homeland for the Palestinians of the first generation and the second generation

living in America. "Exiles from history and homeland" is what the poet Mahmood Darwish (1987) has called his people. Darwish ascribes the term "exiles from history and homeland" to the Jew as well. Fawaz Turki (1972) a Palestinian writer and historian has commented on the recreation of a Palestinian in exile:

" The social structure of the Palestinian family, whose atmosphere engendered a deep and constant hope for the return to Palestine, and the official discrimination against the refugee himself, created pressures that served to perpetuate the notion in the mind of the young Palestinian that he was the member of a minority, thus enhancing his Palestinian consciousness. In his home a Palestinian child, whether born in Beirut, Amman, or Damascus, would be instructed to identify himself as a Palestinian from Haifa or Lydda or any other town that had been his parents' birthplace, and his own experience would constantly remind him of this." (1972:39)

According to Portes and Rumbaut (1990) immigrants who come to America fleeing dictatorial regimes tend to develop a different kind of politics. Their situation is one in which political concerns may or may not play a primary role in the life of the community, as with other immigrants. "Instead, politics is at the very core of refugee communities and is apt to remain so for many years. Militant opposition to the regime that expelled them and an enduring commitment to oppose it is what sets refugees apart from other immigrants. Even in defeat, this common political ideology tinges their process of incorporation into American society and tends to produce novel social and economic outcomes." (1990:114)

A thirty eight old man whose family had been forced out of Lod (within the 1948 borders) and who was born in Lebanon depicts this feeling, "They deny me a Palestinian passport, a Palestinian flag... they deny me the piece of land that my ancestors lived on but they cannot deny my nationality as a Palestinian."

Although a large number of Palestinians came to the U.S. by choice, many cannot in fact return on a permanent basis to Palestine whenever they choose. This is especially true of Palestinians currently living in New York, who came from the West Bank for example. Those Palestinians in many cases, lost their "Hawiyah" or Israeli I.D which establishes residency status because they failed to return every year to the West Bank to renew their "Lasse Passe." Without a "Hawiyyah" they can only visit the West Bank on a three month visitor's visa. So in essence many Palestinians feel like exiles although a direct war may not have displaced them and Israelis did not expel them directly. One woman states, "I don't have a Hawiyyah because I couldn't go back home with the kids every year ....but not having a "Hawiyyah does not make me less of a Palestinian- it makes me more of a Palestinian because of that and it makes me struggle even more."

While conducting field work, several Palestinians told me that they had paid 10-30 thousand dollars to procure a "Hawiyyah" because they had lost residency.

According to Portes and Rumbaut (1990), throughout the history of immigration, the characteristics of sending countries have also made a significant difference in shaping the politics of the first generation as well as the timing of its shift into American-based concerns. Immigrants in the past or present may have come from stateless nations, divided lands contested by warring factions or occupied by a foreign power; hostile states, dictatorships that oppressed the entire population of their countries or singled out the immigrants won group for special persecution; consolidated but indifferent nation-states, which neither promotes nor acknowledged the emigrants' departure or states that actually supported and supervised emigration, regarding their national's communities abroad as outposts serving their country's interests.

These diverse origins interact with contexts of reception to give rise to different political concerns among the foreign born that mold, in turn. the politics of subsequent generations. Depending on this variable geometry of places of origin and destination, immigrant communities may be passionately committed to political causes back home, either in support of or in opposition to the existing regime; they may see themselves as representatives of their nation-state abroad; or they may turn away from all things past and concentrate on building a new life in America (1990:97). Applying this to the case of Palestinians living in New York,

the continued occupation of their land has only increased their resolve for self determination and liberation.

According to Gellner (1964), "Men do not in general become nationalists from sentiment or sentimentality, atavistic or not, well-based or myth founded: they become nationalist through genuine, objective, practical necessity, however obscurely recognized." (1964:168). So if we were to discern some kind of 'objective necessity' to explain nationalism among Palestinians in New York, it would be the struggle for liberation and independence.

Minogue (1967) considered nationalism a three stage process: 1) The stage of legend-making in which "Nationalists turn every patriotic event into a piece of nationalist legend" (1967,26): This is a period in which the nation becomes aware of itself as a nation suffering oppression. It is a time of casting around for a cultural identity. The material for these legends is the history of the community in question. In applying this to the Palestinians in New York, without exception all expressed their pride of the "Intifadah" and it's accomplishments. A fifty year old man who had visited his family in the West Bank in 1992 proudly stated, "I saw a ten year old child close the entire town of Ramallah down. He would go around to every shop and say "close up" and they did ... the children did what the PLO and Israel could not do."

2) The second stage is the centerpiece of nationalism, it is the time of the struggle for independence. The struggle may or may not have an obvious moment of beginning, but it usually has a point of termination. Since 1948 that moment has been the liberation of Palestine for Palestinians. According to Minogue the actual content of the struggle varies enormously. It may involve terrorism, or full-scale guerrilla warfare, or there may be riots and demonstrations. Or the work of struggle may be a continual process of peaceful political negotiation. But again, the vital thing is that it should provide a legend of heroes backed up by the resilience of national virtues. But this stage is vital for national self-respect.

3) The third stage, he calls the process of consolidation. Sometimes this stage hardly exists at all. It is seen in economic terms. It believes that the nation can only be consolidated once it has become a developed economy.

Palestinians in New York are the supporters of the Palestinian struggle for a homeland even in New York, Israel's strongest supporter. Palestinians in New York cope daily with the difficulties of being not only a racial minority, but also a political minority in a region they perceive as being dominated economically, socially and politically by Jews.

One 43 year old teacher who teaches mathematics in a private school in Manhattan in referring to living in New

York,

"It's so anti arab- so anti Palestinian that it forces you to feel your "Palestinianity." You can't ignore it- so you have to say I have to connect with my arabnesss or with my palestinianess because it is just too overwhelmingly negative against you.... I think because of this Jewish-pro-Israeli stance ... in America in general but New York specifically. .... that makes me feel more a need to connect to my ethnic background. I think I would feel less need for it if I were living in a less hostile place"

The Palestinian-Americans see themselves more as exiles in the true sense of the word, than immigrants. They enjoy the benefits of the U.S. economy and they say they appreciate a system that rewards their hard work. But most believe that they can never become real Americans that they must never become so Americanized as to forget their homeland. Abu-Hasan is a 48 year old man who came to New York twenty five years ago. He has been going back with his family to his hometown of El- Bireh in the West Bank every summer for the past twenty years. He says that he realizes it is costly but he explained that he was "investing in the political education" of his children.

"I don't want my children to ever forget who they are or what we went through as Palestinians... I take my children back every year because I want them to know that is our home and I want them to see what the Israelis are doing to our people."

Palestinians living in New York see their lives in the United States as an interlude, a waiting time, in which to build a successful business and keep the family safe until they can return to a Palestinian state.

Despite their acceptance of the PLO as their sole representative, most Palestinians living in New York are not the radical activists or machine-gun-toting terrorists many of their American neighbors suspect they are. They are more eager to lead relatively quiet and private lives and succeed economically than to openly fight the U.S. government or the American Jewish community amongst whom they live.

For many Palestinians living in the United States, the belief in the "return to a liberated homeland" results in a transient non-assimilationist attitude toward the United States, at least among the immigrant and first born generation. The sojourner attitude of the non-settlers toward their existence in New York, lends itself to a particular lifestyle which eschews participating and assimilation in the host society. Such attitude leads to the formation of a closed community and a social organization that serves as a buffer between the immigrants and the host society. The immigrants' reluctance to cut off ties to their home community and most especially the pressures that have been put on them by their people in Palestine to support them over the past forty-six years have maintained and widened the gulf between themselves and members of the American society. The result of the immigrants' anti-assimilation attitude is a preoccupation with events taking place in the home society as opposed to events in the host society. A fifty year old

grocery store owner after relating to me the political events of the past week in the West Bank, explained how he got information about the West Bank: "I watch CNN but the news here is biased, I don't trust it... Once a week I call relatives and friends back home and they tell me what's going on."

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The American- born second generation are proud of their ancestral roots and their heritage but realize that America has become part of their existence. A 20 year old college student who is very active politically illustrates this in a statement, "I am a Palestinian but I am also an American ...I grew up in New York and no one can take that away from me."

Palestinians living in New York are now experiencing a moment of crisis in their existence and in how they think about their future. The peace agreement signed between the PLO has impacted their lives in New York. Many who have established homes and businesses in New York are now contemplating returning to Palestine, others are more skeptical about the agreement and the return. And there may be an emerging third group composed of people like the twenty year old college student who was born and raised in New York. They will have resolved that America is their home. Perhaps only a minority of Palestinians would opt for "going back home" but many would still need this state as a focus for

identification. The question as to how many from the first and second group will actually return if they were offered a chance remains to be seen. Research on other sojourner populations in the United States (e.g. Central American refugees) suggest that fewer will return than think they would like to do so now.

### **Social organization of the emerging Palestinian community in New York**

Palestinian identity in the United States continues to be kept alive, sometimes through the transplanting of local communities from the West Bank via family chain migration. Palestinians in New York identify each other by the village, town or district they come from in the "Old country." Someone is "Khalily" (from El-Khalil) or "Kodsi" (from El-Quds or Jerusalem) or "Haniny" (from Beit Hanina).

A large number of the Palestinians living in the New York metropolitan area originated from the two West Bank muslim towns of El-Bireh and Beit-Hanina. Village identity is strong for these Palestinians. The village of origin remains clearly the central focal point of their ethnic identity. Despite being scattered across the United States, people from these two towns of origin have been able to keep close ties especially through the formation of "Jamaiyat" or "compatriot

societies" as described below.

Distinctions by town and region in Palestine are important and meaningful to most first generation Palestinians. The leading factor in preserving the social structure of social relations was and remains bloodline (reference). In America, Palestinians continue to marry within their clans as well as to aid the family and to benefit from its' economic support. Tightly knit communities exist in part due to their preference for marrying within their own village or town-- (an overwhelming majority of people marry within their own town in the case of El-Bireh and Beit-Hanina). One informant explained,

"the preference is to marry our sons and daughters to others who come from the same town. At least you know who their family is ... what kind of family they come from and who their father, grandfather is...That is important to us. If that is not possible then someone from a neighboring town.. but never an American ... we would never allow that."

A 23 year old woman confided that her parents, "would prefer that I marry someone from our town back home and would really have a difficult time if I married someone from Syria or Egypt even though they are Arab and muslim."

Regional ties and loyalties have led to the founding of compatriot societies whose goal was to reconvene immigrants from the same region at least occasionally, to exchange news and information and reminisce about old times in the ancestral village or town. One such society is "Jamiat El- Bireh

Falastine" (El-Bireh Palestine Society). Founded in 1982 by a group of expatriates in Cleveland, Ohio with the expressed goals of holding the exile community together and continuing the ties with the hometown. The basis of this solidarity are a common pride of origin and strong love for the home town. It is expressed in a series of commitments to which the members are expected to submit. They include at the minimum payment of the annual membership dues, making monetary contributions for projects in the home village and participation in the annual convention. The organization publishes a newsletter with items of information on the political situation in the West Bank as well as more intimate news such as births and deaths among their members; conducts national elections for its officers; and holds an annual convention in a different state each year.

A typical agenda at the annual convention includes, a political report on the situation in the West Bank and Gaza, discussion groups, a drafted response letter to the PLO leadership in reference to a particular event for example: the Israeli invasion of Lebanon or the closing of Universities in the West Bank by the Israeli military. Board elections are held, and activities for American-born teens are organized; and the three day event ends with a banquet.

Many immigrant groups have developed mechanisms which diminish acculturation and assimilation contacts to an

absolute minimum by organizing "ethnic enclaves." These groups have encapsulated themselves in self-sufficient neighborhoods where their social and economic life have been almost completely independent of majority interference (Swan and Saba, 1974).

Palestinians have not sought an ethnic enclave in New York. Swan and Saba's (1974) study of Christian Palestinians living in Florida found that Palestinians did not see a necessity of confining themselves within a close ethnic neighborhood community. I have found that this also applies to Palestinian Muslims living in New York. Palestinian Muslims as well were sufficiently familiar with the institution, economics and social aspects of the Western World to achieve a comfortable adjustment without finding it necessary to segregate in an "ethnic village." They have, however isolated themselves in other ways from the larger American community: A twenty two year old graduate student in referring to her parent's generation:

" .... they tend to hold on to a lot of social structure that they brought with them, years ago when they first came... they tend to have a more traditional view of what the daughter's role is and then what the wife's role is. So they're much more secluded. Even if you see girls going to school you don't see them out looking for jobs, you don't see them trying to be economically able to stand on their own two feet. They stay in their parents house until they get married, and then they go to their husband's home."

There is still some resistance to social interaction between unrelated men and women especially if the interaction is in a non public event and there is no parental supervision.

The moral connotations that interaction between men and women once had has decreased. Separation by gender during weddings or parties is rare. The social context and social setting is what determines whether the interaction will be accepted or not. Therefore a business setting, a community event, a political rally in which men and women interact, will not be condemned. However, if the woman was to show any public display of affection in her interactions with a man, her behavior becomes a topic of gossip among the townspeople. The experience of a twenty two year old college student illustrates this point. She complained that she had encountered a lot of resistance from parents when she tried to recruit young women to participate in a "Dabke Dance Group" - a traditional Palestinian dance group. She explained that because the rehearsals were at night and because the group also included boys, the parents refused to allow their daughters to participate. "I don't know what the parents thought ... that I would corrupt their daughters or something..."

She eventually recruited three other women whose parents she said were "progressive."

The Palestinian community in New York does not exist in a geographically bound structure though there are neighborhoods with high Palestinian density such as Bay Ridge, in Brooklyn. The mosque and the wedding hall, however,

constitute the ecological and social space for the emerging of the Palestinian-American community. In these locales, the bulk of Palestinian communal life takes place: the religious services, the weddings, the funerals, the lectures, the bazaars, the meetings, etc.. Zenner's (1985, 124) very eloquent comments about the Jewish community are equally applicable to the Palestinians:

"The synagogue, home observances of festivals, Jewish community centers and the like help demarcate a Jewish symbolic arena in both time and space. While many, if not most, Jews only move in and out of the arena a few times a year, others remain in the arena for a wide range of (MISSING) . While there is no corporate Jewish body, the activities within the arena and the movement through it indicates that American Jewry retains its vitality."

The Palestinian community in New York consists of social networks of families, friends, acquaintances, as well as institutions and organizations. The "life blood" of the community however flows through personal conversations on the phone, through visits between family and friends and through the general desire to keep in touch with "people from back home."

For some, the traditional social structure is clearly reinforced by participating in family events such as weddings and funerals.

One sixty year old man explained that it was important to keep the ties between the townspeople wherever they were, "I have attended weddings and funerals as far as California...It is

alot of expense but worth it because in the long run who do you have but your townspeople... No one is going to stand by you in a crisis but "awlad baladak" or your own people."

Persistence and continuity of all the events and flavor of the home village, reactions -- the status etiquette, program of entertainment, visiting ritual and spatial arrangement of individuals in relation to each other in public places and private homes recreates in the finest detail the same kinds of events that occur in home-gatherings in Palestine. Disputes are still settled by "Sulha"- a peace made between two parties instead of courts. People involved in a dispute seem to realize that they are in one way or another obligated to each other and to the community to resolve their differences through "sulha." Out of fear of being drawn into a conflict that may tear the family and the community apart, relatives and particularly the elders have an immediate interest in mediation. Rugh (1985) asserts with regard to the Egyptian family experience, "people avoid having unresolved tensions within their circle of intimate connections. One reason is that when tensions exist the person loses the full potential support relationships provide; the person is unable to face the world with a cohesive group at his or her back."(1984:105) Mediation in the Middle East is held in high esteem and is considered an honorable task. A 63 year old man from a prominent family in El- Bireh and

living in Brooklyn for the past thirty five years is constantly called upon to be part of a "group of elders" mediating different disputes including: issues of marriage, business or family problems. He explained the reason people choose "sulha" over courts:

"We don't believe in the court system for certain things because it really doesn't make for goodwill among the disputants ... they will eventually have to live in the same society."

#### **Political origins of network**

In the past the ideological thrust of Palestinian nationalism both in Palestine and in the Diaspora, including the United States had been consistently secular. For years prior to the Intifada the four secular-nationalist organizations active within the West Bank and Gaza were: Fateh (the main faction of the PLO), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and the Palestinian Communist Party (PCP). The latter three are leftist groups. Palestinian politics in the United States was conducted in terms of these organizations. These groups operated in the United States organizing meetings, distributing literature and organizing demonstrations. They had their Palestinian constituencies of activists and supporters in the U.S. Palestinians in the United States were divided by their affiliations to each

group, with some supporting Fateh the main faction of the PLO and others supporting more leftist groups such as the PFLP and the DFLP. Palestinians living in New York had viewed those activists as their representatives within the PLO and within the occupied territories. One forty year old woman in referring to the different factions in New York and the meetings they organized,

"Our fights and differences were about the form of resistance to the Israeli occupation ... we felt empowered by them (referring to activist leaders) we felt that we had a say in the decisions that were being made in Tunis and that we were participating in the political process... although we were thousands of miles away from Tunis."

The Islamic groups in contrast to these secular political organizations emerged in the West Bank during and after "the Intifada." The major Islamic group, " Hamas " (or the Islamic Resistance movement, which was the Palestinian branch of the Muslim brethren), and a smaller faction, "Islamic Jihad", aimed to establish an Islamic state in Palestine and, perhaps later, throughout the Arab Middle East. They rejected the nationalists' aim of a secular, religiously pluralistic state (Taraki, 1989).

There has been an increasing support for Islamic groups among Palestinians in New York as an indication of frustration with the P.L.O leadership even by those who define themselves as secular nationalists. The support however only fulfills a need for some Palestinians. The vacuum created by the failure of the PLO to secure an "honorable liberation" of Palestine seems to have encouraged certain segments of the

middle class and the lower middle class to resort to religion. According to Barakat (1993), other conditions have contributed to the revival of Arab religious fundamentalism as a political movement: enduring economic crises, social anomie, distorted modernization, deliberate manipulation and even sponsorship of religious movements by some governments, and tyranny of the state over civil society." (1993:169) However, this growth in importance of the Islamic movement in Palestine and among Palestinians living in the United States should be seen not in isolation but as part of the increased appeal that such movement have enjoyed throughout the Arab and Islamic world since the late 1970's.

The Islamic movement offers Palestinians a social and political vision different from other nationalist groups. The Islamic instruments of action are mosques. Thus in terms of a program of political action, what emerges is a vision based on a non-PLO and in some respects even an anti-PLO ideology of religion intended to give support to the ideology of nationalism. (Migdal, 1988)

Recently, Palestinians living in New York have become increasingly polarized between what some within the community term progressive (nationalist) and reactionary (religious) currents. But even those who support the progressive nationalists seem to be confused on where they stand. They

perceive themselves as being pulled in both directions. It is often difficult for Westerners to understand how deeply Islam enters into all aspects of everyday life of Palestinians living in the United States. For many of the Palestinians I interviewed, identification with Islam even when its belief, rituals and ceremonials are ignored or abandoned, remains an important way of defining themselves. Even the secular nationalists are contemplating the role of Islam in the creation of a Palestinian national bond. According to Kimmerling (1993), during the course of the Intifada the future role of Islam came into question. "Even the most secular and nationalist figures appropriated cultural symbols that had strong Islamic resonances." A forty three year old businesswoman who had initially identified herself as a "Palestinian nationalist" and "not religious at all" stated, "I think Hamas is the only one with a political agenda right now but I want a Palestinian state not an Islamic state (in the West Bank). Hamas has a political program- It has a social program and that's what makes a difference. They're opening up schools where its' doctrine is being taught. It is still doing political action... It has women's organizations ... So it's more organized."

Another thirty nine year old woman explained Palestinian's "return to religion", "There's a strong trend toward that kind of thinking (religion)...when life gets to be too much and there's too much oppression ...people naturally turn to religion.. Wherever the Palestinians have gone they have been oppressed..if not by Israel then by Arab regimes... We were oppressed in Lebanon, we were oppressed in Jordan and lastly

we were oppressed in Kuwait."

A forty year old homemaker explained the increased attendance in mosques in New York by comparing it to the same phenomenon in the West Bank:

"The last time I went (to the West Bank) I saw a strong trend or change in the social situation. There's one moving back towards Islam and toward Hamas because ... it's a very strong political organization.... It's more than a religious organization. It's the only organization that is continuing to do a political program as far as attacks against the Israeli occupation. While the other political organizations "Fateh" and "Jabha" (P.F.L.P.) have really calmed down. There is alot of internal fighting. The Palestine Popular Front is questioning its own existence after the fall of the Soviet Union. Fateh -- half of them believe in what Abu Ammar (Yasser Arafat) is doing the other half doesn't believe in what he's doing but at the same time they feel that they still have to support him.. There's a lot of confusion."

#### **Who speaks publicly for Palestinians in New York**

Recent events in Palestine, including the Intifada, and most recently the signing of the peace agreement between Yasser Arafat and Israel, have contributed to the state of confusion in which Palestinians in New York find themselves.

Until recently most political leadership in the Palestinian community in the West Bank as well as in the United States came from the middle and upper class elite- professionals such as teachers, lawyers and physicians. Since December 1987, an "uprising" "Intifada" of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip under the auspices of organizations such as the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising and The Islamic Resistance Movement, Harakat al-Muqawamma al-Islamiya-

( Hamas ) has dominated the politics of Palestine. As a result of the Intifada, many young men from the refugee camps of the West Bank and Gaza have ascended to leadership. In the period leading up to the Intifada, West Bank and Gaza leaders had not been given any power by the PLO leadership. The Intifadah enabled the masses to influence the PLO directly and strongly. Fourteen months after the Intifada, Salah Khalaf, a member of the PLO's Central Committee, asserted that:

"... a new generation grew up. And this generation in fact does not know fear, is free of complexes that we have lived with in the Arab World. This new generation learned accurate organization from the Occupation itself."

The Intifada started a new phase in the development of Palestinian nationalism. According to Don Peretz (1993) "It shifted the focus of attention and the center of decision making from leaders in the diaspora, such as Arafat and the PLO Executive committee, to the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza." The Intifadah consisted of a new generation and a new leadership rather than the traditional notables from the middle and upper middle class professional elite. Many formerly unknown individuals, both men and women, from refugee camps and the working class were in the vanguard of the uprising.

Cobban (1991) notes that communication from West Bank and Gaza leaders "could no longer be downgraded by the PLO leaders as has sometimes been the case before December 1987."

Teitelbaum and Kostiner (1989) confirm this point: "not only had the Palestinian movement become a mass movement but, its' political center of gravity had shifted." The momentous changes "at home" have led many Palestinians living in America to question whom they view as their spokespeople or representatives. Increasing numbers of Palestinians living in New York perceived the Tunis based "outside leadership" to be doing nothing while the so called "inside leadership " the "children" of the Intifadah, were confronting "the enemy."

The Israeli-P.L.O. mutual recognition pact, signed September 13, 1993, drew public opposition from different secular and religious groups and individuals in Palestine, including the Islamic fundamentalists groups such as "Hamas." Most Palestinians living in New York were also opposed to the peace agreement. The failure of the Palestinian leadership to consider the concerns and interests of the Palestinians both in the West Bank and in the Diaspora had undermined the credibility of the peace process for most Palestinians. Palestinians living in New York were no exception. Most perceive this neglect as a betrayal.

The principal focus of political identity has been nationalism but now the line between national and religious identities are becoming blurred. The two identities may begin to overlap as they have in many Muslim countries.

The Palestinian struggle for independence and self determination was at the core of the Palestinian exile identity for both young and old, first and second generation Palestinians. When Palestinians saw that struggle being relinquished by the P.L.O. leadership, many in New York felt a state of confusion and a crisis. That struggle at the heart of the Palestinian identity in the Diaspora was fast becoming a thing of the past. It was being relegated to secondary importance. For Palestinians in New York this may in turn lead to a search for a new identity.

With Palestinians becoming increasingly disenchanted with Yasser Arafat and other top P.L.O. leaders, representatives of the P.L.O at the U.N. were no longer seen as representing the hopes of the people. Palestinians living in New York believed that they had capitalized on Palestinian suffering to achieve their own ends and had compromised the Palestinian struggle for a homeland.

Palestinian intellectuals such as, Edward Said , a professor of English and comparative Literature at Columbia University in New York (who was also a member of the Palestine National Council (P.N.C.)-- the Palestinian government in exile) and more recently Hanan Ashrawi, a professor of English Literature at Bir-Zeit University in the West Bank were prominent advocates of Palestinian rights in the west and

played a special role in the nationalist movement. However, they were never seen as representing the Palestinian people in the West Bank or the Diaspora. They had a specific task and that was to articulate the "Question of Palestine" and bring the Palestinian struggle for a homeland to the forefront of World Politics. Palestinians in New York did not view them as an "effective" new Leadership. They seemed little connected with the masses both in New York and in the West Bank and they were perceived to be following whatever emanated from Tunis.

#### **New York Palestinians adapt to change in the Middle East**

For Palestinians living in New York, the recent events in Palestine have put them in a state of flux and confusion. The Intifada accompanied by the diminishing control of the P.L.O., the signing of the Israeli- PLO peace treaty in 1993. All are events that have contributed to this state of confusion. Many feel betrayed by the PLO. One fifty five year old man stated: "The PLO no longer represents me. It didn't take my dreams and aspirations into account when Arafat signed the Peace Plan with Israel. What did we gain Jericho Gaza... nothing... all the children who died for nothing."

For years the dream of a homeland has impeded the natural progression of assimilation for Palestinians. After the War of 1948, many families and communities were torn by immigration. My research along with other researchers show

that the period since then has witnessed the reconstitution of many of these ties. Palestinians have often made "herculean efforts too preserve family ties and to maintain their sense of identity with the homeland." (Ghabra 1987:29)

To relinquish their right of return is utterly unthinkable to the Palestinians. Anton Shalhat the literary critic (1987) wrote "Usually a man lives in a certain place in the world, but for the Palestinians the place lives in the man." That sentiment sums up the Palestinians political position on the issue of return and bespeaks a profound feeling that unites the Palestinian people as a whole. However, does the dream of a homeland serve to encourage Palestinians to return and settle in Palestine or will it weaken their will to do so once it is actually realized.

Members of the first generation have been preparing for the possible return to a liberated Palestine and have obtained more tangible items such as property or houses in Palestine. They have sent money or brought money to their family in their towns and villages to build modern houses, which they planned to occupy upon permanent return to Palestine (most of these houses are upon completion occupied by relatives or left empty). Many of these houses may never be occupied by their owners, but knowing that they have a "home" in Palestine has given them peace of mind, and have made their life in the

Diaspora more endurable or at least justifiable. Now that peace may be a viable option Palestinians are being confronted with a possible choice. Palestinians living in New York are confronted with the decision of whether or not to go back. A 48 year old business man living in Brooklyn illustrated the new dilemma. He had built a 'villa' in his hometown of El-Bireh sixteen years ago. It had remained unoccupied until last year when he had decided that he wanted to go back with his wife and children to live there. After living there for four months he brought his family back to New York. He explained, "It was just too difficult... the children's schools .. the adjustment would have been difficult for them ... I don't know maybe next year I'll take them back."

More second generation women than men voiced their skepticism to me about "returning." The most often cited issue for women was "fundamentalism" in the West Bank. They know that many women in the West Bank had participated publicly in the Intifada (Giacaman & Johnson, 1989), in the belief that it would be the road to their own liberation (Gad, 1989). At the same time within a year of its outbreak, almost all with the exception of a few determined leftist women had donned the "Hijab" (headscarf) and the "Jilbab" (long coat) in the Gaza Strip at least in part because of pressure from the Islamic organizations. Early in that campaign, the male leadership of the nationalist groups offered little support

for those not wanting to do so (Hammami, 1990).

Palestinian women, especially educated and professional women are skeptical about going back to live in Palestine permanently. In their summer visits to their home societies, many of the respondents felt the pressure to conform i.e. wearing the Hijab, not wearing short sleeves in public. One forty-eight year old woman stated, "I covered my hair when I was there because I felt too different.. everyone around me was wearing the Hijab."

Some felt that the PLO Leadership had disregarded them thus giving the fundamentalists more power. The disregard for women is not surprising according to Peteet (1991), given the Palestinian women activists' experience in Lebanon. While taking a stand for more equality, in the end, the organization had "declined to be an arena for a radical restructuring of the gender order"; its first priority was in building national unity, not in dealing with the specifics of women's circumstances."

Although one woman insisted that she was determined to go back to "help in building the Palestinian state" she was not so sure that she would want her daughter to go back: "maybe if it's a country where I know my daughter will be treated fairly. I will encourage her to go back but until I see that

going on, I will not let her go through what I went through as a woman back there."

The emergence of a Palestinian-American identity is a recent phenomenon and one which many first generation Palestinians seem uncomfortable with and second generation Palestinians feel somewhat confused by. For second generation Palestinians, this identity allows them on the one hand to emphasize the common features of their history, culture and language and those common connections which bind them in their American experience on the other. The emergence of a number of Arab- American organizations at the national level has also acted to reinforce shared characteristics as well as a common identity (Abraham and Abraham, 1982). Some of these organizations include : The Arab American University Graduates Committee (A.A.U.G.), and The Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (A.D.C).

**CHAPTER VI**  
**CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

This dissertation attempted to explain the workings of an uprooted people-- the internal dynamics that would explain what was, and what would be for a people in a diaspora, whose land is Palestine. It sought to demonstrate how people who have maintained a diaspora existence, and a diaspora mentality or the consciousness of a people with a powerful sense of their Palestinian national identity, and of future generations who are trying to resist assimilation into mainstream America.

While there is no one description that can apply to the experiences of Palestinian communities in different parts of the world of their dispersal in both Arab countries and Western countries. Palestinians constitute different proportions of the populations in the host countries they inhabit, ranging from 65 percent in Jordan to below 1 percent in Iraq. Although Palestinians share Arabic as a common language and Islam as a common religion in the various Arab societies where they reside, and do not share a language or religion in the different Western societies in which they have come to reside, they have established different forms of social and political organizations, and different defence mechanisms to counteract their absorption and assimilation. In Jordan, for example, many Palestinians have been able to

achieve full citizenship including even participating in the Jordanian Cabinet, as a result of the inclusion of the West Bank in the Kingdom of Jordan after the "1949 Armistice agreement." In other countries they remain refugees or outsiders living in separate neighborhoods. Regardless their national identity has survived.

For decades, Palestinians have resisted assimilation in the countries they have come to reside in. This is especially true of Palestinians living in the United States. They have resisted assimilation preserving their traditions and clinging to their identity as Palestinians. They have maintained their identity as "Palestinians" with all the connotations that come with the word -especially as a people whose homeland was usurped, and are struggling to recover it. They have not cut off ties with their own towns and villages of origin. Everything that they accomplish in the United States is in preparation for their return to Palestine. So they have built houses, bought land and continue to be preoccupied with events back home.

For years the dream of a homeland has impeded the natural progression of assimilation for Palestinians. Palestinians living in New York, are now experiencing a moment of crisis in their existence and in how they think about their future. The peace agreement, signed between the Palestine Liberation

Organization, has impacted their lives in New York. Many who have established homes and businesses in New York, are contemplating returning to Palestine, others are more skeptical about the return, and the agreement. And there is a third group who have resolved that the United States is part of their existence and may never return.

Bonacich (1973) used the concept of sojourners to describe immigrants who do not plan to settle permanently and who keep alive an unusual attachment to the homeland and a desire to return to it. The sojourner attitude that Palestinians have, lends itself to a particular life style that avoids participation and assimilation in American Society. Studies have shown that such immigrants tend to sustain a high degree of internal solidarity in their community of exile, and avoid lasting relationships with members of the host society. They strive to maintain strong ethnic ties because these ties will persist in the future toward which a sojourner points. The future that these Palestinian sojourners are pointing to, is the homeland. Hence they will not embrace social patterns that are not compatible with their homeland culture.

Edward Said (1980), once expressed a concern with "... the form of Palestinian survival." Divided, dispersed, without a sovereign territory, distrusted, dehumanized, face

by hostility, Palestinians face a problem of maintaining identity. He comments, "a child born since 1948, therefore asserts the original connection to lost Palestine as a bit of symbolic evidence that the Palestinians have gone on regardless: He or she would have been born there but for 1948."

Their dispersion across the globe, whether in other Arab countries, or in America has kept alive an image of the whole of Palestine for most Palestinians. It was assumed by many, that the Palestinian problem would be absorbed by the community that they resided in. It has come to be realized that Palestinians perceive themselves as "stateless exiles." Palestinian nationalism has increased rather than diminished in the diaspora. Palestinians wherever they may be, whether they reside in Amman or New York, insist on their heritage as unique and their nationhood as the ultimate goal.

Their Palestinian experiences of occupation and dispersal have influenced the course of the development of Palestinian nationalism, and hence their identity wherever they have come to reside. Palestinian Americans, maybe extensions of their own "imagined communities." They manifest a deeply rooted sense of belonging to a past that may be susceptible to reinvention, while choosing an identity in the new land and possibly altering it to accommodate, but not forsaking that

connection to the homeland.

Hundred of thousands of Palestinians were expelled by the Israeli occupation. Some were encouraged to flee, others were impelled by conditions of hostility under an "occupation" to leave. Whichever way they left they have retained the memories of their homeland; their children cultivate a collective myth about it; and their ethnic communal consciousness is defined by it. Their political mobilization in the U.S. has focused around the desire to liberate this homeland and return to a homeland free of its occupiers.

Does the ethnic group provide a centrality and a focus in life for the individual? Or does the powerfully attractive mass American culture lurk constantly in the shadows and compete with one's strong desire for identity and rootedness in the ethnic community? A greater sense of ambivalence is much more evident and perhaps more stressful in the individual who seeks a greater degree of socio-economic mobility. In this same individual, there may be a profound need for community or for centrality. But the cultural void, and the lure and the prizes offered by mass culture all seem to exist outside the gates of the ethnic community. These are questions that need to be further explored.

If the Palestinians achieve independence, many

Palestinians in the diaspora will see the struggle as just beginning. Many Palestinians have acquired, as remnants of nationalist enthusiasm, the belief that independence was the solution to all problems. There are some features of Palestinian nationalism through which, although useful in the period of nationalist struggle, are positively retrogressive in the period of national consolidation.

Some political divisions are found among the Palestinians in New York. Among the factors that determine one's sense of Palestinian identity or stance are, whether the person is a refugee, whether one lived in a refugee camp before coming to the United States, whether one lived in an Arab country before coming to the United States, and the degree of economic success they have achieved in the United States. All are factors that contribute to this identity and will ultimately determine who will return to live in Palestine.

Despite differences between first and second generation Palestinians in terms of their political values it is difficult to find a Palestinian man or woman in New York who is not concerned about what is going on in the West Bank, the Israeli military occupation, or the Intifadah. Although many may have lived under the occupation before coming to the United States there were no pronounced differences between first generation Palestinians and the second generation-

American born Palestinians, in terms of their commitment to the "Palestinian cause."

In interviews that I conducted, the most prominent elements that emerged, were the sense that "they" as Palestinians are a stateless people and have few freedoms in their own country, that their land is being stolen and that most have no right to return to their country. This was reiterated by both young and old, first and second generation, and men and women. Every Palestinian I interviewed, emphasized the tragedy of the Palestinian people and how it has affected his or her life and split their families.

A large number of Palestinians in New York have prospered professionally, and economically. Although many express a strong desire to return to Palestine, they have investments in homes and businesses in the United States which may prevent them from returning. Others have also been preparing for the return home, by building houses in the West Bank. Some Palestinian Americans may return to live there permanently while others may not.

Would those who have not achieved the economic success of their fellow Palestinians be more likely to return? Will Palestinians whose homes are the refugee camps of the West Bank want to return? These are questions that will require

further research.

My conversations with Palestinians confirm what Edward Said noted in his book "After the Last Sky" (1986): While there is not a singular Palestinian experience due to the various and scattered fates of the Palestinian people, Palestinians do in fact form one community, "if the heart of a community is built on suffering and exile. The ethos of exile that is prominent among Palestinians in the United States developed out of shared history, shared suffering." Without a country, the 'ostoura' or myth which Turki (1980) defines as "the force in culture that binds the past-present axis in society," is all that Palestinians have. For some the non-acceptance of their present reality is because to them present reality is in Turki's words "insanity" and harmony could be achieved only by clinging to an "arrested past."

Charsley (1974), Barth (1969) and Leach (1954), all have emphasized the process through which identities are established, maintained, and changed. In this sense, Palestinian identity is derived from the sense of loss and exile and dispersal. The shared history, and their nationalism, are in a sense cultural constructs. The cultural concept of shared descent and history is present to different degrees in all ethnic categories and/or communities. Among Palestinians this concept appears to be

particularly strong.

It is this sense of being part of a scattered and displaced people that allows Palestinians to continually seek each other in the diaspora. In meeting another Arab the first question that is asked by a Palestinian in New York is where are you from? "Min Falastin" or from Palestine, is enough to initiate a social relationship. This strong sense of descent is a result of the conditions that caused them to emigrate. Whether they emigrated from Palestine or from another Arab country, their continuous displacement is what they have in common and what intensifies their identity as Palestinians. Their maintenance of traditional Palestinian values, their non-assimilation are an expression of the political ethos of keeping the Palestinian cause alive, even in exile.

Although many of the Palestinians I interviewed considered Islam to be a way of life, Muslim fundamentalists still remain a minority among Palestinians in New York. Few of those interviewed attended mosque on a regular basis. Although, in many parts of the Islamic world, there are signs of a reawakened religious consciousness favoring a return to muslim puritanism. In some countries Muslims, tempered by current developments, have advocated a greater involvement of Islam in the political and social structures of the nation and urged a re-emphasis on Islam as a principal factor in public

life. Meanwhile, more mosques are being built and younger people are going to them in larger numbers. There is a traditionalist and fundamentalist group that has contended that the Islamic doctrine has all the answers and provides an ideal and coherent model for society that was superior to that found in the West, whose values they reject as corrupt.

Although some Palestinians in New York, take into account the deep seated Islamic impulses and they themselves insist on preserving at least the essence of their traditions they do not consider themselves "fundamentalist." The reversion to traditional garb and the 'Hijab', for some Palestinian women in New York, and the embrace of traditional mores and customs is a sign of that. There are some who prefer more flexibility so that Islam can adapt to the changing times, and I believe that most Palestinians in New York fall in that category.

While they do not live in ethnic enclaves and do not see the necessity for doing so, there is a continuous flow of information from the homeland among Palestinians in New York.

Second and third generation Palestinians, born in the United States, feel pressured by both societies. Their parents and community urge them to resist cultural assimilation into American society, which many perceive as "morally corrupt." Yet their exposure daily to the American

style of life, freedoms, and the realization that they may remain in the U.S. may pressure them in the direction of acculturation and or rebellion against traditional norms. This is especially true of the young Palestinian women I interviewed. While they may appear well integrated into American society, they are continuously pressured to observe traditional Palestinian, Muslim society traditions along with the pressures of freedom in America. This is a source of frustration for these women.

The longer a diaspora is established the more likely are its members, especially the second and subsequent generations to move away from the old country and focus on local needs.

Ethnic groups as Barth (1969) and Leach (1954) and others have pointed out, are not necessarily, or even usually, cultural universes. When I began my fieldwork, interviewing Palestinians, it became evident that among the Palestinian population there were variations by gender and by generation concerning issues of return. However the symbols of their identity as Palestinians, were shared by all and these shared symbols formulate the basis of this identity.

Unlike other white ethnic groups, Palestinians have special reasons to hang onto their historical definition of self. Palestinians who are in the United States, have

survived wars, displacement, occupation, and the unknown situation of whether or not they will regain their homeland. This places more responsibility on Palestinians in the United States to perpetuate their culture.

Palestinians became politicized by dividing along ideological lines of the Palestinian struggle. But will this collective interest in politics change once "statehood" is realized? Will this diaspora consciousness weaken with the passage of time or once a homeland is established or does the homeland focus, become more embedded in the collective consciousness. Will Islam become the new focus? These are questions for further research.

The Palestinians I interviewed, talked about the intensity of their Palestinian identity. There were common themes that they reiterated over and over again - they were "proud" of their Palestinian roots, they had been "displaced as a people by the Zionists," and "they would return to their homeland one day." Although some claimed dual identity, as Palestinians and as Americans, they felt that their Palestinian identity was central to their self conception.

Frederick Barth's (1969) classic essay on the social construction of ethnic boundaries is one of the landmarks in the discrediting of the notion that culture and identity are

essences inherent in racially and geographically distinct ethnic groups. In opposition to the "exoticist essentialism" of many anthropologists of his day, Barth argued for the social determination of the boundaries distinguishing one ethnic group from another. The current wave of post modern textualism, with its emphasis on "imagined communities" (see Anderson, 1991) and the "invention of ethnicity" (see Sollors) goes even further. There is much to be gained by acknowledging the constructed character of all categories of culture, politics and knowledge including identity and ethnicity. But many post modern textualists have gone too far in the direction of regarding culture as a domain to be understood in relative isolation from social determinants, and some varieties of post modernism have dismissed the relevance of ethnic and national identity altogether. For Palestinians more than any other ethnic group in the U.S., nationalism and political solidarity with the home society, are important factors in their ethnic identification.

In the literature on nationalism and ethnonationalists, ethnic communities, and immigrants, the "diaspora" phenomenon is given little attention (see Cobban, Shafer, Smith, Rotschild). Through the ages, the word Diaspora had a very specific meaning: the exile of the Jew from their historic homeland and their dispersion throughout many lands, signifying as well the oppression and moral degradation

implied by that dispersion. Applying it to Palestinians in the United States is a metaphoric designation. However a collective diaspora consciousness among Palestinians in New York, cannot be denied.

This study has suggested criteria and techniques appropriate to the analysis of Palestinian ethnicity.

#### **Creation of a Transnational Community**

Palestinians living in the United States do not see themselves as immigrants in the United States. They did not forego their relationships and attachments to their home societies. They continue to participate in their home society despite living in the United States. By building and establishing bases for themselves in Palestine with hopes of return. Even though many may have acquired the citizenship of the country they had inhabited, they still rebuilt on the basis of an identity based on shared uprootedness, dispersal and shared national aspirations.

The attachment to a specific piece of land or to a little house almost has a mythical quality to it. But if their attachment started with the piece of land or the house that their parents lived in, it moved on to take in the appearance of a collective identity. It is this attachment and association rather than actual possession of the land that is

important in their ethnic identification. In my interviews I found that the attitude toward land has not changed much. As in other landed societies there is a strong attachment between the villager and the land he owns.

Palestinians seem to have reacted to dispersion by holding tightly to their family and village ties. Both men and women, first and second generation talked about the importance of family ties and connectedness to their towns and villages of origin and for their continuity as a people. The clustering of social networks around village and place of origin and kinship produces a predictability of the relationships and is based on the implication of future interaction.

For Palestinians celebrating a wedding, mourning a death elicits a reciprocal response. Each person knows that the fulfillment of these obligations will result in a reciprocity in his time of need. Those who do not follow the ways of the group are informally isolated by the majority. Persistence and continuity of all the events and flavor of their home society in terms of marriages, funeral rituals, and visiting rituals, regenerate in the finest detail the same kinds of events that occur in home gatherings in Palestine. Disputes are still settled by "Sulha" a form of mediation instead of American courts.

For Palestinians, transnational family ties have been a backbone of Palestinian social structure. The persistence of extended family networks across borders are important to their persistence as a people. Although family remains an institution that is an integral part of the Palestinian immigrants life in New York, some perceive this influence as gradually diminishing as a result of living in America.

An example of asserting this common national identity is when a national association- The Palestine El-Bireh Society- a Palestinian American association that was established in the United States to bring the town community together in the America, invited members to it's annual convention in the home society in Palestine in 1995. The invitation read:

**EL- BIREH, PALESTINE SOCIETY -USA****MARK YOUR CALENDAR**

THE EL-BIREH, PALESTINE SOCIETY ANNUAL CONVENTION WILL BE HELD IN EL-BIREH, PALESTINE, NAMED, **THE CONFERENCE OF RETURN**. ALL PALESTINIANS FROM EL-BIREH ARE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE 1995 ANNUAL CONVENTION

**OFFICIAL CONVENTION DAYS**

WED., THUR., FRI-JULY 19,20, 21 1995

Pre-Conference Program July 16-18

Post Conference Program July 22-24

THE CONVENTION WILL ADDRESS THE FOLLOWING ISSUES

1. OUR SOCIETY - PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE
2. THE ROLE OF THE DIASPORA IN BUILDING EL-BIREH
3. PROBLEMS OF THE YOUTH RETURNING TO EL-BIREH
4. EL-BIREH ORGANIZATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS PANEL
5. DISCUSSIONS OF THE OSLO AGREEMENT

Holding the annual convention in Palestine, is a significant illustration of how Palestinians in the United States are asserting their identity as Palestinians, and reaffirming that they are one with Palestinians living in Palestine. By convening this meeting in the West Bank they are saying "We are Palestinians from El-Bireh who because of "the occupation" temporarily live in the U.S." They are asserting their authenticity as Palestinians who live "temporarily outside," and have as much right in the political and social development of their country.

I believe that the economically more successful of Palestinians in New York will continue their involvement in Palestine. With the possibility of statehood, there will exist more opportunities for Palestinians to cooperate economically with Palestinians in Palestine compared with individual investments. This may not agree with Gordon (1964) who outlines a theory to explain the different rates of assimilation. Gans (1979), also argued that after several generations, ethnicity becomes largely 'symbolic.' I do not believe this to be the case for Palestinians in New York. Their ongoing relationship with their home societies will persist. The second generation American born Palestinians have also been investing in Palestine, by building homes to live in as well as houses to rent. In general, for the Palestinian -Americans, the continued maintenance of contact with kin in the home society has been significant even beyond the first generation.

Another factor that reinforces the persistence of a community is their high endogamy rate (Goldring, 1992). Gordon (1964) highlighted the inward focus of marriage as one sign that a "subgroup" will persist over time. Continued family involvement in arranged marriages among Palestinians in the United States is one component that will assure its persistence.

The visions of return and liberation have motivated and sustained the Palestinians in New York, but who and how many members will return to a Palestinian state, remains to be seen. Even dispossessed people are unlikely to leave their stable environments their businesses, investments, homes in the United States for an unknown future. In the past two years, some Palestinian Americans, have gone back and some have sent their wives and children back. Others have been debating the ideological character of this state. This is especially true of educated Palestinian women. These women voiced their doubt about returning to this state if its character is fundamentalist.

For the second generation Palestinians, going back may be a step into the unknown. Although they are proud of their ancestral roots and their heritage, they realize that America is also part of their existence and identity.

This study sought to demonstrate how a people who have maintained a diaspora existence and a diaspora mentality, and the consciousness of a people with a powerful sense of their Palestinian national identity are trying to resist assimilation in America.

There is no one description that can apply to the experiences of Palestinian communities in different parts of

the world of their dispersal. Palestinians in New York perceive themselves as exiles, and have held on to their national identity. Their dispersion has kept alive an image of all of Palestine in their minds.

There is no typical Palestinian in New York. Palestinians have adapted well to the United States and at the same time have remained a traditional people in many ways. In fact, both of these realities exist at the same time for Palestinians. Most importantly, however, is that their identity as Palestinians, lies at the core of their existence.

**APPENDIX**

Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Location of interview \_\_\_\_\_

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

- 1) What is your occupation?
- 2) What is the highest grade of school you have completed?
- 3) Where were you born?
- 4) Where were your parents born?
- 5) Where did you grow up?
- 6) Where have you lived?
- 7) What was the most common ethnicity in the neighborhood you grew up in?
- 8) Growing up, were your neighbors Palestinians?
- 9) When did you come to the U.S.?
- 10) Did you live anywhere else in the world before residing in New York?
- 11) Who in your family were the original immigrants to U.S.?
- 12) Where did they come from? (West Bank, or other Arab country or European country)
- 13) How old were they when they first immigrated?
- 14) Why did they leave ( \_\_\_\_\_ ) country?

- 15) Why did they settle in U.S.? In N.Y?
- 16) How would you identify yourself if someone asked you?  
Pal. American- Palestinian, Arab American etc.?
- 17) What is your religion? Do you practice?
- 18) Marital status:
- 19) Number of children:
- 20) What is the language spoken in your house?
- 21) If you speak Arabic - How did you learn the language?
- (If respondent has children) -- Do your children speak Arabic? How did they learn it?
- 22) Do you maintain a correspondence with people in Palestine? Friends ? Relatives? Other?
- 23) Do you or someone in your family send money to family and relatives back home.
- 24) Do you have another residence in Palestine?  
If not -Do you stay with relatives when you go back to visit?
- 26) Would you describe yourself as working class, middle class, or upper class?

- 27) Would you prefer that your children marry within their religion, their ethnicity? Why?
- 28) Can you describe some of the Palestinian customs or traditions in your life (like food, music, cultural events)?
- 30) What holidays do you and your family celebrate?
- 31) Are there any specific holidays that you celebrate because you are Palestinian?
- 32) Do you feel more comfortable being around Palestinians than non-Palestinians. Why?
- 33) Do you live in a neighborhood where other Palestinians live? Or where Arabs from other countries live? If no, why? If yes, why?
- 34) If you were to move, would you try to find Palestinians to live near or socialize with?
- 35) Have you ever visited the country of your parents?
- 36) Who told you about your ancestors?
- 37) What ethnic group are your closest friends from?
- 38) Have you or anyone in your family sponsored or been instrumental in bringing someone to the U.S. from Palestine?
- 39) Who do you maintain contact with in Palestine? Relatives? Friends?

- 40) How often do go back to Palestine
- 41) Reasons you go back:
- 42) Do your children socialize with other Palestinians, other Arabs or Americans?
- 43) Do your children attend Arabic school? Religious school?
- 44) Do you attend mosque?
- 45) To what extent are you involved in political functions:
  - Arab political functions in general;
  - Palestinian political functions;
  - American political functions?
- 46) To what extent are you involved in religious functions with other Arabs; other Palestinians; other Americans?
- 47) To what extent are you involved in social functions with: other Arabs; other Palestinians and/or Americans?
- 48) Is it important for you to maintain an identity apart from other "Arab" nationals? Why?
- 49) How comfortable are you living in an American culture?
- 50) Living in the U.S, do you feel torn between two cultures?
- 51) In 10 years do you see yourself living in the U.S or in Palestine?
- 52) What factors would make you move back to Palestine?

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