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Main Researcher

Mohammed Mosheer^{1,*}

The Iconography of a Nation: National Identity Construction in Palestinian Visual Representations

¹ University Name & City (Main)

Department of English, Faculty of
Literature, Islamic University, Gaza,

* Corresponding author:

e-mail address: Mamer@iugaza.edu.ps

Abstract

In the struggle for liberation and independence, imagery and visual representations are central to nationalist discourses and to national identity construction. Visual images of the nation become a revolutionary and mobilizing tool with the aim of rallying the nation behind a nationalist goal and shaping its collective identity. This paper aims to examine how Palestine is represented and imagined in various Palestinian visual representations including iconic images, posters and paintings. Based on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual communication grammar, this social semiotic study analyzes a number of images and posters produced by Palestinian artists in order to look into the constituent elements of Palestinian national identity and the 'homeland' as visually imagined in Palestinian visual discourse. The study shows that conditions of exile, dispossession and national struggle have been predominantly mapped onto Palestinian visual representations which are continually used to advance a grand national narrative and to assimilate individuals into an imagined community by stressing collective national themes. More social semiotic research should be devoted to the analysis of imagery and visual representations as they occupy a central place in the processes of constructing and asserting national identity and memory.

Keywords: visual representations – social semiotics – Palestinian imagery – visual grammar – national identity

أيقنة الأمة: تشكيل الهوية الوطنية في التمثيلات البصرية الفلسطينية

الملخص

في النضال من أجل التحرير والاستقلال، تشغل الصورة والتمثيلات البصرية دوراً مركزياً في الخطابات الوطنية ومفهوم الوطن. هذه الصور والتمثيلات البصرية للأمة والوطن تصبح أداة ثورية وتعبئة للأمة بهدف تحرير الأرض وتشكيل الهوية الجمعية. تهدف هذه الدراسة السيميائية إلى دراسة كيف يتم تمثيل فلسطين وتخيلها في مختلف التمثيلات البصرية كالمصقات والصور الأيقونية، حيث اعتمدت هذه الدراسة السيميائية على منهج الباحثين كريس وفان لوفين (2006) لتحليل الصور والاتصال البصري. وقد قام الباحث بجمع وتحليل مجموعة من الصور والمصقات، وذلك بهدف تتبع الموضوعات والتجسيدات البصرية التي غالباً ما يتم الإعتماد عليها في خطابات الهوية الوطنية الفلسطينية. وقد خلصت الدراسة إلى أن الصور والتمثيلات البصرية الفلسطينية قد ركزت على ظروف اللجوء والإحتلال والتهجير والنضال الوطني بهدف تعزيز السردية الوطنية الجمعية. وتوصي الدراسة بتكريس المزيد من البحوث التي تستخدم منهجية السيميائية الاجتماعية لتحليل الصور والتمثيلات البصرية لأنها تشغل حيزاً مهماً في عمليات تشكيل وتأكيده الهوية والذاكرة الوطنية.

كلمات مفتاحية: التمثيلات البصرية – السيميائية الاجتماعية – الهوية والذاكرة الوطنية – الأيقنة – الصور الفلسطينية

1. Introduction

"I said, what is a homeland? I was asking myself that question a moment ago. Naturally. What is a homeland? Is it these two chairs that remained in this room for twenty years? The table? Peacock feathers? The picture of Jerusalem on the wall? The copper lock? The oak tree? The balcony? What is a homeland? Khaldun? Our illusions about him? Fathers? Their sons? What is a homeland? ... I'm looking for the true Palestine, the Palestine that's more than memories, more than peacock feathers, more than a son, more than scars written by bullets on the stairs...." (Ghassan Kanafani, 2000, pp. 184- 186)

In the struggle for independence and nationhood, imagery and visual representations are central to nationalist discourses. These images and visual representations of the nation and the homeland become a revolutionary and mobilizing tool with the aim of liberating the land and crystalising a collective identity. A reservoir of meanings, symbols and images is, therefore, drawn upon by discourse actors to enlist the "nation" behind a national goal. Images and visual representations are widely circulated through digitization and photography (Cross, 2006), in mass media, publications, websites, public assemblies, processions, commemorative events, exhibits and other popular spaces. Their influence is deemed powerful as they contribute to the formation of ideologically-based political and cognitive models of the national "in-group" and in solidifying a national narrative that continues to be enacted, especially in times of crisis and war.

This paper offers a rare look into the Palestinian 'semiotic landscape' – to borrow a term from Kress and van Leeuwen (2006: 35) – which includes the range of images, paintings, posters and other forms of visual communication employed in the visual construction of a Palestinian national identity. It aims to examine how Palestine is represented and imagined in various visual representations such as iconic images, posters, paintings, artwork, photographs, and various other representations (for a critical discourse analysis of how Palestine is represented in verbal texts, see Amer, 2012).

2. Visual Images and National Identity

Nations are not accidental acts of human organization, but they have to be actively constructed by discourse actors who draw on those elements, real or imagined, which are experienced by members of the collective group they represent and whom they proclaim to defend (Amer, 2012). Thus, nationalists forge an image of the nation through promoting specific beliefs, values, language, images, myths, memories and symbols about a shared history and a living present, all of which shape a collective memory and national self-identification (Smith, 1991:195).

Kress (2010) holds that visual representation is always partial motivated by the sign maker's interest (cited in Feng, 2017). Visual images of the nation have motivated meanings underlain by the social and political contexts in which producers and consumers of such images perceive the nation. They generally aim to reassert the unity of the nation and "give the concept of nationhood greater immediacy" (Baron, 1997: 105). In the case of national liberation movements, images become cultural tools for communicating nationalist ideas and mobilizing the nation behind a national cause. According to Messaris (1997), visual symbols, in comparison to verbal symbols, are evidently more effective in telling stories, transmitting values, evoking emotions, and persuading people (Cited in Sun, 2017). Rovisco and Veneti (2015: 273) point out that a large body of research on the interconnections between visual language, media environments and protest repertoires have shown how contemporary social movements and new activisms "use images and symbols to express their goals and identity, to mobilize new participants, to attract and shape media coverage and to win the support of a range of publics."

3. Palestinian National Identity

Like other nationalisms in several Arab countries, Palestinian nationalism was shaped by the extraordinary political and socio-economic circumstances at the turn of the 20th century, especially in the years that followed the end of *World War I* (WWI) and the beginning of British Mandate for

Palestine (1920-1948). Khalidi's (1997) cogent work provides a path-breaking analysis of the origins of Palestinian nationalism and the emergence of national consciousness, especially during these formative years. Khalidi (1997: 171) shows that much like other Arab national identities, Palestinian national identity was multi-layered and inflected by a multiplicity of transnational, regional and local loyalties, in particular Arabism and Islam, "Thus it would be normal for a Palestinian to identify primarily as a[n] Arab in one context, as a Muslim or Christian in another, as a Nabulsi or Jaffan [from the cities of Nablus and Jaffa in Palestine] in yet another, and as a Palestinian in a fourth." He shows that these constituent elements of Palestinian collective identity – Muslims and Christian religious attachments to the land, the conception of Palestine as a discrete entity belonging to a larger Arab or Ottoman whole, local patriotism, family and communal alliances, and the rejection of external British control over Palestine – were widespread before WWI and already pre-dated Arab Palestinians' violent encounter with Zionism (see also Kimmerling and Migdal, 1993; Muslih, 1987).

The new, grim realities of expulsion, dispersion and uncertainty following Israel's creation in 1948 heightened Palestinian self-identification and a shared sense of collective destiny. It was and still is, as this study also shows, that Palestinians' violent encounter with the Zionist movement – and later Israel – and their rejection of Zionist encroachment on their land that has mainly contributed to a heightened sense of national and political self-consciousness and helped solidify a Palestinian nationalist movement (see also Quandt, Jabber and Lesch, 1973). Within these significant circumstances, the Palestinians' desire for achieving independent statehood has been persistent since the earlier decades of the 20th century and continues to drive the Palestinian national movement.

4. Methodology: Social Semiotic Analysis

The study sees visual representations as a social activity that involves social construction of social reality and actors and, therefore, they are a site for the expression ideological meanings, and that "Visual structures are never merely formal: they have a deeply important semantic dimension"(Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006:47). Cross (2006: 174) sees iconic images as "a legitimate genre of sign" which are "characterized by strong ideological association" and are therefore "worthy of study from within a semiotic perspective." She holds that "representational iconic images...need to be identified and distinguished if their unique power is to be appreciated." (p. 174). According to Rose (2007), semiotics involves studying how reality is articulated through the images themselves and that many semiotic studies tend to focus on the image itself as the most important site for the expression of socially-situated meanings and the effects images leave on society. Teo (2004) holds that semiotic analysis "concerns the communication of meaning as a dynamic and fluid process which transcends the linguistic sign, bringing together the agency, process, reception and effect of meaning."

Rodriguez and Dimitrova (2011) argue that the visual, much like verbal texts, can function as framing devices inasmuch as they make use of various rhetorical tools – metaphors, depictions, symbols – that claim to capture the essence of an issue or event graphically. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006:2) hold that both linguistic and visual communication express meanings "belonging to and structured by cultures in the one society." They see visual communication as always coded and that "Like linguistic structures, visual structures point to particular interpretations of experience and forms of social interaction." The meanings produced by photographers, painters, printmakers, designers, etc., are essentially socially situated meanings reflecting differences, congruities and contradictions which are part and parcel of the social life, that is, "Images reflect, represent and reveal a community's values, norms, culture and history" (Cross, 2006:185).

The visual semiotic analysis employed in this study uses Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) grammar of visual design adapted from Halliday's social semiotic theory and language metafunctions (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen 2004). Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) hold

that visual images, like language, produce three levels of meaning, namely, the representational meaning which involves patterns of representation of aspects of the world as it is experienced by people. They distinguish two kinds of representational meaning, one is narrative representation where narrative patterns "serve to present unfolding actions and events, processes of change, transitory spatial arrangements" (p. 59), and the second is conceptual patterns which "represent participants in terms of their class, structure or meaning, in other words, in terms of their generalized and more or less stable and timeless essence" (p.59). Narrative patterns are classified into four processes: "An action process depicts the action of a participant (e.g. running, hugging, and punching). A reactional process depicts a participant's reactions, typically formed by facial expressions (e.g. smiling, crying, and frowning). Verbal and mental processes are constructed by dialogue balloons and thought bubbles respectively (Feng, 2017: 454). On the other hand, conceptual patterns are classified into classificational, analytical and symbolic process.

The interactive meaning involves enacting patterns of interactive relations between different types of participants in a visual design. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) propose three ways to examine the interactive meaning of images through eye contact/gaze (demand or offer), social distance (intimate, social, or impersonal), realized in close-up, medium or long shots of participants, and point of view which refers to the angles used in an image—frontal angles imply attachment to the viewer, and high and vertical angles suggest power over the viewer. The compositional meaning relates to "the way in which the representational and interactive elements are made to relate to each other, the way they are integrated into a meaningful whole" (p. 176), and is realized through three interrelated systems: information value (given or new, ideal or real, important or less), salience (achieved through size, color, tone, focus, perspective, overlap, repetition, etc.), and framing.

Therefore, the study will employ analytical categories from Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) in the analysis of a selection of iconic images and posters, with an emphasis placed on the symbolic use of these images and its intersection with the social and political contexts of viewing. Particular emphasis is mainly placed on how represented participants are portrayed through salient visual resources, mainly eye contact, social distance, angles and colour, in addition to how accompanying verbal messages and symbols are used in the representation of participants and events. This is in line with Feng's (2017) observation that analysts are guided to focus on essential representational features for their purposes in a principled manner and to make interpretations based on the systematic semiotic descriptions.

A number of widely circulated iconic images and posters were selected from a large corpus of images, posters, drawings and visual representations produced by Palestinian artists posted on websites, blogs, social networks, official sites and activist forums, among others. Many of these images numbering over 1,000 images were already compiled by a website¹ that contains various Palestinian artwork produced over the years. Here it is worth noting that the researcher's emphasis was not so much on the representativeness of the sampled photos and posters, as this would be quite difficult given that there are perhaps thousands of photos and posters available, but it was the researcher's interest in seeing how Palestinian cultural identity and themes were visually represented in a number of key images and posters.

5. Data Analysis: Memory and Remembrance

Unlike other nationalisms where myth is sometimes mixed with reality, the uniqueness of Palestinian nationalism is that there is no need to invoke myths of an ancient past to affirm its claims, but rather the freshness of the national experience and the ongoing lived realities of individuals living under the occupation or in exile are permanent sources for articulating, rearticulating and consolidating national self-identification. That is, Palestinian nationalism is

¹ <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/>

driven by the intimate intertwining of the present reality and experiences of dispossession, displacement and statelessness of most Palestinians since Israel's creation in 1948.

Thus, there is a constant repetition and reiteration of the themes of loss, dispossession and longing for the homeland which are all defined against and in reaction to their rather violent encounter with the nationalist Zionist "occupier". Sayigh (2007: 3) holds that recreating Palestine through memory was both a natural response to their forcible eviction from the land and a process of passing to younger generations the home keys and possessions which were their own. The political implication of this memorialization process is a denial of Zionist appropriation of the land and a rejection of Zionist attempt to erase their cultural and physical ties to Palestine. In what follows, I examine a number of widely circulated images and posters drawn upon and the themes and meanings they express.

5.1 The Refugee and the Tent: Al-Nakba

At the core of Palestinian national imagery is the *Nakba* (Catastrophe in English), given the dramatic circumstances of dispossession and displacement that the Palestinians experienced as a result of Israel's founding during and in the aftermath of the War of 1948. Thus, Palestinian art has been a key tool in popularizing the symbols of this suffering and dispossession. Social conditions and political and historical realities are mapped onto images and visual expressions and become a defining element in the visual construction of national identity. Visual representations memorializing this grand national plight have contributed to the construction of a common past – a main strategy identified by Wodak et al. (1999) – shared by all Palestinians and defined by conditions of dispossession and displacement since 1948.

The visual representation of sufferings and tribulations faced by the Palestinians during the *Nakba* is exemplified in the following iconic image in figure (1) as the researcher often sees it displayed in Palestinian assemblies, websites, publication and exhibitions to epitomize the Palestinian *Nakba*. In terms of the representational meaning, the old woman is the only actor, or as Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) termed the 'represented participant' who is presented against the backdrop of a refugee camp. By occupying the centre of figure (1), the woman is the key information of this image making salient not only her facial expression and hand gestures but also her feelings and attitudes. Thus, this old woman metonymically represents the experience of Palestinian refugees and the traumas and dispossessions of the 1948 War. As it is impossible to represent all members of a category in visual images, all visual representations of categories are necessarily metonymic (Feng, 2017). She has come to be seen as representative of the Palestinians who were displaced and became refugees as a result of the war; that is, an old female who represents the innocent old lady who is guiltless, yet she was treated horrifyingly and was displaced. A mere civilian who was mistreated at an old age, and so she is a good representation of all vulnerable categories of the society. This old woman takes a central, yet she takes a passive role as a refugee woman who is undergoing the horrific experiences of being a refugee. With the refugee camp appearing in the background, the old woman is clearly overwhelmed by extreme sadness and shock. A reactional process of expressing extreme shock is also depicted in the hand movement as the woman covers her mouth, which is a culture specific gesture pointing to a feeling of profound sadness and fear.

The interactive meaning is particularly significant, especially the character's gaze that directly addresses the viewers and so establishes an imaginary relation with them (Kress and Leeuwen, 2006: 89) to emotionally relate to the experience of the refugee woman. According to Cross (2006: 177), "Modern style of representational iconic images is a demand-type image (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006), which is created by the strategic positioning of image elements towards the front of the frame/screen, as well as by the subject's gaze which, in contrast to the gaze of iconic subjects in the past, attempts to engage the audience." Here, the viewer is drawn into the world of the refugee by looking at the woman's distraught gaze and the depth of her expressions. Her eyes

are almost sealed, as she is suppressing her feelings and thoughts, or trying to wake herself up from such nightmare. According to (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 117), “when represented participants look at the viewer, vectors, formed by the participants’ eyelines, connect the participants with the viewer. Contact is established, even if it is only on an imaginary level”. This ‘demanding’ type of addressing the viewer directly engenders a powerful sense of empathy and identification with the represented participant and makes the viewer understand the woman’s feelings well.



Figure (1) Palestinian Woman Refugee

The interactive meanings are further accentuated by the choices of distance, angle and colour. Note that this is a frontal, medium close-up shot that allows the viewer to focus on the woman’s face and emotional reactions and positions the viewer in a close personal distance to evince intense emotional responses from the audiences, such as compassion, solidarity and/or identification with her and that of the Palestinian refugees. The affordances of the distinctive features of colour in this figure add up to the broody and gloomy aura this image evinces. The black and white, de-saturated, flat colour both accentuates the naturalness of the image as possibly taken during or immediately after the war and enhances the overall effect of coldness, anguish and gloom (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2002; 2006:233).

Thus, this image involves the discursive work of constructing “a community of victims” (Wodak et al., 1999: 212), that is, the creating of a national solidarity bound together by conditions of statelessness, occupation and a protracted national crisis. This relates to what Lindholm Schulz (2003:2) referred to as an identity of “suffering”, i.e., “an identification created by the anxieties and injustices happening to the Palestinians because of external forces.”

This is also illustrated in Figure (2) which is a multimodal text combining verbal and visual elements produced as a commemorative text marking 60 years of Nakba. The text contains a real picture of refugees during the 1948 War and symbols and text that affirm the themes of the Nakba discussed above. Turning to the representational meaning, the main purpose of the poster may well be to rally support to the themes of Nakba. The poster conjures up a number of interrelated themes, for instance, the theme of Palestinian ownership of the land, Palestine, as symbolized by the land deed, known in Arabic as Tabo. At the time of the 1948 Nakba, many displaced Palestinians took with them their Tabo as proof of their ownership of their lands and homes. Thus, it has become a common motif in Palestinian national discourse concerning the right of refugees to return to their villages and towns of origins. The strong hand fist is tightly and firmly holding the Tabo document, thereby asserting a Palestinian motif of not relinquishing the right of return. The hand is part of the land, and so an emphasis is placed not on only people’s attachment to the land, but also the land is attached to the people who are the natives of the land. The picture is crowded with refugees,

especially women and children, walking from a distance which signifies that a big number of people were displaced at the time of Nakba.

The verbal text written in Arabic and English accompanying the image "The Nakba at 60" and "[Palestine] Not for sale" both in red and white colours reaffirms the same theme. With the purpose of informing, educating, mobilizing, agitating or appeasing the people, poster producers rely heavily on easily-identified and well-understood visual text to convey the intended meanings (Sun, 2017: 10). This vocative collaborates with the relatively close-up shot and the natural, life-likeness of the visual image to create a strong appeal which reaches out to the readers in an almost palpable way.



Figure (2) Expulsion of Palestinian Refugees

Thus, through the deployment of visual and textual elements in this poster, themes of exile, loss and displacement pervade this kind of images, as the symbols and motifs are aimed to preserve the national memory of a people dispossessed and forced to flee, and they are indicative of a national strategy of constructing national sameness (Wodak et al., 1999: 212). The referents in this image namely the Tabo and these refugees and their descendants are not imaginary but they exist in external reality, hence heightening the realism of the poster. The point of view here is a wide-angle shot taken from a rather low angle includes a snapshot of a real image depicting fleeing women and child refugees displaced at the time of 1948 war. This snapshot takes the centre of the poster intensifying the realism of the themes of the poster and imposes a strong presence for the strong hand fist and the fleeing refugees.

In terms of colour, the poster reflects the faint hues of the colours of the main represented participants in the picture – the land deed, the hand and walking refugees are in the pale colour, while the verbal text is saliently displayed in red and in white colour against a black background. This contributes to a strong sense of reality and credibility of the participants for the viewer. Using the red colour for number 60 and for 'Not for Sale' highlight the horridness and bloodshed that happened over the past 60 years and that the Palestinians are willing to die for the sake of Palestine.

5.2 Palestinian Women

A multiplicity of images emerges reflecting the different social and political circumstances which the Palestinian woman experiences. This multiplicity indicates a harmony and consensus over the roles of women in the Palestinian society and liberation movement. This is due to the contexts of occupation, war and loss which have imposed on the Palestinian woman unusual roles which are manifested in the representations of women in Palestinian visual representations. The contributions of women in the Palestinian national struggle inspired many artists.

A closer look at how the Palestinian woman is depicted in images and popular arts, one can notice a multiplicity of woman images. Prevalent in Palestinian iconic imagery is the representation of Palestine as a woman who is always portrayed as a young woman in her late twenties or early thirties, being this strong, pretty-but-firm and sad-looking woman. She is represented in a beautiful contemplative sense. This consistency is revealing and perhaps points to a collective imagining derived from the Palestinian collective experience and cultural traditions.

Figure (3) is a case in point which points to a typical representation of the nation as a sad-looking peasant woman. She is wearing traditional embroidered dress and atop the head standing two peasant figures, a man and a woman, against a background of a Palestinian village. This image is produced on the occasion of Land Day commemorating the killing of a number of Palestinians by Israeli occupation forces in 1976 when the Palestinians were protesting the expropriation of their land.



Figure (3) Palestine as Peasant Woman

As is the case in other territorial nationalisms, it is common to use peasants to signify close attachment to the land. Note that she is never scarf-less thus confirming the cultural identity of the Palestinians. It is worth noting that peasants comprised the vast bulk of Palestinian refugees in 1948 and hence it is not uncommon to find visual representations of Palestinians including women as peasants. This agrees with Baron's contention that "Many nationalisms celebrate male and female peasants as 'culturally authentic'. Peasants have a concrete tie to the land, which is, after all, central to the claims of territorial nationalism" (Baron, 1997: 112). The distinctive clothing of Palestinian women has been closely linked to the struggle for the recognition of Palestine. The antique thoub (women's robes) is a prized family possession that reinforces the connections between clothing, land and identity. The fabric, shape and embroidery generally tell the region the women come from. Wearing this traditional dress and the two farmers above her head holding a sickle and a pitchfork may point to the notion that the woman is carrying the legacies of her ancestors and the willingness on their part to farm the land and die for it.

In terms of the interactive meaning, this is a frontal, medium close-up shot showing the head and shoulders of the main character in the figure. This narrows the social distance between the reader and the subject, constructing an imaginary affinity and solidarity, and invites the reader to identify with the persons depicted in the poster (Teo, 2004). The frontal angle says, as it were, 'What you see here is part of our world, something we are involved with' (p. 136). The contact between the represented participant and the viewer in the images is created by the participant's gaze, which is read as a 'demand' type of look, thereby invoking the meaning of calling on Palestine's men to rise up to defend the 'motherland'.

There is also the portrait of the woman representing the nation's armed struggle for independence. In Figure (4), the woman as a freedom fighter, as feda'i, occupies the centre of the

image. She is in her 20's, wearing modest attire. Palestine appears as a woman, as a victim, yet stands defiantly against the occupier, thereby reflecting the reality of occupation that is portrayed as the aggressor and the stranger. Particularly noteworthy in figure (4) is the many roles that Palestinian woman takes, e, g., she is a woman rebel carrying her rebel's rifle, but also a mother holding her baby, she is also a prisoner in Israeli jails and she is the wife of a Palestinian prisoner. That said, the woman carrying the fighter's rifle is the nucleus of the information on which all the other characters are attached. This centrality foregrounds her above the other represented participants and in this way brings the viewer into her 'world' with the ostensible aim of relating to her experience and role. This is also realized by the camera angle and distance, as this is a frontal, medium close shot which narrows the social distance between the reader and the subject by constructing an imaginary affinity and solidarity, and invites the reader to identify with the persons depicted in the poster (Teo, 2004).

The verbal text of the this image clarifies and complements the image's visual content as it points to the different roles and challenges Palestinian women take on in the course of their people's struggle for freedom and independence. In other words, this image taps into notions of resistance and national pride through underscoring the heroism of the Palestinian woman in the struggle for liberation.



Figure (4) Palestinian woman as fighter

The effect of the raised AK47 rifles is highly interpersonal, as this is one of the most popular and widely used assault rifles that has become a symbol of resistance. As the main actional process is that of the woman holding the freedom fighter's rifle, she is presented positively as an active member in a community struggling to regain its dignity and freedom.

The notion of 'honour' and men protecting their women is a notion deep-rooted and dominant in Arab culture and is consistent with cultural norms. Furthermore, grammatically, the word "Palestine" in Arabic is a feminine noun that refers to a female. Baron (1997: 121) points out that the representation of the nation as a woman is intended to tap into notions of honour and entice male viewers to the duty of defending and honouring the nation; that is, "these images were intended to generate a romantic attachment to the nation and encourage a fusion with it. By depicting the nation as a woman, nationalists hoped to stimulate love for the nation and draw male youth to the cause." Such metaphoric representation entices the viewers to reclaim the "lost and violated land" so as to prepare the children for the liberation struggle. Invoking the image of motherland and sexual rape by foreigners is common in nationalist discourses. For example, Thaiss (1987) shows that during the period leading up to the Islamic revolution in Iran, the US was portrayed as "an adulterous infidel who raped and mistreated Iran, which was depicted as a mother – as a mother country." (Cited in Eriksen, 1993: 108). The visual representations of the women

reflect the main social roles of the Palestinian woman and the local traditions and practices. These images celebrate the life of heroic women who are positively presented as active, steadfast, firm-but-sad looking women embodying the nation and its national struggle.

5.3 Jerusalem

Jerusalem (*Al-Quds* in Arabic) is at the centre of Palestinian nationalism and figures quite extensively in Palestinian nationalist discourses and imagery. The frequent references to Jerusalem (often symbolized in an image of the Dome of the Rock) reflect the strong connection with a unique religious and historical place. These references mirror similar tendencies in similar nationalist discourses in the search for the nation's roots in a glorious past. These visual expressions make assertions to the place of Palestinians in history by appealing to their role as the trustees and vanguards of these Muslim and Christian holy places and appeal to Palestine's ancient and eminent place and religious significance. There is a frequent appeal to Jerusalem with its religious importance and history and the deep-rooted presence of the Palestinians in Jerusalem throughout history. This particularity burst into a fully blown sense of national identity as the national aspirations of the Palestinians at the turn of the twentieth century collided with British imperialist plans and Zionists' biblically-invoked statehood claims.

This Palestinian particularity is visually represented in figure (5), which is one of the most widely circulated posters. Visual images that circulate pervasively are central to social life, given that they are used by both image producers and consumers as interpretive schemes or structures (Loseke, 2012, cited in Sun, 2017: 11). In terms of the representational meaning, the poster is a portrait depicting a Palestinian fisherman carrying Jerusalem on his shoulder, thereby emphasizing a theme in Palestinian discourses of the religious significance of Jerusalem and Palestine and the responsibility of Palestinians for protecting and defending it on behalf of the Muslim *Umma* (pan-Islamic collectivity). In Palestinian folkloric traditions, when someone carries something on shoulders, it denotes shouldering responsibility for it. The caption underneath that says in Arabic "Jerusalem is ours, the land is ours" emphasizes a sense of ownership and responsibility of Jerusalem. Such visual representation is emotionally powerful for it invokes religious and romantic sentiments of resistance, holy struggle and the drive to protect the homeland. Further, Jerusalem and its surrounds that are being carried is in the shape of an eye which is a powerful message that they will be protected. In Palestinian culture, if something is in a person's eyes, it means that it is well protected at any cost.



Figure (5) Palestinian Carrying Jerusalem

Note also that key represented participant is an older man, which may be construed as an allusion to the Palestinian people's age-old responsibility for protecting Jerusalem over the centuries, and that wherever they go, Palestinians shoulder the role of the guardians of the holy city.

Further, his back is bent, thereby emphasizing the heavy burdens due to defending Jerusalem. This responsibility is taken quite firmly as shown in the strong firm hands.

This old man, who is referred to in Arabic as the “camel of heavy burdens” is barefoot denoting that Palestinians are defined by realities and conditions of statelessness, exile, displacement, and constant movement. In other words, he represents the unity and shared destiny of Palestinians in that everywhere they exist, they face the same predicament and shoulder the same responsibilities. The portrait depicts a visual act, or what Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) refer to as an ‘actional process’ of ‘moving while carrying Jerusalem’ by the main protagonist which symbolizes the Palestinians’ constant mobility. This is eloquently illustrated by Said (1994: 115) that “Finally, you can see from Jean Mohr's pictures that the Palestinians are a people who move a lot, who are always carrying bags from one place to another. This gives a further sense of identity as a people.” Conditions of the Palestinians’ statelessness, constant movement and feelings of victimhood all constitute the Palestinians as different from others, as being singled out at airports, checkpoints, etc.

In terms of the interactive meaning, the poster is taken with an eye-level, full shot. This camera angle shows the represented participant filling the frame and is depicted from head to toe, while the background is slightly blurred out not showing much of the surrounding. This angle foregrounds the old man and what he carries and in this way the emphasis is placed more on the man’s actions rather than his emotional reactions, and in this way the viewer is brought into the imaginary world of the main character. In terms of the modality of colour, the natural colours and lighting of the image imbues the represented participant with a sense of realism and further brings the reader closer to the situation being depicted. The poster’s low saturation contributes to this cold, repressed and brooding atmosphere of the image. This representation suggests a strong commitment on the part of the image-maker to the ‘reality’ presented to the reader (Teo, 2004). The contextless background from which the main represented participant merges heightens the timeless and borderless nature of Palestinian mobility.

5.4 The Orange grove and the Olive tree: A Palestine Lost

In the discourses of most territorial nationalisms, the construction of national identity draws heavily on the notion of national territory and the homeland, whereby a number of motifs recur frequently in nationalist discourses centering on land and territory (see, for example, Smith, 1991:63). Land and territory have always been at the heart of the conflict between the Palestinians and Israelis, and the concept of the territory is most fundamental to both. In this light, the connection between the people and the land has shaped the Palestinian national identity, especially for a people who have shared experiences of dispossession, expulsion, dispersion, statelessness, marginalization and military occupation. These elements define Palestinian identity.

Thus, the Palestinian pastoral landscape has always captured the imagination of Palestinian discourse producers and imagery. Frequent references praise the beauty and richness of Palestine’s agricultural, pastoral landscape before the Nakba, and in this sense amplifying the loss that the Palestinians have come to experience. These references express an organic, perennial connection to the land which underlies a constructive strategy aiming at establishing a common national present of uprootedness and land loss (c.f. Wodak et. al. 1999). According to Lindholm Schulz (2004: 15), Collective memory in national(ist) discourses is intimately connected to place and geography, manifest in Palestinian memories of orange groves and olive trees. Since nationalism is ultimately an ideology relating to the distribution of territory, nationalism as an ideology also thrives on the meaning of ‘our’ nature, landscape and geography.

The olive trees and orange orchards figure extensively in Palestinian visual representations. These appeal to an imagining of Palestine as a "Paradise Lost". These images document life before the events of the 1948 *Nakba*, as the memory of Palestine is that of a place full of life, color, prosperity and happiness. The olive tree commonly symbolizes Palestinian rootedness in the land

and Palestinians' refusal to have their political and cultural identity erased. The olive tree has always been used as a potent form of nationalist expression. Therefore, it is not uncommon to find in Palestinian nationalist literature and popular culture frequent references to the olive tree. For instance, Figure (6) which is a real image of an olive tree against the background of Palestinian landscape quite lucidly points to Palestinian steadfastness and organic attachment of the Palestinians to their land and their persistence to hold on to it despite Israeli military occupation and oppression and its attempts to root them out.



Figure (6) The Palestinian Olive Tree

As there is no physical activity by the represented participants in terms of transitivity processes, the picture may be classified as representing an 'existential' process (Halliday, 1994), depicting a state of being rather than an event or 'happening'.

Turning now to the verbal sign in the poster. The themes communicated by the visual mode are reiterated in the verbal text, as it says in Arabic "We are as steadfast as the olive trees... never to surrender, never to lose dignity". Thus, Palestine is formed not only through the human, but also through the natural, i.e., through its rural environment with its trees, symbols and places which all formed the natural fabric of Palestinian environment. Thus, a prevalent image of Palestine is that of a "Paradise Lost" whereby "people's recollections of village life bring up a wealth of concrete detail that gives depth and solidity to the picture" (Sayigh, 2007: 2). Oranges are a central motif in Palestinian imagery the purpose of which is to glorify the splendor and the beauty of Palestine, thereby asserting a relation with the homeland as the beloved, of yearning to a paradise lost because of Israeli colonial occupation. Oftentimes Palestine is referred to in Palestinian literature as the land of oranges (c.f., Kanafani's *Land of Sad Oranges*, 1999). It involves a strategy of positive self-presentation which appeals to national sameness and uniqueness (Wodak et al, 1999).

Memories are still fresh given the immediacy of the Palestinian catastrophe and the present-day realities of the ongoing conflict with the Israeli occupation. The emphasis in Palestinian imagery on depicting the natural environment of Palestine is aimed to heighten the sense of collective loss of the homeland. Producers of these images are witnesses to these events and express real-life experience of a generation that went through the tribulations of 1948 War and the consequent dispossession, thereby affirming the memory of the place and the place of memory in Palestinian national discourses.

Take, for instance, Figure (7) below is a portrait that suggests a land of prosperity and paradise. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) note that portraits are 'conceptual' and 'timeless' aimed at capturing some timeless essence. Here the cultural and historical memories find expression in this nostalgic emphasis on the image of the orange grove. Here we find that the orange becomes a symbol to eulogize a glorious, virgin Palestine not violated by the foreign invader. This idea is also

found in Ghassan Kanafani's *The Land of Sad Oranges* (1999) that "the oranges that... would shrivel up if a change occurred and they were watered by a strange hand".



Figure (7) 'The Spring that Was'

As in the case in other territorial nationalisms, it is common to use peasants to signify close attachment to the land. This peasant environment is the core of the Palestinian society and the symbol of Palestinian identity. The representational meaning is partly expressed in the types of participants, processes and circumstances invoked in the portrait. The participants are clearly Palestinian peasants, women, children and families involved in the 'doing' of harvesting, gathering, telling stories and celebrating and in this way the image producer intends to capture a moment in time in the lives of pre-1948 Palestinians. The portrait, therefore, aims to accentuate a sense of connectedness and shared identity and nostalgia to a glorious past is used to rally up the nation behind a national idea and evoke empathy with the Palestinians. It aims to instill in younger generations who did not experience the displacement of 1948 an image of the "homeland" that once was there, and the environment in which the *Nakba* generation grew up.

The mode of colour adds to the perceptual truth the image producer invokes. The colourful, saturated tones of red, green, orange and white create a celebratory, calming, and refreshing tone that is in harmony with the image's predominant themes, and aims to emotively involve the viewer in this pictorial presentation of events. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2002), high colour differentiation and high saturation become signifiers of 'adventurousness', with differentiation standing for the absence of monotony and routine, and saturation for an intensity of feeling, for 'living to the full' (p. 359, cited in Teo, 2004: 196). They further add that the way a visual is presented can also encode this variance in commitment to the truth-value of what is represented in the visual sign. If a painting is depicted in rich, natural tones, it can suggest that the painter is committed to the reality of the painting. This image can be classified as 'high modality' according to Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) description of an artistic orientation, which suggests that the basis for 'degree of truth' in this image would be the extent to which it powerfully communicated a feeling or perception. In the image, the color, shapes, characters, background, activities look coherent with everyday perceptual reality.

5.5 The Keys

During and immediately after the Palestinian *Nakba*, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forced to leave their homeland (for a historiographical analysis of the 1948 War and *Nakba*, see, for example, Morris, 2004; Pappé, 2006; Shlaim, 1986) carrying with them the keys of their homes, as evidence of their property ownership in the pre-*Nakba* period, and as such the house key is a symbol of the Palestinians' dream that one day they will return to their land and homes. Today, the key represents memories of loss, dispossession and displacement, and the determination to be

recognized as refugee wishing to return to their ancestral homes. That is, keeping the keys symbolizes the right of Palestinians to return to their homeland. It is the 'dream of return' (hilm al-awda, in Arabic) that is a predominant theme in Palestinian national narrative.

In this respect, for a geographically dispersed people like most Palestinians who live in exile or in refugee camps inside and outside Palestine, many Palestinians especially younger generations do not have a direct contact with the physical "homeland" or a material memory of Palestine. Their relation to it, however, is "imagined" and constructed through discursive and non-discursive acts of memory, symbols and stories transmitted from older generations to younger ones.

As can be seen in Figure (8), the two hands – one for an older person and the other is the hand of a little child – both firmly clutching to the key visually represent this theme of cross-generational transmission of the dream of return, reaffirming a living memory of a lost Palestine. While there are no faces or people in the image, human agency is well represented in the two hands holding the key. The hands create an imposing presence as they metonymically refer to the generations of refugees. The key becomes an only remaining possession left of Palestine that was seized, as inheritance from the fathers to the sons. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) hold that "subject behaviors – actions and poses depicted in frames – create interaction between the viewer and the people shown in the images. These "image acts" pertain to the ways in which visuals make "offers" or "demands" from viewers" (cited in Rodriguez and Dimitrova, 2011: 55).

Thus, one actional process (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006) that seems to be communicated here is one of "resisting" to fall to a subservient reality created by the occupation and replacement that Israel managed to establish forcibly in occupied Palestine, and at the same time emphasizing a more concrete reality connected to a place, a time, a culture and a deep-rooted history at odds with the contrived reality of a military occupation. In words, the key in this image becomes a visual metaphor of themes of return and rejection of encroachment on Palestinian land. That is, the key refers to a symbolic process that is intended to record and construct reality as motivated by the image producer (Kress, 2010, cited in Feng, 2017). It is that fear of the erasure of the memory of the lost land that is quite dominant in these paintings and therefore one can find that the association of the key and old and young generations symbolically refer to the insistence on keeping the memory of the land on.



Figure (8) The Key of Return

In terms of camera distance and angle, Figure (8) is a frontal, close shot of the key which becomes the frame's focal point, thus visually asserting a strong attachment to the national ideas that the key communicates and inviting strong responses from the viewers to that effect. The viewer is made to

relate to the image, as the latter echoes the premises of the grand narrative discussed above, but also adds to them the emphasis on generational continuity and right of return to the homeland. Note that the Figure (8) is an “offer” type of image since there is no eye contact between the represented participants and the audience. It is a real image that invites the viewer to take the information represented.

Sun (2017) holds that no visual text exists in isolation, but only within the interrelationships between social and historical texts. For Palestinians, Palestine is not a mythical place that they yearn to, but it is a concrete memory and it is a physical place of which they still keep the door keys and land deed. Many Palestinians left with the keys and land deeds with them as proof of their ownership of their lands and as that their connection to the land is not a figment of the imagination. It aims to preserve the memory of the Nakba and affirm the right of return to the homeland. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006:47), images of reality are closely connected with the interests of the social institutions within which the images are produced, circulated and read, and therefore they have a deeply important semantic dimension.

6. Conclusions

The study has examined the visual representations of the memories, tribulations and symbols of national heritage which have contributed to a well-developed sense of Palestinian identity and attachment to the Palestinian ‘homeland’. It examined a clustering of motivated meanings which constitutes the grand Palestinian national narrative by looking into images, paintings, and other visual representations that are drawn upon are used to constitute and reconstitute the national group and define political and cultural sameness. This study has shown how conditions of exile, occupation, dispossession and a sense of belonging to the homeland are visually represented in Palestinian visual discourses.

The researcher demonstrated how Palestinian imagery sought to reify dominant narratives of the Palestinian past and present and how such images become synonyms for national, collective memory and identity. These images and paintings are characterized by their realism, emotiveness and colorfulness aiming to make an immediate emotional impact on the viewer. Further, these images also have socio-cognitive functions in that they underlie a process of shaping collective consciousness and memorializing the collective experience of uprooting and displacement.

What we see in these iconic images and paintings are the intertwining of pain and hope. Olive branches, keys to a destroyed home, the land deed, and the orange trees become symbols of Palestine lost. These images aim to preserve the past through portrayals of symbols and iconic images which idealise the notion of a Palestine Lost longing for redemption and remembered as a vibrant centre for cultural, political, social, spiritual and economic life.

Such imagining of the past has relevance to the present and continuously shapes the present identities. The multiplicity of motivated, socially-situated meanings as communicated in Palestinian imagery "can be viewed in terms of the social context in which meanings are constructed, or in terms of the underlying mythic elements which support a society's vision of itself and its history" (Bazzi, 2009, p. 21). As has been seen here in this study, the use of nationalist imagery has been used to crystallize a national character and rallying the nation behind a national purpose. Predominant characters in these images are the wretched, the wandering refugee, the enamored young female fighter, the suffering old woman, and young and old Palestinians. Oftentimes we find that these different themes and characters are interwoven in these iconic images such that one image contains more than one theme if not all of them, thereby embodying the Palestinian grand national narrative, asserting national identity and creating a form of counter-hegemonic discourse by portraying daily reality and suffering.

These visual processes and practices are well-entrenched in the national collective and are continuously produced and reproduced in the group's effort to assert its cultural, political and national space. That is, the national myths and symbols are created to unite the nation, reaffirm

national identity, and mobilize the people behind a national goal. These visual representations allow for a particular kind of identity to be transmitted from one generation to another.

Cross (2006: 189-190) points out that "Representational iconic images are capable of eliciting intense emotional responses such as awe or disdain and therefore need to be identified as well as deconstructed by the audiences they infiltrate. A visual and critical literacy is a tool that can assist in this process of deconstruction." It is, therefore, vital to devote more research into the analysis of the use of imagery in nationalist discourses so as to have a window on how visual representations are equally central to the mobilization of people. In a word, I agree with Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) that while written language has been the most highly valued and frequently analyzed form of communication, it is imperative to equally focus on other multiple means of representations including visual representations for the central and significant role they play in expressing the shared meanings needed to function in societies.

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