



Article

Palestine in the Cloud: The Construction of a Digital Floating Homeland

Hanine Shehadeh

Palestine Land Studies Center, American University of Beirut, Beirut 1107 2020, Lebanon; hs184@aub.edu.lb

Abstract: A widespread revolt during the months of April and May 2021 in the Palestinian city of Jerusalem, also known as *Habbet Ayyar*, responded to Israeli actions aiming to ethnically cleanse and force out residents from the neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem, where approximately 3000 people reside, and to limit the movement and entry of Palestinians to Al-Aqsa Mosque. These measures were met with an unprecedented wave of youth-led protests against the Israeli army, police, security agencies, and settlers. *Habbet Ayyar* stands out not only for its innovative and effective use of new media to amplify the protests beyond Israel's sphere of influence and control, but also for the unity displayed by fragmented Palestinians as they confronted Israel. By exploring the larger historical and geographical context of the movement that led to *Habbet Ayyar*, this article aims to understand how Palestinians have utilized, for the past 20 years, new media as a battleground—despite enforced digital colonialism—and how these media served to articulate and create what I call a *digital “floating homeland”*. The concept of a “floating homeland” is useful for exploring how the Palestinian virtual social movement has redefined and reconnected with Palestine beyond Israel's control and fragmentation. This digital homeland is constructed through new technologies that have reshaped Palestinian self-identification and allowed for a virtual and digital reconceptualization of a borderless Palestine.

Keywords: settler colonialism; Palestine; media; Zionism; history; identity

1. Palestine in the Cloud: The Construction of a Digital Floating Homeland

A widespread revolt during the months of April and May 2021 in the Palestinian city of Jerusalem responded to Israeli actions aiming to ethnically cleanse and force out residents from the neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah in East Jerusalem, where approximately 3000 people reside, and to limit the movement and entry of Palestinians to Al-Aqsa Mosque. The well-documented Israeli settler–colonial encounter in Palestine has innumerable dehumanizing episodes, and the looming evictions in Sheikh Jarrah are just one piece of Israel's larger scheme to annex all of Jerusalem. The Israeli authorities had put up metal barriers on the Damascus Gate Square while exerting pressure and violence on the residents of Sheikh Jarrah. These measures were met with an unprecedented wave of youth-led protests against the Israeli army, police, security agencies, and settlers. The April and May 2021 uprising in Jerusalem, also known as *Habbet Ayyar—April's Uprising*, stands out not only for its innovative and effective use of new media to amplify the protests beyond Israel's sphere of influence and control, but also for the unity displayed by fragmented Palestinians as they confronted Israel. Through hashtags such as #SaveSheikhJarrah, #SavePalestine, #GazaUnderAttack, and #FreePalestine, Palestinian online users disseminated messages from which new aspirations of participatory action emerged, allowing Palestinians to mobilize new media in novel ways and facilitate grassroot movements.¹

By exploring the larger historical and geographical context of the movement that led to *Habbet Ayyar*, this article aims to understand how Palestinians have been able to somewhat crack Israel's matrix of control by utilizing, for the past 20 years, new media as a battleground—despite enforced digital colonialism—and how these media served to



Citation: Shehadeh, Hanine. 2023. Palestine in the Cloud: The Construction of a Digital Floating Homeland. *Humanities* 12: 75. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h12040075>

Received: 27 April 2023

Revised: 15 July 2023

Accepted: 26 July 2023

Published: 1 August 2023



Copyright: © 2023 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

articulate and create what I call a *digital* “floating homeland”. I borrow the term “floating homeland” from Haitian writer Edwidge Danticat’s *Create Dangerously*, which she employs to describe a Haitian non-submersible eleventh department that she adds to the already existing ten geopolitical departments. According to Danticat, this floating department is derived from a collective conception of an additional, yet purely ideological, homeland where Haitian immigrants and exiles reside following their dispersal into the diaspora (Danticat 2010). The floating homeland serves as an ideological space for survival and resistance, preserving the cultural identity of exiles through its connection to Haiti as the motherland. I argue that the sustained chains of protests in Palestine since April 2021, mushrooming out of a networked movement, have materialized in the Palestinian digital floating homeland. This article analyzes how a people, separated physically, legally, and militarily, were able to transcend the many colonial and factional divisions, by coordinating various forms of resistance through online platforms that eventually materialized in the unprecedented revolt that erupted in April 2021 across all historical Palestine.²

Edwidge Danticat’s concept of the Haitian floating homeland is grounded in the notions of scattering and being scattered, the scattering of the self, of the land, and of the memories. For more than five hundred years, the island of Hispaniola has experienced numerous colonial, social, political, cultural, linguistic, familial, and economic disturbances that have made it impossible for the Haitian people to come to terms with their collective memory, which has been poisoned since the arrival of Europeans in 1492. Forced out of her homeland like thousands of others, Danticat carries her country’s history as she navigates uneasily between two worlds, that of Haiti, and that of the *dyaspora*, where people are “with their feet planted in both worlds,” (Danticat 2010, p. 51) which stands for her other home of the United States, the very country that occupied her homeland from 1915 until 1934 and continues to exploit it.

The creation of the “floating homeland” by the Haitian author is accomplished by utilizing imagery and memory construction, invoking Haiti’s spiritual economy, and depicting communities that resist national boundaries. Danticat writes, “My country, I felt both as an immigrant and artist, was something that was then being called the tenth department. Haiti then had nine geographic departments and the tenth was the floating homeland, the ideological one, which joined all Haitians living outside of Haiti, in the *dyaspora*.”³ Danticat’s work draws attention to the constructed and imagined nature of the nation, and “the possibilities of postnational imaginaries,” (Butler 2019) where she and the rest of the Haitian “exiles, émigrés, refugees, migrants, nomads, immigrants, naturalized citizens, half-generation, first-generation, American, Haitian, Haitian American, men, women, and children” reside (Danticat 2010, p. 51).

The distinctiveness of Haiti and Palestine, juxtaposed heuristically within this paper, arises from significant convergences. The conception of floating homelands carries historical, political, and material value not only for people living in forced exile or diaspora, but also for those living under settler colonialism. Israeli settler colonialism has been consistently working on erasing any semblance of Palestinian political autonomy and identity (Abu El-Haj 2003; Sayegh 2012; Massad 2006). For more than a century, Jewish Zionism has aimed to distort Palestinian identity by setting in motion a process of geographic separation and isolation, as the colony is “a set of trained dispositions, on unequal entitlements to resources and rights, on conquest as dispossession, on dispossession as progress, and not least on a requisite set of embodied and durable racialized relations.” (Stoler 2018, p. 46) This process would splinter Palestinians in different secluded spaces which are marked conceptually and materially. To achieve this, Israel has erected walls, checkpoints, and watchtowers, effectively limiting any possibility for Palestinians to envision or reclaim their homeland. Therefore, the concept of the floating homeland adds to existing scholarship on Palestinian identity formation under Israeli settler colonialism.

It is in Danticat’s “eleventh department”, albeit a digital one, that I claim Palestinians have constructed a space where their homeland is reconceptualized as a whole, defying Israeli limitations and boundaries. The history of the Zionist settler colony on Palestinian

lands shares many similarities with Haiti's history of colonial conquest, dispossession, appropriation, capitalist exploitation, racialization, fragmentation, and alienation. The concept of a "floating homeland" is useful for exploring how the Palestinian virtual social movement has redefined and reconnected with Palestine beyond Israel's control and fragmentation. Despite being physically and metaphorically besieged, Palestinians have developed a sense of self, space, and identity by forming virtual communities that resist colonial forms of knowledge and control. These self-sustaining communities have been built over the past 20 years through communicative systems and networks of support and resistance to face and survive Israeli erasure.

2. Conceptualizing the Palestinian Floating Homeland

Over the last two decades, social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have been utilized to report and document events occurring in Palestine in real time. Through these platforms, the world was made aware of Israeli settler-colonial practices such as land annexation, exploitation, confinement, and military attacks. In addition to exposure, these platforms were also used to coordinate and mobilize both local and international protests. Palestinians and their allies around the world have made social media a central weapon not only in the narrative fight against Israel internationally, but, more importantly, also in the national revival of the rightfulness of the Palestinian plight. This has resulted in the propagation of Palestinian resistance in all its forms as Palestinians were using applications to coordinate actions among themselves (Ward 2021).

Studies on the impact of new media on the Palestinian national identity constructions and political activism have surged (AbuZayad 2015; Aouragh 2011; Khalili 2005). Several scholars have studied Palestinian Internet presence and activism as a continuation of Palestinian political actions against Zionist dispossession since the 1880s. In her extensive research on how "Palestinianness" has been expressed, presented and formed online by both Palestinians inside and outside the Occupied Territories, Miriyam Aouragh shows that, despite Palestine's digital infrastructure being colonized by Israel, online presence did not reduce Palestinian nationalism, but rather strengthened a specific "anti-colonial nationalism online." (Aouragh 2011, p. 111) The cyberspace, for Palestinians, has gradually become a space where the conversation on resisting the limiting settler-colonial constructs of race, nation, and belonging took place through innovative, at times imaginary, constructions of identity and community. Albana S. Dwonch has documented, in *Palestinian Youth Activism in the Internet Age*, how international and local virtual communities witnessed, in real time, the resistance of the Nabi Saleh village in the West Bank, from which hundreds of dunams of lands have been confiscated for the purposes of building Israel's illegal Halamish settlement, whose settlers burned hundreds of the village's olive trees and, in 2009, confiscated the village's water spring. Dwonch also documented the political revival of young Palestinians with Israeli citizenship following the Arab Spring, who self-organized in Tel Aviv and Jaffa in January and March 2011 to demand land and national rights. Dwonch saw in these seemingly isolated events and campaigns a deconstruction, in the digital age, of the more traditional mobilization modes, especially those implemented by official Palestinian and Israeli parties in each geographic area (Dwonch 2021).

The Internet has facilitated the formation of a Palestinian identity in cyberspace, unlocking its expressive and liberating potential. This has resulted in a fundamental shift in how local events are disseminated in the global Palestinian public sphere, with the Internet serving as a critical building block in this process. In addition, applications that would reconfigure the colonial boundaries of Israel were being developed, as well as applications that would digitally revive the erased Palestinian villages and towns. In *Postspatial, Postcolonial: Accessing Palestine in the Digital*, Meryem Kamil analyzes how, by focusing on Al Jazeera English's 360-degree video tour of the al-Aqsa compound in East Jerusalem and Palestinian grassroots organization Udna's three-dimensional rendering of the destroyed village Mi'ar, new media have been instrumental in the reimagining of Palestinian access to land as a community-driven and intergenerational project. Kamil informs us that new

media allow for an understanding of space that imagines decolonial futurity. This future-oriented political practice works toward a vision of Palestine determined by Palestinians, as opposed to limiting pragmatic wars of maneuvering and paves the way to a decolonial futurity that is both practical and utopian (Kamil 2020).

This paper draws on this existing research to build a comprehensive picture of the relationship between new media and identity construction in historical Palestine, and how this relationship has contributed to the creation of a “digital floating homeland” that transcends physical boundaries and settler-colonial practices, while highlighting the ways in which new media technologies have facilitated political mobilization and resistance movements in Palestine. However, the aforementioned studies have not yet fully addressed the cumulative impact of social media on Palestinian identity formation. All forms of new media and the evolving technospheres of cyberspace—early technology adoption and mastery, the new digital technologies, the theorizing of the “question of Palestine”, and representations of a national identity on the information highway and other digital media technologies in education, culture, and politics—have been instrumental in building a discursive Palestinian consciousness in its virtual unification and motivation of the Palestinian nationalist ethos.⁴

By bringing together these studies, the paper seeks to provide a more complete understanding of the complex dynamics at play in Palestine, both on the ground and in the digital realm. I argue that Palestinians, severed from the familiar terrain of their homeland, forged out of necessity a virtual community of resistance structures and new languages in which to express them, and were able to organize a social movement that enabled this heterogenous mass of people to somehow overcome their profound fragmentation, alienation, dislocation, and ultimate commodification.

3. Broadcasting the Second Intifada in Real Time

By the time the Oslo Accords were signed, Israel had accelerated its annexation policies; the “Israeli settler-colony has resulted in the usurpation of all of historic Palestine, and in the process of the last four and a half decades, the physical separation of the Palestinian people into three major segments in relation to Palestine—Palestinians in Israel proper (otherwise known as “Israeli Arabs”), Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, in the West Bank, and in the Gaza Strip, and Palestinians in the diaspora.” (Massad 2006, p. 99) When the al-Aqsa/Second Intifada broke out in 2000, marking the complete failure of the Oslo process, Palestinian lands were transformed into “besieged ghettos, walled in and surrounded by mobs of Jewish colonial settlers and the Israeli army” (Massad 2006, p. 173). Yet, as a people enduring chronic violence and dispossession for over a century, Palestinians adapted spatial and social practices to consolidate their plight for freedom.

Historically, the methods of mobilization for strikes and revolts against the occupying forces occurred through multiple popular committees that would also lead the coordination and information exchange with other committees and maintain records, logs, and maps of land closures and seizures, arrests, and attacks, act as spokespersons with the media, write pamphlets and distribute them, draw graffiti on the walls, and offer support to other villages and coordinate actions (Norman 2010). However, the advent of the Internet in the early 2000s in Palestine has ushered in a paradigm shift, propelling these methods to an elevated and transformative state. The Internet has not only significantly expanded access to information and fostered local and global reach and collaboration, but it has played a crucial role in the diffusion of innovative resistance, in all its forms.⁵ Lori Allen explains that, during the Second Intifada, spatial constraints provoked continual improvisation. “Given the recent apparent shift in Israel’s political approach to Palestine,” Allen explains, “which some describe as a change from conflict resolution to conflict management in the midst of creeping apartheid, the adaptation by Palestinians to arbitrarily disordered space and spectacular destruction may represent some middle ground between quiescence and refusal, a ground that might sprout creative political potential” (Allen 2008). Allen observes

that the commonly repeated observation that “we are living an ongoing Nakba” was not just a figure of speech:

In the intifada-montage sequences that were broadcast as fillers between news programs on television, for example, images from the first intifada (1987–93) and from 1948 (the Nakba) were interspersed into footage from clashes of the current intifada. Pictures from the first intifada were used as illustrations in reports on the second, just as posters of young people martyred during the first intifada were redisplayed during commemorative events during the second. In this nonlinear, nondiscursive practiced poetic mode of image creation a historical consciousness, and rhetorical argument, is enacted. (Allen 2008, p. 467)

By the time the Second Intifada broke out in 2000, Israel’s military oppression was dramatically shifting into an even more aggressive rule, with closure policies in the Palestinian Occupied Territories, while novel methods of control were set in motion to further isolate and fragment Palestinians, whether in the Diaspora, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Jerusalem, or Israel. Dismembering the Palestinian national body remains an aim of Zionism. However, with the accelerated development of technologies, the Second Intifada in September 2000 witnessed a media transformation and an increase in publicly mediated protest that has deeply influenced the Palestinian collective memory, identity, and resistance. This historical consciousness materialized in the televised murder of Palestinian child Muhammad al-Durra by an Israeli sniper during the first days of the Intifada, turning the continuous brutality of the Israeli army into one of the most iconic images of the Second Intifada. The murder of al-Durra, who was shot while hiding in his father’s arms, was broadcast on all Arab channels, leading to one of the most notable songs of the Second Intifada titled “al-Quds Hatirga’ lina” (Jerusalem will return to us), sung by Egyptian pop singers and prominent Arab actors, in solidarity with Palestine (Massad 2003). These new technologies and new media—and the relative freedoms of expression, search, and connectivity they offer—that were evolving at that time, allowed not only for faster and novel ways of content distribution, but for the advancement of a Palestinian consciousness that would explore new ways of identification and belonging to their confiscated lands; a consciousness that would evolve virtually by resisting and surpassing Israel’s boundaries.

In the past two decades, the Internet has proved to be an alternative and safer place for Palestinians to map out their presence, identity, and resilience. Howard Rheingold—who studied the emergence of “virtual communities”—observed that “computer-mediated communications” technologies owe their phenomenal growth and development to networking capabilities that enable people “to build social relationships across barriers of space and time,” in order “to suit their own, very different communication needs.” (Rheingold 1993, p. 8). It is specifically to the spatial and temporal ruptures produced by recent technological advances that the present study of the digital floating homeland as a promising refusal site of domination and restriction of colonial structures is directed. Palestinians have utilized new media as a battleground by gradually conceptualizing a Palestinian subjectivity that will engender belonging in the entirety of Palestine unbounded by settler-colonial confinement, deracination politics, and identity-altering commodity and scripts. The Palestinian digital floating homeland is tenuously grounded in a redefinition of the boundaries of the Israeli state and in the possibilities of return, including a return to the historical conditions in Palestine before the arrival of European settlers. The digital floating homeland for Palestinians under Israeli settler colonialism is an idea of renewal. Palestine, though territorially and demographically fragmented (the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Jerusalem, and Israel), becomes in the virtual world a dialogic homeland where Palestinian subjects with complex identities resist false settler-colonial binaries and build their home(land).

4. Palestine in the Cloud

As a movement and as a coherent ideology, Jewish Zionism contextualizes Israel’s embodiment as a settler-colonial project, insofar as Israel was “established as the result of a colonial conquest, justified by an ethnocentric and racially exclusive ideology.” (Rodinson

1973, p.13). The creation of Israel in May 1948 created a Jewish majority by destroying more than 500 Palestinian towns and ethnically cleansing 90 percent of the Palestinian population from the territories occupied by Israel in 1948–49 (Pappé 2004). As a result, over 780,000 Palestinians were driven out of their homeland into neighboring countries. The ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians was a process of systematic violence and terror attacks, which continues until this very moment in the form of territorial demarcations, wars, expulsions, and Jewish-only settlements. The considerable scholarship on settler colonialism in Palestine has covered the structural mechanisms, politics, and governmentality of ongoing colonialism and dispossession of Palestinian lands and bodies (Said 1980; Abu El-Haj 2001; Gordon 2008; Khalidi 2020), which moves beyond seeing the Israeli state and its occupation of Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank as a series of isolated events but rather as structurally part of Israel's "logic of elimination and not exploitation: they wished less to govern Indigenous peoples or to enlist them in their economic ventures than to seize their land and push them beyond an ever-expanding frontier of settlement" (Elkins and Pedersen 2005, p. 2). Israel realized that incorporating the native Palestinian population into its colonial project would be a demographic threat. Hence, it has been treating each part of the occupied lands and its inhabitants differently. Depending on the resources and the political, economic, and military benefits it could gain, "different mechanisms were developed to expropriate the occupied land in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip without fully annexing it", in order to further isolate and fragment the Palestinian population and prevent a demographic imbalance within the settler-state of Israel (Gordon 2008, p.6).

In the aftermath of the 1948 Nakba, Palestinians had to contend with different forms of erasure and fragmentation of Palestinian identity, while acquainting themselves, without choice, with a colonial reality that thrived upon exclusion. Lorenzo Veracini explains that in a settler-colonial society, the process of settler "indigenization" aims to eliminate the violent origins of invasion, while also reinforcing the idea that the settler-state's existence is an irreversible reality, thereby perpetuating the temporal framework of settler colonialism (Veracini 2010). The answer to a settler-colonial reality is therefore resistance and survival (Veracini 2011). Novel writing, Manar Makhoul notes, was part of the evolution of Palestinian identity under Israeli settler colonialism. It was a major force in the preservation of Palestine's historical memory in the form of a literary heritage partly driven by fear of erasure. Palestinians in the newly founded state of Israel kept documenting the power imbalance in their new reality and how the absence of space to thrive within their culture led to silenced identities (Makhoul 2020).

Palestinians with Israeli citizenship are commonly known as "1948 Palestinians" or "Israeli Arabs", due to their roots originating from those who remained during the creation of the settler-colonial state in 1948. As settler-state institutions are instrumentalized to neutralize Indigenous difference (Povinelli 2002), since the Nakba, Israel has implemented various legal, political, and social tools of oppression to neutralize Palestinian Indigenous identity, attempting to de-Palestinize them. Over time, Israel has gathered over 65 laws that violate 1948 Palestinian citizens' rights in all areas of life, from citizenship and residency rights to the right to political participation, land and housing, education, culture, and language, religious rights, and due process rights during detention, especially on alleged security-related charges.⁶ Social psychologist Nadim Rouhana explains that Palestinians with Israeli citizenship live in a "constitutionally exclusive ethnic state," as the state's ethnic policies, designed as "security concerns", were developed to maintain Jewish dominance and control over Arab citizens (Rouhana 1997, p.31). The policies of fragmentation have impeded the development of Palestinian identity among Palestinians in Israel and have had notable effects on their collective identity and their views of Palestinians living under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza, although, as the author suggests, these differences need to be examined further. This has resulted in Palestinians with Israeli citizenship internalizing throughout the decades the colonizer's geo-mental imposition, as Frantz Fanon has thoroughly studied in a different context (Fanon 2016). Raef Zreik tells us that history has been the shelter of 1948 Palestinians and the protector of their narrative when

everything in the public space reminds them of their shattered identity. It is after the Oslo agreement and after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority that the place of 1948 Palestinians has been more broken up, as “From the beginning, and for a long period, we have been reduced politically and have been excluded from the national project. (...) The national movement was moving behind the wall. We were clapping for its success and were crying for its misfortunes and stumbles.” (Zreik 2007, p. 209).

The Oslo agreement sent 1948 Palestinians the message that they had to accept their ambiguous position. Nevertheless, it is important to note that despite being kept at a distance from the Palestinian national body, they had not severed their ties with their Palestinian identity. Fearing additional displacement, retaliation, and punitive actions, some Palestinians residing in Israel have started to perceive violence against other Indigenous communities living in Gaza, the West Bank, and Jerusalem as violence directed towards people from a separate body. However, the answer to this disruption of the national Palestinian body came in the form of the Second Intifada and the diffused images of a unified wound. Against every structure of oppression emerges an infrastructure of resistance. Palestinians have been resisting Zionist settler-colonial dispossession and the erasure of their political rights and identities through several modalities, accumulating in a political history of resistance stretching back over one hundred and fifty years (Nassar and Heacock 1990; Sayigh 1997; Khalili 2007). The Palestinian quest for national liberation did not cease and resistance materialized in various forms of political practices, using both violent and nonviolent means, local and international, in order to disrupt the Israeli methods of oppression, despite the disproportion in power relations. Various forms of disobedience, including strikes, revolts, armed resistance, songs, folklore, and literature, have been utilized to resist oppression. These forms of resistance have been employed by Palestinians since the late 19th century, when Jewish Zionist immigrants arrived in Palestine (Khalidi 1997). During the era of the British Mandate, the most significant expression of this resistance was the 1936–39 Palestinian revolt (Swedenburg 2003). The struggle for Palestinian national liberation, whether inside Palestine or in the diaspora, never ceased, as Palestinians learned to continuously reorganize and mobilize their resistance against Israel’s settler-colonial practices, materializing in the grassroots movement of the First Intifada in 1987 that unified the Palestinian struggle (Bennis 1990; and Nassar and Heacock 1990).

In the early years of the Internet, Palestinians found in popular video chat and messaging service PalTalk, launched in 1998, an unprecedented way to connect with one another in real time through various chat rooms. These chat rooms cover a wide range of topics, including sports, entertainment, culture, and politics. In addition to standard features like voice chat, file sharing, and virtual gifts, PalTalk allowed Palestinians to create and join chat rooms with names such as Falasteen Online, Al Quds Online, State of Palestine, Palestine Arab Forum, and Falasteen Cultural Groups, among tens of other chat rooms where Palestine in all its forms was discussed. These digital platforms offered Palestinians centers of rich intellectual exchange through which models for imaginative reterritorialization of boundaries and borders took place, as they were able to reconnect with family members and communities from which they have been separated for decades. One example of this is the 2006 online symposium organized by the chat room “Al Quds Online”, which focused on marginalized Palestinian refugees in Iraq. The symposium, which opened with the Palestinian national anthem, allowed Palestinians from all over the world to engage in a debate about the extremely difficult situation faced by Palestinians in Iraq, as well as the role that the Palestinian authority should play in ameliorating their plight (Watan 2006). Ultimately, these digital technologies have enabled Palestinians to transcend physical borders and build virtual connections with others, both behind Israeli walls and in the diaspora.

One of the first websites online in the early 2000s was PalestineRemembered.com. The launch of this website was revolutionary for Palestinians and specifically Palestinian refugees scattered across the globe, as, for the first time, a virtual space connected and commemorated their shared collective memory of dispossession and materialized their

memories. The website stated aim is to be “an easy medium where refugees can communicate, organize, and share their experiences amongst themselves. The refugees are encouraged to attach their stories, memories, pictures, movies, music files, join discussions at the message board and guest book sections, directory service listing of the refugees and their contact information, and URL links related to each listed town.” In 2003, PalestineRemembered.com launched its “al-Nakba’s Oral History Project”, which consists of 800 interviews, covering 320 towns all across historical Palestine, and containing over 4000 h of recording (Palestineremembered.com).

Palestinians have also used social media, blogs, and other online platforms to share their stories, connect with one another, and advocate for their rights. In this cyberspace, their national identities operate as a cohesive transnational force (Shohat and Stam 1994). This was strongly demonstrated through the remarkable journey of Mohammed Assaf, a Palestinian contestant on the second season of Arab Idol in 2013, and the sensational buzz created by his participation. Hailing from a refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, the singer embodied the spirit of every Palestinian living under occupation—the determination to exist, to love, and to express oneself through music despite Israel’s settler-colonial policies. Assaf’s strong voice ran on a platform of pride and unity.

Wrapped in a Kuffiyeh, the symbol of Palestinian nationalism and resistance, and with the Palestinian flag featuring prominently on stage and in the audience, Assaf wowed the judges and audiences with his performances, which included traditional Palestinian songs as well as contemporary pop hits. His emotional rendition of the song “Ya Tair altayer” (Oh flying bird) in his qualifying round brought many to tears and garnered widespread attention on social media. The song expressed the Palestinian yearning for freedom and the ability to reunite with loved ones in inaccessible occupied villages. Despite living in confined circumstances and behind Israel’s imposed barriers, Palestinians still hold onto the dream of soaring like free birds and revisiting their homes, villages, and families. The lyrics of the song are in Arabic and can be translated as follows:

Oh flying bird travelling back home
 My eyes follow you and May God protect you
 Oh you traveller, my heart is envious
 Palestine is my homeland, so beautiful praised by God
 Pass by Safed and fly over Tabariyyah
 Go to Acre and Haifa and greet our sea
 Don’t forget Nazareth, This Arab fortress
 And inform Bisan that its people are returning
 (...)
 Pass by Gaza And Kiss its soil
 Her people are dignified and Her men are mighty
 Jerusalem, the capital and Al Aqsa its landmark
 God willing We will gather soon in our homes.

The song, which accentuated the Palestinianness of all cities and villages, including those within the state of Israel, resonated with Palestinians and Arabs globally, with the original video clip from the competition gaining over 25 million views (Assaf 2013). His song “Ali el Kuffiyeh” (Raise your Kuffeyeh), a song reminding Palestinians of the oneness of their national body, has over 112 million views on YouTube. Palestinians took to the streets in celebration across historic Palestine when Assaf won the Arab Idol title, and for the first time, a Palestinian musician made headlines internationally.

The broadcasting power of satellite channels coupled with the open space of new media is a powerful tool in deconstructing colonial narratives. Arab Idol was a unique space in which the politics of (in)visibility were reformulated in favor of Palestinians. Visibility is negotiated through terms of recognition that have been dominated by colonialist

views of reality, which distort and erase Indigenous knowledge and culture. The theme of visibility/invisibility, as elaborated upon by Vincente M. Diaz, refers to the ways in which the dominant culture has historically sought to erase or ignore the presence of Native Americans, by rendering them invisible, which has contributed to their ongoing marginalization and oppression. Diaz examines the ways in which Native Americans have sought to assert their visibility and agency through various forms of resistance, including artistic expression, political activism, and cultural revitalization:

The power to see, to create images, and to control images is a crucial aspect of the struggle for cultural survival and political self-determination. Native Americans have been fighting against images and representations that disempower, dehumanize, and commodify them for centuries. Yet, at the same time, they have been creating images that empower, humanize, and decolonize their identities.

A personal emotion of nostalgia and a longing to return to their lost homes in Palestine was now being broadcasted and shared by millions of viewers on MBC,⁷ and was turned into a political act. Thousands of Palestinians and Arabs in Beirut, Cairo, Amman, Gaza, Ramallah, Haifa, Nazareth, and more gathered in cafes to watch Assaf sing his way through the episodes. While Israel constantly works on freezing Palestinians outside of *time* and *space*, new media gave Palestinians a platform to decenter the dominant narrative and allow those fragmented digits to move forward with effective decolonial actions.

Additionally, new forms of media have emerged that enable the telling of stories via hashtags. These tags serve as a means of organizing and classifying social media content around a particular subject, occasion, or motif. By utilizing a designated hashtag, people can link up with others who are sharing similar material and participate in a broader discussion. In the context of constructing a narrative, hashtags can be employed as a tool to craft a shared story or statement regarding a specific cause or movement. In recent decades, Palestinians launched several hashtags that challenged mainstream narratives and were meant to educate Palestinians and others and debunk colonial myths. The hashtags #Palestine, #GazaUnderAttack, #FreePalestine, #ShujaiyaMassacre, #SheikhJarrah, and #GreatReturnMarch carry the history of a homeland under settler colonialism, but they also make daily resistance visible. An entire archive of digital Palestinian content is saved under these hashtags, which have been used to narrate and shape a decolonial future.

In 2017, the video of 16-year-old Palestinian Ahed Tamimi slapping an Israeli soldier in her hometown of Nabi Saleh went viral. She was protesting the detention of her brother and the ongoing occupation of Palestinian land. The video sparked international attention and solidarity campaigns for Tamimi's release from Israeli detention. In 2017, the #SaltWaterChallenge (Ma' w Milh in Arabic) was launched to draw attention to Palestinian political prisoners on hunger strike in Israeli prisons. Participants drink salt water to symbolize the desperation of more than 1500 Palestinians in eight Israeli prisons who launched a "Hunger Strike for Freedom and Dignity" to demand better living conditions and medical treatment. Arab and international celebrities, including Arab Idol Mohammed Assaf, participated in the challenge, which went viral in the region. In 2018, Palestinian journalist Yaser Murtaja was killed by Israeli snipers while covering protests at the Gaza–Israel border. In response, Palestinian social media users exposed Israel's intentional executions of journalists during the #GazaReturnMarch. In 2021, twins Muna and Mohammed El-Kurd gained international attention for their social media posts in both English and Arabic documenting their family's fight against a forced eviction from their home in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem. Their posts on Twitter and Instagram provided the world with a window into living under occupation in East Jerusalem, and the issues of Israeli settlement expansion and displacement of Palestinians in East Jerusalem.⁸

Social media and hashtags have provided a powerful tool for Palestinians to document and share their experiences, raise awareness about their struggles, and mobilize local and international support. The digital space has become a platform for narrating a homeland, a place where stories can be shared to reconnect those that have been separated for decades. I follow scholars such as Rosemary Sayigh, Nahla Abdo, and Ruba Salih, who counter

colonial “truths” with stories that express the resilience, resistance, and formation of colonized communities. These counter-discourses provide histories of resistance that aim to alter the settler-colonial temporality of a *fait accompli* (Sayigh 1998; Abdo 2018; Salih 2015).

I view the digital floating homeland as a cloud of countless digits that, when fused together, form a force that contests and revolts against colonized minds. Palestinians took their plight to online platforms and found in the digital floating homeland a space of regeneration and renewal. This realm is a space where generations of Palestinians come together to undertake the emotional task, despite the conspicuous difficulties, of constructing a collective present from the shards of a body that has been repeatedly shattered and scattered into a thousand pieces.

Palestine in the cloud is a decentralized space, a storage area where users have uploaded data on Palestine for the past two decades. These data include a variety of information, such as historical data, population statistics, economic indicators, geographic content, cultural information, folklore, food recipes, information on the different dialects, and much more. The information was stored in various formats, such as text, images, videos, and audio files, and was organized using a range of database management systems, enabling users to access the data from anywhere with an Internet connection, rather than being tied to a specific physical location or device. Palestine in the cloud provided many benefits, including enhanced accessibility, scalability, and relative security to the national Palestinian liberation movement. Palestine in the cloud allowed Palestinians to return to a digital floating historical homeland.

5. A Virtual Return March

Shaping this digital floating homeland was not only an experience of dispossession that relied on a national imaginary, but also a “textual strategy” of plurality and multiplicity, the mobilization of an imaginary. The term *imaginary* is quite complex and carries a variety of meanings. Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytic notion of the imaginary involves the subject’s internalized image of the ideal, whole, and self, and is situated around the notion of coherence rather than fragmentation. This desire for wholeness propels the imaginary in a mirror that works against the primordial experience of fragmentation (Lacan 2007). I assert that Palestinian subjects who are themselves displaced and dispossessed subjects within their own homeland rely on the imaginary to produce and conjure images, forms, patterns, and narrative strategies that help organize and unify the fragmented characters and actors beyond idealized unity. This desire for unity and wholeness is a compensation for the primal separation experienced as lack, loss, disintegration, and alienation specially felt by Palestinians, and specifically those with Israeli citizenship, who fearing potential repercussions, had to exercise heightened caution when it came to openly expressing their Palestinian identity.

Following the 1993 Oslo Accords, which sought to establish a Palestinian state within the 1967 territories but ultimately failed, Palestinians residing within Israel found themselves excluded from the Palestinian political agenda. Over the years, they endured Israeli government’s attempts to subdue them through excessive policing and political, social, and economic marginalization. However, the Second Intifada represented a significant juncture that fostered a sense of unity among Palestinians residing in both the 1948- and 1967-occupied territories. A month after the outbreak of the Second Intifada, Palestinians in Israel took to the streets of what was covered in the Israeli and international media as a “show of solidarity with demonstrators in the West Bank and Gaza,” leading to the killing of 13 demonstrators by the Israeli police (Iraqi 2015). Twenty-three years later, the pictures of the victims still circulate on social media demanding police accountability and justice (Adalah 2015). By firing on the crowds, the colonizer in 48 Palestine sent a message that any disobedience would not be tolerated, as only a docile show of solidarity, ideally silent and private, towards the atrocities committed against Palestinians in the Occupied Territories,

could be accepted. Expulsions, expropriations, arsons, theft, and house demolitions were to be watched and absorbed as a punishment for those who revolted.

However, a call for decolonizing the minds of Palestinians and rejecting the colonizer's imposed structure of "solidarity" has spread through the digital realm. The use of new media has enabled the education of Palestinians across historical Palestine, emphasizing the unity of the Palestinian body and the rejection of the colonial idea that one Palestinian cannot be in solidarity with another. This digital space allowed Palestinians to define their resistance based on their own needs and aspirations. Despite the circulation of the apocryphal tale of the legitimacy of the state of Israel online, the Internet has become a vital space for the traumatized Palestinian nation to mobilize diverse forces and pockets of resistance on the ground. This has enabled the Palestinians to promote revolutionary social change movements, as these platforms intensified the interaction of scattered Palestinians who previously were prohibited from interacting with and reaching one another. These interactions, which relied extensively on historical memory, projected a revival of a unified Palestinian nationalism and shared discontent. As such, this digital revolution has defined activism in many ways and has strengthened collectivity and connectivity due to the erasure of geographic boundaries.

Tensions in the Occupied Palestinian Territories have remained high ever since Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, known for his right-wing stance, announced in September 2019 his intentions to unlawfully annex approximately one-third of the occupied Palestinian West Bank (Zraick 2019; Sfar 2023). During the April–May 2021 revolt, whose aims were to face the looming threat of evicting Palestinians families from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah by Israeli settler organizations, new media allowed instantaneous communication among Palestinians who were normally fragmented behind the different boundaries and walls set up by the Israeli state. Tensions soared during the start of Ramadan on 13 April 2021. Daily violent incidents targeting Palestinians by Israeli settlers and forces escalated around the Old City, particularly near Al-Aqsa Mosque and in Sheikh Jarrah. By channeling new media to amplify their voice and encourage Palestinians who could cross the physical settler-colonial barriers and checkpoints to come to Jerusalem in defense of it as part of Palestine, and not solely in defense of or in "solidarity" with Jerusalemites, 1948 Palestinians and others across the West Bank were defying the entrenched and unreformed structure of the settler-colonial state. It is the savvy maneuvering between the online and offline worlds that has created cracks in the insidious forms of Israeli colonial control.

Strengthened with additional acts of social defiance such as communal prayers and iftar gatherings during Ramadan in Sheikh Jarrah, Jerusalemites forced the Israeli police to remove the iron barriers from Damascus Gate Square on 25 April 2021, two weeks after they were installed (Reuters 2021). This collective digital collaboration was beyond the traditional reach of Israel's settler-colonial regime. Building on the digital floating homeland that regenerated political and cultural activism over the past 20 years, and taking advantage of the accumulation of online and offline experience in the last five years, Palestinians were now armed with new forms of popular resistance against the occupation authorities.

However, Israeli provocations did not come to an end and intensified on 7 May, as Israeli forces stormed Al-Aqsa Mosque compound during Laylat al-Qadr, the holiest night of Ramadan, injuring hundreds of Palestinians. Facing restricted access to al-Aqsa mosque and evictions in Sheikh Jarrah, the support of 1948 Palestinians was requested, and they instantly answered the call. The Israeli police prevented numerous busloads of Palestinians with Israeli citizenship from reaching Jerusalem. The buses were stopped approximately 20 km west of the city. Within a matter of minutes, through the spread of coordinated actions on social platforms, hundreds of cars arrived from East Jerusalem to pick up the stranded protestors on the Jaffa–Jerusalem highway. Many cars blocked the critical artery connecting Jerusalem and Tel Aviv in both directions, compelling the Israeli police to open the road and allow Palestinians to reach al-Aqsa mosque. This novel approach to protesting empowered Palestinians not only in Sheikh Jarrah, but across all of historical Palestine,

enabling a unified collective political expression among Palestinians across the Occupied Territories and in Israel.

Palestinian sentiment has been awakened and unified through a new sense of identity. Palestinians in Israel, who had been exposed to deracination and identity-altering techniques, symbolically returned to the unity of the Palestinian body via new media. This was evident through several visible phenomena, such as widespread participation of Palestinian students at Israeli universities in college activism, demanding a rethinking of Israeli assimilationist strategies, and the formulation of sociopolitical and cultural activities to re-educate Palestinians with Israeli citizenship. In 2000, protests by Palestinians with Israeli citizenship during the Second Intifada were characterized as support for the struggle of their people in the 1967 areas. However, the protests in April and May 2021 were different. They sent a message that Palestinians in Israel were not just showing solidarity, but were direct stakeholders in the cause, with the slogan “If you live, live free” resonating across all cities in Israel. Facing similar home evictions, in April, residents of Jaffa were protesting the sale of a building to a yeshiva seminar, which Palestinians perceive as part of a systemic Zionist effort to dispossess them of what is rightfully theirs. Their chants of “Barra barra ya mustawtinin, al Ard esemha Falasteen” (Out, out, settlers—The land’s name is Palestine) echoed the voices from Sheikh Jarrah (Shamir 2021).

Journalist and activist Muna el Kurd and other Palestinian activists from Jerusalem joined protests in Nazareth on 9 May 2021, where she took the microphone on the podium and asked 1948 Palestinians to follow them back to Sheikh Jarrah. The crowd chanted in reply: “With our souls and our blood, we will protect al Aqsa”, as Palestinian flags were being waved as forms of civil disobedience (Middle East Eye 2021). Thousands of pictures, pixels, and videos of these events were uploaded, livestreamed, and circulated online under hashtags related to Palestine in both Arabic and English. By 10 May 2021, thousands had emerged in at least 20 Palestinian towns in the 1948 areas, including smaller villages, in protests and confrontations described as “unprecedented” by the Israeli state security apparatus. The protests were now also condemning the Israeli bombardments of the Gaza Strip that started on 11 May and lasted 10 days, killing 256 Palestinians, including 66 children and 40 women. This has led to massive arrests among Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, who were also resisting the same aggressive and abusive regime.

The spread of Palestinian unity came in several forms. During the Israeli attacks on Gaza, Israeli forces detained singers and poets for performing and speaking in Arabic on Israeli campuses and other public spaces and for expressing themselves on social media. Most notably, Israeli Intelligence services arrested Palestinian popular artist, Moeen Al-Asam, from Bir Al-Sabe’ in the occupied Negev in May, after performing a song titled “Gaza, the Land of Dignity”, in which he praised Palestinian armed resistance. This was reason enough for Israeli Intelligence services to detain and interrogate the artist for hours, but not before the song and its lyrics went viral on social platforms (Eye on Palestine 2021a). This left the Zionist colony with multiple open fronts as residents closed roads, threw Molotov cocktails and rocks at Israeli forces, set fire to police cars, broke Israeli surveillance cameras, and replaced Israeli flags with Palestinian ones. Thus, for a few fleeting moments, these demonstrators effectively turned a segregated nation into a desegregated stage and juxtaposed the digital floating homeland into an insubordinate space.

These images, made possible by new media, demonstrate that another world beyond settler colonialism is possible, a world beyond Palestinian memory and trauma. Robin D. G. Kelley notes that rebellion and resistance are meant to allow us and enable us to imagine a new society (Kelley 2002). It is therefore my contention that the digital floating homeland allowed Palestinians to disturb the social order and imagine the dissolution of existing settler-colonial hierarchies and boundaries. The digital floating homeland is thus a space where resistance regroups, evaluates, and moves forward to mobilize and materialize the ideologies at hand.

These newly forged routes, however, must survive Israel’s matrix of control, as Palestinian cyberspace too falls under Israel’s vast digital-military complex, which applies

extensive surveillance on the Palestinian population through its army's Digital Transformation Administration, a unit established to apply big data, artificial intelligence, and machine learning to improve battlefield performance and streamline the military's administration (Kunstman and Stein 2015). Helga Tawil-Souri and Miriyam Aouragh coined the term *cyber-colonialism* to refer to the role of the digital in "reinforc[ing] a world of contact and influence between radically asymmetrical powers." (Tawil-Souri and Aouragh 2014, p. 107). The territorial fragmentation of post-Oslo Palestine resulted in an infrastructure dependent on Israeli networks. The Palestinian Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology has documented, throughout the past twenty years, how Israel colonizes Palestinian ICT by refusing Palestinian access to frequencies, jamming and hacking telephone, Internet, and broadcast signals, uprooting transmission towers, confiscating equipment, preventing the installation of infrastructure, and regular interruption of radio and television operations, in addition to maintaining the high costs of online access for Palestinians (7amleh—The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media 2018).

However, the advent and persuasiveness of new telecommunications technologies and cyber-infrastructure has also created new opportunities to resist by translating acts of direct action and civil disobedience into virtuality, routing and IP address spoofing, or social mobilization and activism, to mention some (Jordan and Taylor 2004). Although, Twitter, TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook have been censoring Palestinian content in compliance with Israel's cyber-colonial containment of the narrative (Middle East Eye 2022), in May 2021, as the popular revolts were unfolding, the powerful algorithms of Facebook proved impotent against an old Arabic font that was revived by Palestinian and Arab social media users to circumvent e-colonialism and its gatekeeping. Through an old Arabic font written without dots but that is understandable to native Arabic speakers, Palestinians were able to defy censorship of Palestinian content and narratives (Abu Sneineh 2021). Several forms of social protests were organized and Jerusalemites and Palestinians in the Green Line mobilized without organized partisan and factional action. This has been a significant feature of this new Palestinian resistance and social movement.

6. A Nation Breaking Free?

The Gilboa Prison, considered "more secure than the Bank of Israel's safe," is located in the north of occupied Palestine, and was built during the Second Intifada to contain and confine Palestinians during their uprisings. Settler-colonial studies have drawn attention to the ongoing colonial enterprise of incarcerating natives as a form of erasure. These studies have revealed how historical practices such as slavery, assimilation, segregation, exploitation, and violence are reproduced through the modern penal system (Razack 2015; Baldry et al. 2012). On 6 September 2021, six Palestinian prisoners managed to escape the Zionist settler colony's most heavily guarded fort. Equipped with spoons, the prisoners dug a tunnel of several meters from under their cell's toilet. The tunnel led to a road outside the prison. While their escape sparked a massive manhunt by Israeli security forces, for the 6 days after their escape, Palestinians prayed for the safety of the prisoners and praised them as heroes.

The online conversation quickly turned to discussions on how to protect and save these heroes, becoming a national concern. The Gaza Strip and the West Bank went out in celebration, handing out candies on the streets during a day of "joy and pride, when Palestinians have their heads held high" (Times of Israel 2021), as the picture of six Israeli soldiers standing above the hole from which the prisoners emerged was circulating with sarcastic remarks under the hashtag #FreedomTunnel. Online users expressed their admiration for their resilience and, under the hashtag #ShawshankRedemption, comparisons to the classic American movie were made. The spoon emoticon quickly became a powerful symbol of resistance and freedom on social media. Thousands of people added it to their profiles, names, and bios, signaling their support for the escaped Palestinian prisoners. Arab Idol Mohammed Assaf tweeted to his 3.2 million followers a picture of six birds flying out of the prison tunnel with the text: "Freedom has an unsatiable taste. May God

protect our prisoners and save them from the jailer's oppression, sooner rather than later." (Assaf 2021) The escape was not only a significant morale boost for Palestinians, but it also shattered Israel's image of strength and invincibility in the face of an occupied people fighting for their freedom.

Across social media, Palestinians in Gaza shared virtual maps to help the escapees navigate to safety in the Gaza Strip, which is considered a haven from Israeli occupation forces. Meanwhile, Palestinians in Israel left water and food outside their homes in case the prisoners needed supplies. In the West Bank, people came together to protect the two prisoners who managed to reach the city of Jenin. However, despite these hopes and efforts, the Palestinian Authority's network of agents, who collaborate with Israel under the guise of security coordination, were instructed to find the prisoners and hand them over to Israeli authorities. Nonetheless, the escape of the six prisoners could not be contained by structure, as much as structures believe they forcibly can harness the bodies and the affects that exceed them. When the captured escapees were brought to court in Nazareth, tens of 1948 Palestinians were chanting: "Huriya, Huriya, la 'Abtalna Huriya" (Freedom, Freedom, To our Heroes, Freedom), in defiance of Israel's oppressive measures (Eye on Palestine 2021b).

Although the prisoners did not have access to the Internet, for Palestinians the Internet was the parallel space for collective nation building around the prisoners' escape and ultimately their own escape from settler-colonial confinement. This dialogic structure allowed the participation of community members experiencing similar confinement in different "cages". Subjected to quotidian racialized and violent experiences, they shared the same aspirations of putting an end to Israeli settler colonialism.

On 11 May 2022, Israeli forces shot and killed renowned Al Jazeera veteran journalist Shireen Abu Akleh, who was covering Israeli raids in the occupied Palestinian city of Jenin. News of Abu Akleh's killing, along with live footage of the moment Israeli forces opened fire, spread rapidly across social media, shocking a region that recognized Abu Akleh, a war correspondent, as an icon of Palestinian resistance. The Israeli occupation authorities immediately denied responsibility, attempting to contain local outrage and international outcry. As Shireen Abu Akleh's body was transported from Jenin to Jerusalem for burial, Palestinians poured out into the streets to bid her farewell. Her convoy stopped in almost every city and village along the way as people wanted to pay their respects. Her body became a symbol of Palestinian pride and aspirations for freedom, both online and offline. Tens of thousands of Palestinians, including those with Israeli citizenship, participated in her funeral procession, with Palestinian flags covering the skies of Jerusalem. This scene, unprecedented since the establishment of the Zionist state 75 years ago, was quickly dubbed the "Liberation March" on Palestinian social media. In the process of deconstructing and reconstructing settler-colonial conceptions and boundaries, Palestinians were able to create a space in which postcolonial subjects can belong, even as they move through and reside in geopolitical spaces that would marginalize or exclude them.

7. Concluding Remarks

Over the past two decades, Palestinians have gradually constructed a virtual floating homeland, which enables them to redefine their homeland beyond colonial imaginaries and boundaries. The realm of cyber-activism has provided Palestinians with modes of resistance against colonial subjugation. This digital floating homeland allows for the envisioning of a decolonized relationship with the land, which guides their new online and offline activism. Through new media technologies, the digital floating homeland "Palestine in the Could" is the entire homeland that was stolen from them, the virtual space where Palestinians can meet, exchange, talk, share trauma, and find ways to heal and reconnect.

Habbet Ayyar and the Great Gilboa Escape, which occurred a few months apart, erected the foundations on which a new Palestinian nationalist political and aesthetic movement could be built. This new consciousness presented itself on the level of everyday people's participatory expressions. The fragmentation and displacement of both lands and peoples, along with their aspirations and shared histories, provide a framework for a more

comprehensive exploration of the concept of a fluid homeland and its various nuances, contradictions, and perspectives, particularly in relation to the rootedness of Indigenous communities and the experiences of (settler) colonial displacement. A fluid homeland creates room for resistance against dispersal, confinement, and marginalization within the nation's geopolitical borders. Danticat insists that disobedience is at the core of everything that is creatively dangerous as it takes bold courage for writers, poets, and artists to "create dangerously, for people who read dangerously" (Danticat 2010, p. 10). In her quest of defining home and exile under a dictatorship, Danticat's *Create Dangerously* is an instrument of liberation as it creates "a revolt against silence, creating when both the creation and the reception, the writing and the reading, are dangerous undertakings, disobedience to a directive" (Danticat 2010, p. 11). Danticat expands on the concept of a floating homeland as a reaction to the complete eradication of collective memories, a place that rejects the enforced voids, silences, and negations that constitute their traumatic history.

The digital floating homeland, "Palestine in the Cloud", is a strategy that deconstructs settler-colonial history; it is also the space where a new consciousness is being developed. Palestinians live in the in-between space and locale of political and cultural displacement that trouble fixed and essentialized notions of identity and destabilize the nation-state framework. In the words of Homi Bhabha, this "third space" allows the breakdown of binaries such as inside/outside, self/other, and center/periphery, and, as such, the reconsideration of the boundaries of the nation. Tawil-Souri and Aouragh acknowledge that the challenge of Palestinian maneuvering between online and offline means organizing to circumvent crackdowns on those practices, and that, on a practical level, "there have been many improvements for political mobilization". The authors conclude that for an online Intifada, which they dub "Intifada 3.0" to be successful, it will have to "challenge both Israeli settler colonialism and its seemingly 'immaterial' cyber-colonialism. Only then can an Intifada 3.0 serve as the model of a new paradigm of resistance in our hyper-capitalist global yet disparate and asymmetrical new network age." (Tawil-Souri and Aouragh 2014, p. 129). In my view, over the past two decades, a digital floating homeland has gradually emerged, encompassing the entirety of historical Palestine, which I argue constituted the beginning of an Intifada 3.0.

Palestinians have long invested in constructing a digital homeplace as a radical political imperative, noting that, although the domestic site of the homeland may be tenuous, it is nevertheless the ground from which Palestinians could resist Zionist hegemony. Bell Hooks, in her study of marginalized black women, writes about "the importance of homeplace in the midst of oppression and domination, of homeplace as a site of resistance and liberation struggle." (Hooks 1990, p. 385). This creation, in the face of "economic and social structures that deprive many folks of the means to make homeplace," speaks to the "political value of Black women's resistance in the home" (Hooks 1990, p. 387). For Palestinians, "home" took intangible and provisional forms, such as the digital floating homeland. "Palestine in the Cloud" reunited 1948 Palestinians, who were sidelined by the Oslo Accords, and reunified them with the national Palestinian body, as they were able to expose how the architecture, institutions, and citizenship regime of the Israeli state made their bodies and existence dispensable.

By utilizing new media technologies, *Habbet Ayyar* marked a significant turning point in the relationship between Palestinians and the Israeli settler-colonial state. More importantly, it redefined the concept of the Palestinian national identity, which had been fragmented, by fiercely envisioning the entirety of their homeland as unbroken and accessible on digital platforms. This redefinition was not only for Palestinians but also for the diaspora and for refugees worldwide. The digital floating homeland is a liberatory possibility that Palestinian writers and activists have articulated as a means of transcending internal divisions and obstacles imposed by colonial rule. It is a space where Palestinians come together to resist the settler society's efforts to erase them from the political and cultural landscape. This digital homeland is constructed through new technologies that have reshaped Palestinian self-identification and allowed for a virtual and digital reconcep-

tualization of a borderless Palestine. While it is currently grounded only in a virtual space, it regularly manifests on the ground by enabling outbursts of resistance.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Acknowledgments: I acknowledge the support of the Palestine Land Studies Center (PLSC), whose archive enabled me to produce this paper.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ Laila Abbas et al. notes that new forms of participatory action emerged, allowing Palestinians to mobilize TikTok leading to what has been dubbed “The TikTok Intifada”. Through hashtags such as #SaveSheikhJarrah, #SavePalestine, and #FreePalestine, the research shows that online users not only disseminated messages of affect and solidarity with the Palestinians during the Sheikh Jarrah revolt, facilitating grassroots movements, but it also enabled a unified collective political expression among Palestinians across the Occupied Territories and in Israel (Abbas et al. 2022).
- ² In this paper, historical Palestine refers to the geographical area designated under the British Mandate.
- ³ When Danticat wrote her work, Haiti consisted of nine geopolitical departments, which mean administrative districts. Haiti consists now of ten districts; hence, the floating homeland that she describes would now be the 11th department.
- ⁴ Exposure to online content can have a significant impact on identity formation, both positively and negatively, as it is perceived to have a liberating effect that enhances freedom of expression. This exposure can broaden an individual’s worldview and challenge their preconceptions. Online communities, such as forums or social media groups, can provide individuals with a sense of belonging and connection to others who share similar interests or identities. This connection can help individuals form a stronger sense of self and identity. See: Gündüz (2017). Available online: <http://archive.sciendo.com/MJSS/mjss.2017.8.issue-5/mjss-2017-0026/mjss-2017-0026.pdf> (accessed on 24 March 2023).
- ⁵ In his study of the Arab Revolutions and Palestine, Hamid Dabashi shows evidence of the presence of alternative political, economic, and social organizations that have long been present in the region. This awareness transitioned into a political upheaval during revolts exactly because the questioning of state actions and public order are suddenly coordinated and enriched with political symbols and imagery that promise change (Dabashi (2012)).
- ⁶ Possibly the clearest demonstration of this fact is the 2018 Jewish Nation-State Basic Law that explicitly states that the right to self-determination is a sole right of the Jewish people. This law—which has distinct apartheid characteristics—constitutionally entrenches Jewish supremacy and the privileges enjoyed by Jewish citizens, while simultaneously anchoring discrimination against Palestinian citizens and legitimizing exclusion, racism, and systemic inequality. See: Adalah (2017).
- ⁷ Arab Idol is broadcast on MBC (Middle East Broadcasting Center) and was launched in 1991; it is known to be one of the most-watched television networks in the Middle East and North Africa, with a wide reach and large audience. According to a report by Arab Media Outlook, MBC Group was the most watched television network in the Arab world in 2019, with a total daily reach of 131 million viewers across the region.
- ⁸ Their Savvy Use of Social Media Helped to Prompt an International Shift in Rhetoric Regarding Israel and Palestine, Landing Them on Time Magazine’s 100 Most Influential People of 2021. Available online: <https://time.com/collection/100-most-influential-people-2021/6096098/muna-mohammed-el-kurd/> (accessed on 25 March 2023).

References

- Abbas, Laila, Shahira S. Fahmy, Sherry Ayad, Mirna Ibrahim, and Abdelmoneim Hany Ali. 2022. TikTok Intifada: Analyzing Social Media Activism Among Youth. *Online Media and Global Communication* 1: 287–314. [CrossRef]
- Abdo, Nahla. 2018. Feminism, indigenoussness and settler colonialism: Oral history, memory and the Nakba. In *An Oral History of the Palestinian Nakba*. Edited by Nahla Abdo and Nur Masalha. London: Zed Books.
- Abu El-Haj, Nadia. 2001. *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Abu El-Haj, Nadia. 2003. Reflections on archaeology and Israeli settler-nationhood. *Radical History Review* 86: 149–63.
- Abu Sneh, Mustafa. 2021. Facebook Users Deploy Old Arabic Font to Bypass Algorithm, Support Palestinians. *Middle East Eye*. May 23. Available online: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-palestine-facebook-algorithm-old-arabic-font> (accessed on 5 May 2023).

- AbuZayad, Ziad Khalil. 2015. Freedom of Expression and Social Media in Palestine. *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 21: 40.
- Adalah. 2015. We Carry the Memory—15 Years Since October 2000, Facebook. September 21. Available online: <https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.891243270958722.1073741843.420582878024766&type=3> (accessed on 5 July 2023).
- Adalah. 2017. The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, The Discriminatory Laws Database. September 25. Available online: <https://www.adalah.org/en/content/view/7771> (accessed on 5 July 2023).
- Allen, Lori. 2008. Getting by the Occupation: How Violence Became Normal during the Second Palestinian Intifada. *Cultural Anthropology* 23: 453–87. [CrossRef]
- Aouragh, Miriyam. 2011. *Palestine Online: Transnationalism, Communications and the Reinvention of Identity*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Assaf, Mohammed. 2013. «Ya Tair», Youtube. April 19. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-a3zagLXIY> (accessed on 25 March 2023).
- Assaf, Mohammed. 2021. *Twitter*. September 8. Available online: <https://twitter.com/mohammedassaf89/status/1435670350398898179?s=12&t=ONbhwQvjyN8cKPDvEizXSg> (accessed on 1 March 2023).
- Baldry, Eileen, Bree Carlton, and Chris Cunneen. 2012. Abolitionism and the paradox of penal reform in Australia: Indigenous women, colonial patriarchy and co-option. *Social Justice* 41: 168–89. [CrossRef]
- Bennis, Phyllis. 1990. *From Stones to Statehood: The Palestinian Uprising*. New York: Olive Branch Press.
- Butler, Maia L. 2019. The Exigency of the Floating Homeland and Engaging Postnationalisms in the Classroom: Approaches to Teaching Edwidge Danticat's *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work*. In *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Edwidge Danticat*. Edited by Celucien Joseph, Suchismita Banerjee, Marvin Hobson and Danny Hoey Jr. New York: Routledge.
- Dabashi, Hamid. 2012. *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism*. London and New York: Zed Books.
- Danticat, Edwidge. 2010. *Create dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Dwonch, Albana. 2021. *Palestinian Youth Activism in the Internet Age: Online and Offline Social Networks after the Arab Spring*. SOAS Palestine Studies. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Elkins, Caroline, and Susan Pedersen. 2005. *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century: Projects, Practices, Legacies*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Eye on Palestine. 2021a. Israeli Occupation Forces Detained the Palestinian National Songs Artist Moen Al Asam after Singing a Song for Gaza, Facebook. May 28. Available online: <https://www.facebook.com/eyeonpalestine.official/videos/palestine-israeli-occupation-forces-detained-the-palestinian-national-songs-arti/4427073650648175/> (accessed on 5 July 2023).
- Eye on Palestine. 2021b. Palestinians Protesting in Front of the Occupation Court in Nazareth City, in Solidarity with the 4 Prisoners Who Just Arrived the Court. September 11. Available online: https://m.facebook.com/eyeonpalestine.official/videos/palestine-palestinians-protesting-in-front-of-the-occupation-court-in-nazareth-c/1250746022063009/?__so__=permalink&__rv__=related_videos (accessed on 15 April 2023).
- Fanon, Frantz. 2016. *Black Skin, White Mask*. London: Routledge.
- Gordon, Neve. 2008. *Israel's Occupation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gündüz, Uğur. 2017. The Effect of Social Media on Identity Construction. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 8: 85. [CrossRef]
- Hooks, Bell. 1990. *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. Boston: South End Press.
- Iraqi, Amjad. 2015. Thirteen Killed, No One Punished: Remembering October 2000. *+972 Magazine*. October 4. Available online: <https://www.972mag.com/thirteen-killed-no-one-punished-remembering-october-2000/> (accessed on 5 July 2023).
- Jordan, Tim, and Paul Taylor. 2004. *Hacktivism and Cyberwars: Rebels with a Cause?* London: Routledge.
- Kamil, Meryem. 2020. Postspatial, Postcolonial: Accessing Palestine in the Digital. *Social Text* 38: 55–82. [CrossRef]
- Kelley, Robin D. G. 2002. *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Khalidi, Rashid. 1997. *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Khalidi, Rashid. 2020. *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonialism and Resistance, 1917–2017*. New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company.
- Khalili, Laleh. 2005. Virtual Nation: Palestinian Cyberculture in Lebanese Camps. In *Palestine, Israel, and the Politics of Popular Culture*. Edited by Rebecca L. Stein and Ted Swedenburg. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Khalili, Laleh. 2007. *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kunstman, Adi, and Rebecca L. Stein. 2015. *Digital Militarism Israel's Occupation in the Social Media Age*. Series: Stanford Studies in Middle Eastern and Islamic Societies and Cultures; Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Lacan, Jacques. 2007. *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*. Translated by Bruce Fink. New York and London: W. W. Norton.
- Makhoul, Manar H. 2020. *Palestinian Citizens in Israel: A History through Fiction, 1948–2010*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Massad, Joseph. 2003. Liberating Songs: Palestine Put to Music. *Journal of Palestine Studies* 32: 37. [CrossRef]
- Massad, Joseph. 2006. *The Persistence of the Palestinian Question: Essays on Zionism and the Palestinians*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Middle East Eye. 2021. Palestinian Citizens of Israel Protest in Support of Sheikh Jarrah Residents. May 11. Available online: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/video/palestinian-citizens-israel-protest-support-sheikh-jarrah-residents> (accessed on 25 March 2023).
- Middle East Eye. 2022. Facebook and Instagram violated Palestinian Rights during Gaza War, Internal Report Finds. September 22. Available online: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/facebook-instagram-meta-violate-palestine-rights-report> (accessed on 10 April 2023).

- Nassar, Jamal R., and Roger Heacock, eds. 1990. *Intifada: Palestine at the Crossroads*. New York: Praeger.
- Norman, Julie M. 2010. *The Second Palestinian Intifada: Civil Resistance*. London: Routledge.
- Palestineremembered.com. Available online: <https://www.palestineremembered.com/MissionStatement.htm> (accessed on 28 June 2023).
- Pappé, Ilan. 2004. *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Povinelli, Elizabeth A. 2002. *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Razack, Sherene. 2015. *Dying from Improvement: Inquests and Inquiries into Indigenous Deaths in Custody*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Reuters. 2021. Palestinians Cheer as Israeli Barriers Come Down after Jerusalem Ramadan Clashes. April 25. Available online: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/palestinians-cheer-israeli-barriers-come-down-jerusalem-easing-nightly-ramadan-2021-04-25/> (accessed on 25 March 2023).
- Rheingold, Howard. 1993. *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier*. A William Patrick Book. Reading: Addison-Wesley Publishing Pub. Co.
- Rodinson, Maxime. 1973. *Israel: A Colonial-Settler State?* New York: Pathfinder Press.
- Rouhana, Nadim N. 1997. *Palestinian Citizens in an Ethnic Jewish State: Identities in Conflict*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Said, Edward W. 1980. *The Question of Palestine*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Salih, Ruba. 2015. Bodies that Walk, Bodies that Talk, Bodies That Love: Palestinian Women Refugees, Affectivity and the Politics of the Ordinary. *Antipode* 49: 742–60. [CrossRef]
- Sayegh, Fayez. 2012. Zionist colonialism in Palestine. *Settler Colonial Studies* 2: 206–25. [CrossRef]
- Sayigh, Yezid. 1997. *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949–1993*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Sayigh, Rosemary. 1998. Palestinian Camp Women as Tellers of History. *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27: 42–58. [CrossRef]
- Sfard, Michael. 2023. Israel's Annexation of the West Bank Has Already Begun. *Foreign Policy*. June 8. Available online: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/06/08/israel-palestine-west-bank-annexation-netanyahu-smotrich-far-right/#:~:text=That%20December%2C%20Netanyahu%27s%20ruling%20Likud,immediately%20due%20to%20international%20objections> (accessed on 5 July 2023).
- Shamir, Jonathan. 2021. As Jerusalem Burns, the Palestinians of Jaffa Face Similar Evictions. *New Lines Magazine*. May 14. Available online: <https://newlinesmag.com/reportage/as-jerusalem-burns-the-palestinians-of-jaffa-face-similar-evictions/> (accessed on 5 July 2023).
- Shohat, Ella, and Robert Stam. 1994. *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. New York: Routledge.
- Stoler, Ann L. 2018. Colony. In *Political Concepts: A Critical Lexicon*. Edited by J. M. Bernstein, Adi Ophir and Ann Laura Stoler. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Swedenburg, Ted. 2003. *Memories of Revolt: The 1936–1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press.
- Tawil-Souri, Helga, and Miriyam Aouragh. 2014. Intifada 3.0? Cyber Colonialism and Palestinian Resistance. *The Arab Studies Journal* 22: 102–33.
- Times of Israel. 2021. Palestinians Celebrate 'Heroic' Prison Break, Call to Protect Escapees. September 6. Available online: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/palestinians-celebrate-heroic-prison-break-call-to-protect-escapees/> (accessed on 5 March 2023).
- Veracini, Lorenzo. 2010. *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1–22.
- Veracini, Lorenzo. 2011. Introducing Settler Colonial Studies. *Settler Colonial Studies* 1: 8. [CrossRef]
- Ward, Alex. 2021. The "TikTok Intifada", Vox. Available online: <https://www.vox.com/22436208/palestinians-gaza-israel-tiktok-social-media> (accessed on 5 March 2023).
- Watan, Al. 2006. «Al-Quds Chatroom on Paltalk Organizes a Symposium on the Situation of Palestinians in Iraq». March 2. Available online: <https://www.alwatanvoice.com/arabic/news/2006/03/02/38734.html> (accessed on 25 March 2023).
- Zraick, Karen. 2019. A Look at the West Bank Area Netanyahu Vowed to Annex. *The New York Times*. September 10. Available online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/10/world/middleeast/jordan-valley-israel-netanyahu.html> (accessed on 5 July 2023).
- Zreik, Raef. 2007. Exit From the Scene: Reflections on the Public Space of the Palestinians in Israel. In *Mixed Towns, Trapped Communities: Historical Narratives, Spatial Dynamics, Gender Relations and Cultural Encounters in Palestinian-Israeli Towns*. Edited by Dan Rabinowitz and Daniel Monterescu. London: Routledge.
- 7amleh—The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media. 2018. *Connection Interrupted: Israel's Control of the Palestinian ICT Infrastructure and Its Impact on Digital Rights*. San Francisco: Association for Progressive Communications (APC), December. Available online: https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/Report_7amleh_English_final.pdf (accessed on 30 March 2023).

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.