Palestinian Commemoration Politics:
The Performative Roles of Women in the 'Palestinian Diaspora' TV Series

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Abstract

The paper analyses gender roles within a Palestinian historical context, using the TV drama series 'The Palestinian Diaspora' as a case study. The focus is, specifically, on how women in pre-1948 Palestine and, subsequently, in refugee camps are presented in the series. Building on Maurice Halbwachs's and Sigmund Freud's respective theoretical frameworks in memory studies and on the works of Raevvyn Connell, Judith Butler and other feminist theorists, the paper shows how women's voices are silenced within the Palestinian national narrative and collective memory. It is argued that the TV series present a unique remembering model where women's gender roles intersect with their class positions and with specific historical events such as the 1948 and 1967 wars. By doing so, the series introduce a commemoration pattern where women become a part of Palestinian history as women, not only as mothers or daughters.

Introduction

In this paper, I analyze the immensely popular TV series' 'The Palestinian Diaspora', which was shown in 2004 by focusing on how gender roles are presented and "remembered" within the context of the Palestinian family before and after 1948. The series narrate the story of a family made up of seven members: the father, the mother, four sons and one daughter. I pay special attention to the mother and her relations to her husband and her children and on two narratives in the series: those of the mother and her youngest son.

In the beginning of the series, the narrator raises the question of memory, stating that the purpose of the project is to commemorate those who are incapable of writing their own history. When examining the process of remembering and forgetting in Palestinian history, women usually fit into the category of those who were coerced into silence and were remembered either as mothers or supporters of men – or not remembered at all. What is more, women are usually presented as having accepted their predestined roles happily and sacrificing, willingly, their lives for the good of the national cause or for that of their children. It is part of a pattern; whereby Palestinian history is used to overcome the present

tragedy: to drive home the point for the Palestinian self and the other that the Palestinians once lived joyfully in their stolen land.

I argue here that commemorating the past to create collective memory can be done without romanticizing it, while, at the same time, fulfilling the psychological needs associated with the remembering process itself. The writer of 'The Palestinian Diaspora', Dr. Walid Said, presents a different type of commemoration than had hitherto been the norm: while showing Palestinian suffering under British colonization and the dispossession of Palestinians from their land in the 1948 war, he also exposes the internal injustice within the Palestinian community in terms of gender, class and patriarchy. In my interpretation, the series show how Palestinian women played the role of the gatekeepers of patriarchy – willingly as well through coercion – by mastering what Judith Butler called their performative gender roles. To be sure, some Palestinian women were aware of the injustice done to them – and some Palestinian men, too – but, as I stress, this awareness was not affective and did not change prevailing attitudes or behavior within a patriarchal society.

The paper is divided into two parts. In the first one, I explain my theoretical approach toward discussing collective memory within the Palestinian context by combining Halbwachs's and Freud's frameworks on the topic. In the second one, I analyze the TV series, empirically, as a Palestinian memory project by focusing on the role on gender with references to works of feminist scholars, such as Judith Butler's, Raevvyn Connell and Hanita Brand. My purpose is to show the importance of studying gender representations in the field of collective memory. And by analyzing, deconstructing and deromanticizing the patriarchal social structure of pre-1948 Palestine, one is also able to offer a better understanding of gender roles in the present, which are not fixed but contingent – and historically and socially structured.

A Theoretical Framework: History, Remembrance and Collective Memory

In an article on the affinities between collective memory and history, Susan A. Crane poses a few questions to those historians who might be sceptical about the memory concept. She raises the question of whether 'we create forms of historical representation because history is past, or do we create them because history is present? Do we write history because we have experienced it ourselves, or do we see ourselves as looking at something that is distant virtually lost to us?' (Crane, 1997). Similarly, I had to ask myself repeatedly while reading and thinking about the 'The Palestinian Diaspora' why I am choosing to get back to

this TV series in 2020 instead of doing so in 2004 when it premiered, that is, four years after the second armed uprising against Israeli rule – in in the occupied territories – began. Having going through this period of revolt, my recollections of it are still incomplete and unclear as if hidden deep inside my subconscious. Yet, as Ala Alazzeh argues – in his treatment of memory practices in relation to the first Intifada in Palestine – the epistemological position of a researcher cannot be detached from the study object (Alazzeh, 2015) or his/her approach towards 'objective' history. To Alazzeh, critical theory, shows that facts are a result of power relations embedded within a dominant ideology. They make memory studies transcend the study of history as an object for interpretations and understanding, making it a cognitive tool to criticize that ideology by exposing other facts that have been obscured in the process of knowledge production about it. Thus, memory studies are themselves a memorizing tool (Alazzeh, 2015).

Here I will make an attempt to create forms of historical representation of the past, not only of the year 2004 but also of a series of crucial and devastating events that Palestinians experienced long before 1948 until the present. Crane begins her article by saying that the most banal description of history is saying that 'it happened' but also what is written and produced about the past (Crane, 1997). I analyse historical events – the 1936-armed revolt against British mandate in Palestine and the internal class struggle in pre-1948 Palestine – through the interpretive lens of the TV series. I use historical literature to contextualize different versions of the past and to offer a new interpretive framework. I am particularly interested in dissecting the standpoint of the series' screenwriter – Walid Said combines many voices over a period of time, merging them into one dominant voice of an educated male peasant – and how it is developed and transmitted, in a narrative form, to the TV audience. History is, then, both the past(s) and the narratives that represent these pasts as historical memory in relation to the present. Collective memory, however, is a conceptualization process where the past's continual presence can be sensed in the present (Crane, 1997). In this sense, collective memory can be an individualistic activity or an institutionalized process, reflecting any sort of historical thinking, remembering, writing, or knowledge production.

I argue that there are, at least, two different answers to the question of why now but not in 2004? The first has to do with Freud's approach to the memory/history or his belief that humanity has created its own experience of history and, therefore, can create it again. To Freud memory and history are mutually conditioning. This interpretation is based on the conception of memory as an interaction between repetition and recollection. In repetition, we

forward images of the past, which continue shaping our understanding of the present, while recollection is a conscious process of reconstructing revised images of the past that suit our present needs (Hutton, 1994). As for how far we can go in recovering these hidden memories, which are retained as a whole in the subconscious mind, Freud maintains that we can retrieve all of them. Freud wanted to seize that moment of memory, the repetition moment, to transform it into a steady process to enable humans to recover their deepest memories for a better understanding of their lives. The analyst's task is to seek to dismantle the chain of associations originally constructed by the subconscious mind to isolate the memory of the original experience. Hence, psychoanalysis uses one technique (conscious recollection) to perceive another (unconscious repetition) (Hutton, 1994).

Using Freud's theoretical framework to look back at 2004, I argue that Palestinians experienced what could be described as transcending moments based on images emerging from their collective memory. In 1948, Palestinians were forcibly expelled from their land by Zionist militias. Some stayed in historical Palestine; others moved within it to the West Bank and the Gaza strip, and yet others left for Lebanon, Jordan and Syria and other countries (Kimmerling, 2000). Despite the brutality of the war, there was a feeling among Palestinians that they would return soon. They waited for 19 years or until the 1967 war between Israel and four Arabic countries – Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Iraq – for a chance to do so. But, as it turned out, the Arabs not only lost the war, but the Israelis occupied the whole of historical Palestine as well as additional territory from Egypt and Syria. That experience represented a turning point in Palestinian history because the Palestinians decided to take control of their own destiny by starting a guerrilla war against Israel and by launching the armed struggle against the Israeli colonization of Palestine (Alazzeh, 2015).

As time passed, however, the Palestinians, represented by the Palestinian Liberation Organization, concluded in 1993 that the only way to keep their cause alive was to open peace talks with Israel. What resulted from the negotiations was the establishment of the Palestinian Authority as the internationally recognized representative body of the Palestinian people. This historical shift from the armed struggle to mediation also made invisible shift in Palestinian conceptions of time. One aspect of memory studies is the relation with time, as in the relation of the past, present and future. In his theses on history, Walter Benjamin described modernity's time as a homogenous empty time; its homogeneity related to a categorization based on the notion of a calendar and the emptiness reflected the lack of the cultural meaning of time reduced to a chain of mathematical divisions(Benjamin, 1968). In contrast to homogenous empty time, history as a historical structure becomes true here and

now; what makes, in other words, a past event present itself in the present is that it is not considered a part of those mathematical divisions of time (Benjamin, 1968). The Palestinian time after 1993 till 2000 was the mathematical homogenous one filled with emptiness and a lack of any cultural meaning. The official institutions dominated the processes of immortalizing the past, but within the context of the official narrative that displaced the earlier rebellious narrative of the Palestinian armed struggle; this was reflected in the abandonment of a Third World liberation movement discourse and the adoption of a liberal human rights one (Khalili, 2007).

Laleh Khalili (2007) introduces, in her study of Palestinian refugee camps, a framework that relates the changes in commemorating themes to intersectional power relations between institutions and individuals. Thus, commemorating processes before 1993 were produced by individuals as part of a non-official process, focusing on themes such as heroism, martyrs, liberation of historical Palestine, decolonizing Israel, the right of return for Palestinian refugees. In contrast, the Palestinian Authority, with its new national project, not only neglected most of these discursive themes but replaced them with others, such as humans rights, the two states solution, the recognition of Israel, and a hesitation about the rights for refugees to return to their lands as a core component in any peace process (Khalili, 2007). This new hegemonic discourse exercised by official institutions was weakened by the intifada, leaving the empty space to be filled with 'divine time' in which the memories of the struggle against colonization were not only kept alive and immortalized but rather embodied in the present as a replacement of empty homogenous time. It was during this period that the 'The Palestinian Diaspora' series was produced and shown – a period in which the Palestinians were engaged with their own immortalizing memory processes, obviating any timing obstacles. For, when a divine time prevails, where these processes spontaneously happen as a daily act, it creates a sort of an imaginary bridge between the past and the present or a conscious feeling that the past is repeating itself in the present.

Another approach in memory studies adopted here is rooted in the work of Halbwachs. He shared Freud's view that living memory involves the interaction between repetition and recollection, but he argued that this process occurs as a reaction to a social rather than a psychological dynamic (Hutton, 1994). For Halbwachs, history in the process of contemporary collective memory, only retains what remains of interest to present-day society, which is very little (Halbwachs, 1950). In that sense, collective memory differs from history in, at least, two aspects: 'it retains from the past only what still lives or is capable of living in the consciousness of the groups keeping the memory alive'. But once a period of

time ceases to interest the subsequent period, the same group has not forgotten its past, since there are two successive groups, the one following the other (Halbwachs, 1950). Subsequently, for every society there is more than one past, one history or one collective memory. What a group of people at the present time remembers is only what suits its present interests, needs and modes of studying history and events. This means that a true recovery process for the past, as Freud claims to be possible, is not possible for Halbwachs because of the remembering process techniques.

To Halbwachs, collective memories are part of lived experiences and represent living links with immediate predecessors. In contrast, he sees history as being unitary. As he put it:

> History can be represented as the universal memory of human species.
> But there is no universal memory. Every collective memory requires the
> support of a group delimited in space and time (Halbwachs, 1950).

Thus, one can argue that within a certain society there are not only several collective memories but also several groups, at the same moment in the present, rethinking the past. By doing so, they create several different collective memories reflecting lived experiences, social positions, and psychological needs. Halbwachs emphasized that repetition memories are not transmitted as they are but are combined as they are continuously revised. He claims that when these memories are being transmitted during a repetition process, they are reduced to peculiar memories as an idealized image that suits individual needs (Hutton, 1994). He suggests that memories are reconstructed within social contexts that include or exclude certain memories. Humans do not retrieve images of the past as they were originally, but convert these images to fit the present conceptions, which are shaped and constructed by the social forces that act upon societies. Thus, what we remember is a reflection of the influences that social groups presently have over us (Hutton, 1994).

In his review of memory studies, Jeffrey Olick (1999) explains that there are two main cultures that dominate the field. The first is related to the psychological and neurological aspects based on the individual as the centre of the memorizing process, while the other is grounded in the social and cultural aspects of the two processes remembering and forgetting (Olick, 1999). In the first one, the memorizing process is being understood as a pure psychological act (Olick, 1999). Thus, remembering and forgetting are subjects of the subconscious oppression, with memory only being retrieved in dreams or in psychoanalysis (Hutton, 1994). The other is rooted in the classic argument represented by Emile Durkheim

who presumes the existence of society as an individual – singular – making the process of immortalizing memories and retrieving the 'collective' past throughout rituals where the past becomes part of the present and part of the collective conscious of the people (Alazzeh, 2015).

I do not want to privilege one school of thought at the expense of the other. On the one hand, I argue that the TV series can be understood – in a Durkheimian vein – as an attempt to create and affect the social collective consciousness by retrieving the past and put it into the heart of a broken present at a crucial moment in the Palestinian people's history. On the other, my point is that the series can be interpreted as an act of self-catharsis based on Walid Said's view that the Palestinian people have made horrible mistakes in the past and repeated them again and again. This is not only about an individual attempt to achieve self-catharsis but a collective one as well. In this way, the audience could be seen as part of psychoanalytical group work: they were being hypnotised by a narrative about their own history in a moment where they felt completely hopeless, helpless and lost. Yet, if that had been the only representative option, the series would have been dramatically and hopelessly romanticized, which is not the case. On the contrary, the series manage to revise the past, not to create a romantic narrative about it, but rather to offer a realistic criticism of the past as well as the present. That is why Halbwachs's model of memory studies can be applied to the topic with the aim of understanding how present social and cultural realities affect the process of restoring and revising the past and how the responses of the past influence the outcomes of memory processes.

Women's Narrative within Collective Memory

When women remember, the present often intervenes, forcing them to adopt the national narrative and collective memory which often are formed, developed and narrated by men. This also applies to Palestinian women, even if their experiences may sometime differ from women of other nationalities. Instead of being better in comparison with the past, the present is for them worse. In a book chapter entitled 'In Palestine, Men and Women were living Happily', Hanita Brand (2009) notes that life in pre-1948 Palestine is the cornerstone of Palestinian collective memory processes, both male and female. It is imagined to be bountiful and colourful, idealized as a lost paradise. In this case, remembering Palestine, particularly for women, become harder for them to find their own voices. Instead, their voices melt within the national narrative as refugees comparing their imagined lost paradise with their sour

present as a refugees, living in poor camps where houses are made of steel and aluminium and where they are dependent on international aid programs instead of being able to pick the fruits of their lost gardens and fields (Brand, 2009).

According to Brand, women's position in the dominant Palestinian collective memory reflects their self-perceptions as being marginal in that story and as only playing a supporting role to men who 'own' the Palestinian struggle (Brand, 2009) against Israel and British colonialism before it. Therefore, women were categorized within the Palestinian narrative as representing a sacrifice for the nation and commemorated collectively as mothers who either gave birth for the nation or sacrificed their children for the cause (Davis, 2017). That lasted until the female engagement in the guerrilla movement in the 1960s and 1970s where women began to 'to be seen as identifiable individuals having their own agency, separate from men, in the resistance' (Davis, 2017). Soon after the signing of 1993 Oslo agreement, however, women returned to their traditional role of supporting men in their struggle against the occupation

Um Mahmud, originally from Al-Damur, who Brand interviewed, mixes three different types of memories. Emphasizing the political context of the past when she mentions British colonialism and the dispossession of the Palestinians by the Zionist militias (Brand, 2009). But when she starts recalling the daily life details of the village which contradict the political message, she makes much of the idea of happiness even within an unequal pre-1948 Palestinian society. In here words:

> In our farming community back in Palestine, men and women were
> living happily and working hand in hand. The men could not do all
> the work on the farm so the women went out to help them. Men and
> women used to go to the field together, come back home together and
> feel much closer to each other than they do now. At home, women were
> responsible for doing all the daily chores, looking after the children,
> feeding the animals, milking the cows and making all the dairy products.
> They enjoyed doing all that; they certainly did not resent it. It was as natural to them
> as the fact the sun rises in the east and sets in the west (Brand, 2009).

'The Palestinian Diaspora' presents a different image of the past, even if it does not completely contradict Um Mahmud's version. In the series, Women work in the field with men, not 'hand by hand' but with families sending their daughters around the 'olive picking season' to work in different fields where workers were needed to help their families. The working conditions were generally bad – both for men and women. Yet, for poor families, there was no alternative if they were going to survive financially. In one scene, the daughter

returns home after having had a humiliating fight with another girl, while picking olives. Hiding her grief and feelings, she approaches her father to hand him her meagre wage; he looks at her with his eyes filled with tears, feeling incapable as a man to provide financial security to his family because he has to send his daughter to the fields of strangers to pick olives. Unlike other few rich families in the same village, the men and women in this family were not living happily together. In contrast to an idealized image of the past – the olive picking season – the series conveys a very dark image of this particular time for the Palestinian peasant.

Um Mahmud felt the need to glorify the past to encounter a depressing present. But, as Halbwachs explained, remembering the past is always associated with group needs, shared feelings, cultural modes and political contexts. As a refugee in Damascus, Um Mahmud had to block her 'true' memories and paint them in joyful colours. Just as in the series, when one of the sons sneaks into the occupied land to steal oranges from an Israeli farm and come back to the camp, he offers one of the oranges to his father. His father retorts that this orange cannot be compared to the oranges in the (home) 'land'. It was the same orange, stolen, yet the brain starts to build barriers and comparisons between the past and the present; the present is projected as being either less than perfect or as hell. At its worst, the past is joyful; at its best, it is 'Lost Paradise'.

However, Um Mahmud memories of the past – the duties and household tasks which she refers as something women enjoyed doing it – are not necessarily a defence mechanism. Her romanticizing of the past, the material abundance and the harmonious sense of community of villages can be understood as standing in opposition to the present state of poverty and dispossession (Farah, 2006). For older women, narratives of the past represented the 'beginning' of an individual and collective history and identity, where the dead ancestors and village saints buried from 'time immemorial' play an important role. A long genealogical chart, usually and effortlessly recounted by older women, established and reaffirmed the roots (Farah, 2006). Another important reason for remembering the village as a 'lost paradise' is that it represented – in the Palestinian past – a sense of community in the absence of a not-yet-formed nation state (Farah, 2006). The village symbolized the idea of a homeland, while in the present, Palestinians had to construct a national identity without a land and in exile. Therefore, refugees insist that their Palestine begins and ends within their original villages, and only by returning to these villages 'the nation as a whole can be redeemed' (Farah, 2006).

The series also emphasize this contrast between the camp in the present and the

village in the past. The family story begins in the village, reducing the whole of Palestine to a peasant life within the village, which includes the relations with the city and other villages. Then comes the historical breaking point represented by the Nakba and the dispossession of the Palestinians after the 1948 war and the appearance of the camp as the place of dispossessed peasants. Collective memory for Palestinian refugees, then, is an ongoing process subject to change but also containing continuity. The camp represents an ongoing exile, linking the younger generation to the older one, and to the idea of the lost homeland. The imagined Palestinian nation was formed – and is still being formed – within the boundaries of the camp and the truth buried underneath it: the exile.

On the other hand, Palestine is remembered as a lost paradise. Yet, Palestinians do not attempt to wipe the evil memories of the past, and it is in this category where the series narrative veers of course. There are certain times in the past which are remembered, but in the context of continuous struggles such as poverty, suffering under the British Mandate period, the Zionist massacres of Palestinians and cruelty of their own landlords, money lenders and tax collectors (El-Nimer, 1993). The series do not distinguish between the ideal, normal and what actually took place (El-Nimer, 1993). This can be discerned in the comments of a Palestinian woman who was interviewed in the West Bank:

> We keep talking about the good old days, but I tell you, we women had
> a hard life. We used to wake up at three or four in the morning to milk the
> goats, to get the water from the village well, prepare breakfast and work
> in the fields and when we came back, we prepared dinner. It was not an
> easy life, but we were in our land (El-Nimer, 1993).

In this interview, the woman seems more realistic in her recounting of the past than Um Mahmud. She clarifies what took place: that women had a hard life and were not completely happy. Yet, in the end, the emphasis is still on the Palestinians having one thing that they do not have in the present: that is, 'living in our land'.

The Unhappy Village Lives of Women and Men

In the second episode of the series, the father, as mentioned, cannot control his emotions when watching his daughter giving him the money, she earned from picking olives for other people. This family does not own much land, a very small tract that merely satisfied its basic needs. The father says to his children that he is sorry for having to let his daughter work and

for not being able to safeguard her dignity in contrast to other girls in the village. One of the two younger sons, then, intervenes, asking his father to let him go with his sister or one of his two old brothers so that he can get paid too. But his older brother tells him to go back inside and study, adding:' If there is any hope for a better life… it comes from education… it's too late for us – the old – but you two have the opportunity to be educated and help the family become financially more independent and more socially respected'. In an earlier scene, the father had refused an offer from one of the cruel landlords to sell his land. Yet, while this refusal reflects a sense of dignity, it brings no relief from the dire economic and social situation.

When the time comes for the two brothers to be sent to school in the city, the father is unable to finance the education of both of them. This prompts him to ask what the point is of doing so. The mother has, at this moment, her first effective role in the family by urging the father and the older son to send the two together saying:' Poor people like ourselves have nothing to look forward to but education… May God guide their way away from poverty to a better live'.

In 'The Palestinian Diaspora', the mother is present in almost every family scene, perfecting her gender role, as the whisperer who intervenes after one of her sons says something she agrees with to the father, or as the angry proud woman who pushes her husband and sons to defend their rights against the local landlords or the British tax collectors, or as the patience woman who reassures her husband that things will be fine, when it is not.

Referring to gender roles, Judith Butler notices that there is an agency that can be understood as the process of rendering predetermined possibilities within one's body (Butler, 1988). These possibilities, she says, are constrained by available historical conventions in which the body's materiality bears meaning and 'the manner of this bearing is fundamentally dramatic' (Butler, 1988). The actress playing the role of the mother in the series had a very impressing facial expressions: to some extent, she mastered what Butler describes as a performative gender act. She is able to transform her body in her motions and her dressing into a Palestinian peasant woman that lived nearly 70 years ago in some nameless Palestinian village, rendering all what she knows and heard from the old generation of Palestinian women about their lives in the village. She is the joyful woman, the hard-living peasant, the mother of five children, the heartbroken mother, the grandmother and the widowed grandmother. And for some reason, the director, Hatem Al-Ali, made her an eternal witness, the living site of memory, the continuous past within the present. She is part of the life in the

village; she experiences the dispossession in 1948, the death of her two sons, and the death of her husband in the camp. When the series ends, she is still alive.

There is a symbolic meaning for letting her live through all these crucial events; as a mother and wife she embodies the meaning of exile – in her aging, yet strong, body. This is an important meaning that her predetermined body bears. She existed as an idea to be mastered in acting a long time before the actor plays her role. Her image existed with all its possibilities long before it was revealed on the screen.

Commemoration can also be a performative act, transferring predetermined images of the past into the present. Every other character in the series could be made up, except for the mother who, as noted, could have existed long time ago. As a Palestinian, I was able to see her facial expressions on my grandmother face, on many old Palestinian women faces. Even her voice was similar to many common women's voices; the language she uses to counsel her husband, to encourage her children, to convince her daughter to get remarried to another man. The daughter dislikes him, but the mother tells her that she cannot be a widow forever and that the life of a widow is not an easy life. Often based on popular sayings, such old feminine wisdom tends to justify injustice done to women and bears the feeling of predetermined destiny for every woman: that any woman's life is not different from that lived by women before them. In short, women have only one role they should perform, again and again: to take care of their families, no matter what.

Women as Victims and Gatekeepers

Butler's most important argument is that gender is not only a social illusion but rather an illusion being performed repeatedly to the extent that it becomes a social norm. Thus, gendered behaviour, practices and character are not only a state of 'becoming' as De Beauvoir once said, but rather a state of repeating predetermined and pre-existed social roles that have been rehearsed over and over again throughout history by different actors males and females (Butler, 1988). This means that gender is not only a socially constructed concept, but a socially cultural performative ritual.

In a very small community like a village in pre-1948 Palestine, the idea of gender is presented in 'The Palestinian Diaspora' in a clearer and stricter form. Every old woman becomes the gatekeeper of traditions and culture, which are the only social norms and rules that every woman should live by. That is obvious in the case of the daughter. As noted, the mother convinces her to get remarried after becoming a widow. The mother knows that

her daughter has no choice but to obey her father and brothers' will. Hence, she advises her daughter that she must forget her first husband and be faithful to her new husband. A few days after the marriage, the daughter is beaten up by her husband and returns to her family house. When her older brother sees her, sad and crying, he gets so angry that he goes out, finds her husband and attacks him physically. A few hours later, the police come and arrest him for what he has done. The father, in a state of anger and grief, for his older son's arrest, reacts in this way: 'It is true what they say… Daughters humiliate their families… Nothing good comes from daughters'. The daughter start repeating her father words and crying:' This is all because of me… I wish I were dead'.

At that moment, her brother, Hassan, intervenes, telling her to stop blaming herself saying to his father:

> This is not true father. We did this by marrying her to that bastard.
> We do this to women. We humiliate daughters and break their heads,
> but we want that to happen without them making any noise and worry us.
> Damn the peasant and his life. (The Palestinian Diaspora)

Hassan represents a different male figure in The Palestinian Diaspora'. He has been deprived of his education in order to enable his younger brother to go to the city school. Living in the village, he feels suffocated by its social and class structure. He is sort of a rebel but without a cause because he cannot turn his ideas into words. This changes when he meets a girl in the village who lives with her mother and does sewing work. The two women soon become stigmatized for living alone without a man. However, Hassan does not care, and he keeps helping them. His attachment to – and affection for – the daughter also becomes stronger. The villagers begin to notice his repeated visits to her house in the presence of her mother, and they complain to his family. Hassan insists that he wants to marry the daughter, but his family turns him down because of the stigma attached to her. After challenging his family, it finally relents. But, as it turns out, it is too late. Having dug into the family backgrounds of the two women, the villagers had managed to find their cousins who waste no time before killing the daughter for staining the family honour.

That represents a breaking point for Hassan who becomes depressed, feeling more alienated than ever from the village and his community. He has not received any support from his mother who had treated the daughter and the mother with complete disrespect. The mother's position does not reflect any cruelty: she only wants to protect her family and her son from being stigmatized for the rest of their life. She is, however, unable to

understand what she herself has never understood and suffered from. Her own family had also been stigmatized for a long time for being foreigners in the village without being recognized by any extended family or a tribe. That changed after the older son became a leader in the 1936 revolution against the British colonization. The extended family recognised his family and visited its members in the village, thereby silencing all the villagers' criticism of them. Yet, even though she had been a victim of social exclusion herself, there was no question of showing any sympathy for the mother and daughter who had suffered the same fate. She did not want to be dragged back to a traumatic past, afraid that her family would lose its social status, which had been earned after the revolution.

That is how patriarchy recruits its victims to be gatekeepers. As Raevvyn Connell has argued, women and men who are most affected by patriarchy's coercive social and cultural system, become gatekeepers on its behalf (Connell, 2005). The Mother in 'The Palestinian Diaspora' is a gatekeeper in different ways. In another episode, the middle son wants to marry the daughter of the same landlord that had tortured the family for a long time and tried to buy their land. The mother does not, however, object to her son wedding plans on those grounds; she is against them because the woman is a widow despite the fact that her own daughter had been widowed. The younger son, Hassan, intervenes again in the family discussion:

> 'Tell me mother, this is what you are saying about a widow woman. What do you say about a widow man?'
> The Mother:' The man is different'.
> Hassan:' Oh my God! The oppressor is an oppressor, okay, that is understandable. But the oppressed? Also oppresses himself and humiliate himself? I cannot understand! The woman more than anyone else is oppressed and suffering from oppression, yet she is the one defending the oppressor!'.
> The Mother:' Okay Okay… you go away'. (The Palestinian Diaspora)

This discussion, again, reveals a different type of commemorating the past. The insists on not presenting a harmonious family where all the members share the same social and cultural values. As it turns out, the son wants to marry the landlord's daughter because her father's wealth and lands. The mother reminds him that women inherit nothing from their fathers. The son counters: 'Will make them do… Time change mother'. There are different factors pushing social change in this single scene: Hassan supports widows and women because of his old love, his rebellious spirit and his own feeling of oppression. His older son wants to marry the widow for economic reasons and believes that he can push for women's

right to inherit their fathers for his own interest. The mother opposes the wedding plan because she thinks that her son deserves better than a widow. And Hasan cannot understand the position of his mother toward his sister for that very same reason. As gatekeepers, women do not occupy the same role as men. The mother had seen her daughter suffer, while she could not do anything about her suffering except for remarrying a man below her station. She does not want her son to feel less than his wife, and, she believes the common saying about widows: that they kill their husbands and they have possessed a curse of some sorts.

As Butler put it, 'The act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene' (Butler, 1988). Often it is not up to women to choose their act or their scene; they must subject to it and play it in silence. The role of the mother in some nameless Palestinian village is to protect her family and every bit of social capital the family gains over the years. That is her role; it existed long time before she ever arrived on the scene. Watching the series provides a unique individual experience for the audience, especially women. For it must have been disturbing for women to watch their gender roles being played repeatedly and by different actors. They have either to comply to the dramatic features that represent them as the heart of family's stability or refuse the whole narrative and decide to write another one.

But for the mother herself, she always chooses to comply with the pre-written role for a mother in Palestinian village. On the other hand, her daughter represents the silence lamp of the family. She endures the suffering, the loss of her first husband after she becomes pregnant with his child as well as that of her child after her new husband coerces her to choose between him and her child. The mother, again, convinces her to give up her child for the family where her son will grow up. A second separation between her and her son takes place during the Zionist militias attack on the village. At that time, the son leaves the village with her family to the West Bank, while she must stay with her husband and flee to one of the Palestinian cities in pre-1948 occupied Palestine. They stay separated until the 1967 war when the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, in a way united Palestine again under one occupation and that made it easier for the son to find his mother and meet her again after 19 years of separation. The daughter never complains throughout the series until she disappears after the second separation with her son. Her silence and endurance are the main features of her character. It was a predetermined role that she had to perfect and accept with complete silence only for her child and the satisfaction of her family, which ironically, ended up losing both in the 1948 war.

Collective Memory and National identity

In the first scene of the series the narrator, Ali, the younger son – who is in his fifties – receives an award for his academic achievements. During the ceremony, he is handed a letter informing him of his older brother's death. He withdraws quietly and starts crying in his car. When he arrives to his family home in the camp, he takes a seat by his dead brother's bedside and whispers:

> Brother, I want you to know, that if it was not for you, I would
> have achieved nothing. Do you hear me? All what I am is because of
> you. (The Palestinian Diaspora).

Since he was highly intellectual member of the family, he was able to think of his brother´s death as more than natural event. He goes beyond the death itself to wonder about what it represents in regard of an entire period of history. In the narrator's voice, he tells the audience:

> My Brother, Ahmad, has died… No one will remember him; there will be no writers
> recalling his life and deeds, and soon the last unknown witnesses shall die, the last
> forgotten novelists, those who knew him as a young man, a wild horse saddled only
> by the wind… Who shall bear the burden of memory? Who shall write the lives of
> those without any biography and marginalized in history books? Those who merged
> their bodies into the people's body and left a deep trace indicate others but not them?
> (The Palestinian Diaspora).

Who shall write the biography of those without any biography? I have always remembered this question whenever I think about 'The Palestinian Diaspora'. It is the first statement of the narrator, clarifying the purpose of the whole narrative: To tell the story of the marginalized, to render a different memories of the past into the heart of the present, to save their stories from being forgotten.

In 2004, the second armed uprising against the Israeli occupation had been defeated, the historical Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat had died, and there was a common belief that he had been poisoned. There was also a general feeling among Palestinians that the whole world had left them alone to face the Israeli war machine and its bloody consequences. All this made many Palestinians ask the question: How did we get here? It was not an easy

question, and for anyone seeking an answer, he or she had to search deep in history, in identity, in memory, just like what the screenwriter Walid Said did.

I consider the series not only to be an attempt to remember the past and its marginalized characters but also commemorate the past in order to clarify the present and to remove its mysterious clouds. It is an individual interpretation for other individuals, who, as Crane explains, were dealt with as information to be assimilated, remembered or archived to create multiple pasts in the form of a lived experience (Crane, 1997). It was important to have a narrator in the series to reflect on events and create the effect of such an experience being told to others. The author, Walid Said, disguised himself as the narrator, transforming his historical research into 'lived experience that the self-reflexive historian consciously integrates into collective memory' (Crane, 1997). This mixture between collective memory and lived experience often interpenetrate each other through autobiography, 'the self-conscious memory of individual members of a group' (Crane, 1997). In 'The Palestinian Diaspora', it was the self-conscious memory of Ali, the younger son and the one who owned the language, enabling him to reflect on memories and integrate them within the Palestinian historical context in order to create a sense of collective identity.

In pre-1948 Palestine, the Palestinians – as is made clear in the series – did not possess what can be described as a national or collective identity. Ethnic solidarity existed among villages and cities, especially when Palestinians became aware of the existential threat they were facing. As Kimmerling points out, the most important factor that shaped and built Palestinian collective identity and transformed Palestinians into a people – while at the same time contributing to the failure of their political project – was the role of the British Mandate in Palestine (Kimmerling, 2000). By restricting and undermining any Palestinian attempts to create institutional bodies or a state structure in Palestine, the British provided the political and administrative umbrella for the creation of the Jewish-Zionist state and the conditions for Jewish immigration and land purchase (Kimmerling, 2000) before leaving.

These issues are discussed, in detail, in 'The Palestinian Diaspora', and the family members – each in his/her own way – were affected by this reality and were part of it. As Kimmerling argues, the years between 1936 and 1948 – including the war – were crucial in the formation of Palestinianism according to which the Palestinians belong to the land of Palestine. As such, they distinguish themselves from other nations with respect to state formation in the region (Kimmerling, 2000). Going back to 2004, Palestinianism as 'an imagined political community´(Anderson, 2006) was going through its worst crisis since the 1967 war.

The crisis was not only on the political level; it was an individualistic crisis. I remember that many Palestinians felt lost after the death of Yasser Arafat, for he represented the continuum between the past and the present. Others who died in the second uprising also represented that continuum. What Anderson says about the nation being an imagined entity – because most of its members do not know each other (Anderson, 2006) – made it more real than ever for a nation still in formation. The need for the past was never more urgent. At that moment, 'The Palestinian Diaspora' was shown on television, allowing the younger generation to relate themselves to – and be attached to – historical figures emotionally and mentally.

Therefore, I can claim that it is useful to interpret the series as a cross between Freud's and Halbwachs's respective frameworks of memory: The narrator recalls the past within the present as if he were retrieving his memories and what he had lived as it happened; thus, the director, used a dramatic technique to convey his own commentary on the events. To put it differently, the author – as an historian – transmitted his own memories of what Freud described as the repetition process and reconstructed them within the social context that included or excluded certain memories as in Halbwachs's framework.

Conclusion

In answering the question of his role, as an author and novelist, Walid Saif, responded in an interview: 'For me, I will always remain the guardian of the Palestinian memory´ (Maidan, 2018). He was not only referring to the series, but to all his work. He was born in 1948 in Tulkarem, a Palestinian city placed on the borders between what is known now as the West Bank and Israel. He had to leave Palestine to live in Amman, Jordan after the 1967 war and his family displacement by the Israeli Army. On the other hand, the personal history of the series' director, Hatem Al-Ali, also interfered with the series subject – the Palestinian diaspora. He too had to emigrate from Al Julan, the Syrian hill that was occupied by Israel in the 1967 war. He experienced the meaning of being a refugee because he lived in the Al-Yarmouk camp in Damascus and had as Saif put it, an emotional interaction between him and the series' story and characters (Maidan, 2018).

It could be the emotional relation that both had with the narrative that made them in the end create a series that affected a lot of people in the Arab world, especially Palestinians. Writers and poets often refer to the series characters in their works and articles, using them to rethink the present and to comment on situations they go through individually or on a

community level. For, to them, as for many Palestinians, 'The Palestinian Diaspora' told, to some extent, a true story. On the other hand, due to the fact that both Saif and Al-Ali had a personal experience in immigration and living in the camp as refugees, they were more willing to criticize the past in terms of gender, class divisions and the patriarchal social structure of community. They were aware of the need of examining, critically, the past to understand the present and did not want to romanticize the past to escape the present dilemmas. That is why there were able to present female characters suffering from internal patriarchy as much as they suffered from immigration and British colonization.

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´The Palestinian Diaspora´, Series:

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