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The American University in Cairo (AUC)  
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

WE LIVE LIKE *KHAYALAT* (SCARECROWS):  
AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF A PALESTINIAN VILLAGE IN EGYPT

A Thesis Submitted to  
Department of Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology and Egyptology (SAPE)

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

By: Amal Abdrabo

Under the supervision of Dr. Kiven Strohm

August 2016

*To be born in a place is something, and to gain acceptance and belonging is another*

*To the people of Jazirat Fadil*

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### *Premise-My Itinerary*

I still remember my first visit to the field as if it was yesterday. A long dusty narrow road was surrounded by high clay walls on both sides that made it hard for any pedestrian to walk beside a passing car. A strong musty smell that is not easy to forget lingered in my mind even to the moment of writing these lines-- the stench of a place that had been abandoned for years and whose people had to hastily leave without cleaning. The sight of a little girl carrying a sack of garbage made me wonder what kind of place drove a ten-year-old girl to carry a load on her back that is three times her size and made her look like a ninety-year-old woman with a bent back. I was as excited as it was my first time wearing the ethnographer's hat and looking through the anthropological lens during my first field research. I was shocked as well by the manifestation of a difficult human life appearing on the surface to any observer.

I also still remember my childhood memories of a magical place called Palestine. Throughout my entire life, I had this image of a beautiful hidden Palestine with green hills and high mountains as conveyed to me in family stories; some of which began with a train journey from Egypt to Gaza, and others which recalled school trips to that magical place. During my childhood, a mysterious image was created in my subconscious about a place called Palestine. I was haunted by images, sounds, dialects, songs, stories, and narratives of Palestine that were passed down to my generation by the lucky members of the older generation who were able to see Palestine.

At the beginning, I was like a dead fish following the stream of previous studies of Palestinian refugees. The first proposed idea for this research focused on questioning the issue of identity in relation to time and place. I imagined that my ethnography would capture traces of a Palestinian national identity in the residents of this remote village in Al-Sharqiya province where

I lived for almost three months. I envisioned a village filled with hovering Palestinian flags, the residents wearing traditional costumes, speaking in the Palestinian dialect, dancing *Dabke*, drinking tea with *Meramia- Marmaraya* (Sage herb), eating *Za'atar* (Thyme) with olive oil, and finally holding on to their symbolic memories such as keeping the original keys of their Palestinian houses and old documentations and photos. My first pre-fieldwork visit on the first week of March 2015 awoke me to another reality when a man in the village summarized the existence of the exiled Palestinian community there in a few words:

*"Ehna Ayshen Zay El-khayalat<sup>1</sup>"*

The phrase struck me and brought my consciousness back to life to start feeling their state of affairs. It took me a while to comprehend why he told me that they are living like "scarecrows". Within different English dictionaries, the word scarecrow means "an object made to resemble a human figure, set up to scare birds away from a field where crops are growing<sup>2</sup>". According to this definition, this scary human-like object is made by a human subject in order to frighten birds away. Another translation of the word *khayalat* could give the meaning of a ghostly existence, and in that case the phrase could be translated to "We live like ghosts".

The word *khayalat* could also mean *shadows* and in that case it will be a dark reflection of an object exposed to light. Within the domain of cinematography, people tended to refer to the first generation of cinema production as "Shadow Play" to refer to moving shadows on a screen that represents a certain theme or even a whole story. Within my studied community, this meaning could reflect their role within their current context as garbage collectors. In this vein, the focus point will be the type of performance being represented by the participants within a story about an exiled community and which is used to penetrate their new social context in

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<sup>1</sup> A said by a Palestinian man, Jazirat Fadil, First Visit to the field, March 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Oxford dictionary, Merriam Webster, Dictionary.com. <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/scarecrow>

Egyptian society. In that sense, the word *khayalat* is related to fantasy and imagination: to have an imaginative role in this life or performing a certain role to penetrate the social context they are forced to live within. In that case, the story will highlight the surviving mechanisms and techniques they followed within their daily life.

For the story of this village, the subjects of this study (the interlocutors and the researcher) are *co-storytellers* of a story about the struggles and survival of humanity, a story that will keep haunting our dreams. The function of haunting does not come with imaginary attributes alone, for it manifests itself through the materialistic aspects of the society of Jazirat Fadil itself as one of many examples of the forgotten Palestinian diasporic communities around the world<sup>1</sup>. This story does not claim to give voice or award a life to a forgotten community as it only depicts what was seen through the eyes of a particular individual, and, thus, cannot be claimed to shed light on the whole story of the people of Jazirat Fadil. In the words of Michael Jackson “for every story that sees the light of day, untold others remain in the shadows, censored or suppressed” (Jackson 2002:ii).

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<sup>1</sup>Some of the previous studies that dealt with the Palestinian diaspora around the globe, for example but not limited to: Diana Allan. 2013. *Refugees of the Revolution: Experiences of Palestinian Exile*. Series: Stanford Studies in Middle Eastern And Islamic Societies and Cultures; Julie Peteet. 2011. *Landscape of Hope and Despair: Palestinian Refugee Camps*. University of Pennsylvania Press. Series: *Ethnography of Political Violence*; Marita Eastmond. 2007. *Nina Gren. Occupied Lives: Maintaining Integrity in a Palestinian Refugee Camp in the West Bank*. The American University in Cairo Press, 2015; *Stories as Lived Experience: Narratives in Forced Migration Research*. Oxford University Press. *Journal of Refugee Studies* Vol. 20, No. 2; *Palestinian Refugees: Identity, Space and Place in the Levant*. 2011. edited by Are Knudsen and Sari Hanafi. Routledge Series on the Arab-Israeli Conflict; Nina Gren. *Imagined Return: The Making of Home, Place and Belonging Among Palestinian Camp Refugees on the West Bank*. Working Paper No 2 . Department of Social Anthropology. Göteborg University May 2002. Accessed: 05, April 2016. [http://www.gu.se/digitalAssets/809/809979\\_WP2Gren.pdf](http://www.gu.se/digitalAssets/809/809979_WP2Gren.pdf). All of which are explored in the following section of Literature Review.

## *Introduction*

Many scholars acknowledge the destruction caused by the Arab-Zionist conflict, which resulted in the displacement of thousands of Arab Palestinian families throughout the world. Among these scholars is Laurie Brand whose study acknowledges this destruction when she writes, “families were uprooted or separated; agricultural land, homes, and often entire villages were abandoned out of fear, proximity to fighting, or direct intimidation” (Brand 1988:6-7). Edward Said in “The Question of Palestine” also described the geographic distribution of the scattered Palestinian population. He distinguishes between those who live in the West Bank and Gaza under the Israeli military occupation; the Palestinians who live in Lebanon and Jordan under the supervision of UNRWA different refugee camps; and, the Palestinians that were divided throughout Europe, North and South America, the Arabian Gulf countries, Syria, Libya, Iraq, and Egypt (Said 1979:115).

A pertinent study done by Wael Ismail investigated the construction of a Palestinian national identity in Egypt with a specific focus on their presence in Cairo. Ismail explored how multiple identities are created through family, institutions, and life experiences. His research was based on oral history interviews conducted through a snowball strategy (Ismail 2007:7-9). Ismail's study on Palestinian refugees in Cairo highlighted the state of motion and fluidity that characterizes the Palestinian national identity in exile. Ismail also pointed out that because he himself is a Palestinian, it was easy to get acquainted with the Palestinian refugees who he interviewed. For example, Ismail mentioned the ease with which he gained access into their houses, and how he sat, and talked with them freely (Ismail 2013:29-31). Whether the interviewees were individuals or officials, Ismail was acceptable to them due to the sense of solidarity based on a shared identity.

For the current research, however, 'this openness' was not a forthcoming privilege for me as an Egyptian researcher. Personally, I found myself in the middle of a political struggle between two parties that are divided economically: one of those parties seizes most of the financial support coming from the Palestinian representatives in Cairo, leaving the other party to suffer inhuman living conditions. It was easy to distinguish between the two factions inside the village based on the type of houses each of them live in; one lives in well-established cement buildings, while the other lives in poor clay ones. It is also noteworthy to mention that this research expands on Ismail's study by focusing on the life of the inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil village and their struggles to survive as a key point in understanding the Palestinian refugee situation.

Based on my preliminary research on the literature, I can argue that this is the first ethnographic study of the social life of the village of Jazirat Fadil and its inhabitants. Jazirat Fadil is a Palestinian village of about 5,000 people who have lived in Egypt since 1948. The village is precisely located in Al-Sharqiya province about 150 kilometers (93 miles) east of Cairo. The village has hosted scattered Palestinian refugees who fled their home village of Beersheba (Byr Sab' / Ba'ar Sab') after the 1948 exodus (NewsOK, 2013). There are no official records of the number of inhabitants in the village with the exception of insignificant information in newspaper articles and a brief mention in a previous ethnographic study about exiled Palestinians in Egypt<sup>1</sup>.

The field was there waiting to be encountered, noticed, and studied. Of the very few researchers who went there, Oroub El-Abed, with the help of a group of assistant researchers,

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<sup>1</sup> Please refer to: Oroub El-Abed. 2009. Unprotected: Palestinians in Egypt Since 1948. The Institute for Palestine Studies (IPS) and International Development Research Centre (IDRC); Menna Ayman. The Palestinian Refugees of Fadel's Island: Living on the Margin in Egypt. October 11, 2015. Egyptian Streets Online Journal. <http://egyptianstreets.com/2015/10/11/the-palestinian-refugees-of-fadels-island-living-on-the-margin-in-egypt/>

studied the exiled Palestinian community in Egypt since 1948. My field site was briefly motioned within El-Abed's book<sup>1</sup> as a place that gathered almost five thousand inhabitants of exiled Palestinians who fled to Egypt after the 1948 war in Palestine. In comparison to El-Abed's project, I did not have the proper financial support to hire a group of assistants to accompany me, so I went to the field by myself.

The current fieldwork depended on participatory observation, oral history testimonies and field notes, while taking advantage of the shared language between us, Arabic. I also decided to live in the community to be studied for a while to help counter the difficulty of access that I previously mentioned. Moreover, in order to create a sense of communal solidarity, I volunteered in helping the people learn to read and write Arabic, which is considered a dream of all of the generations there. Providing literacy skills opened a gateway to gain access to both economically divided parties within the village during my three-month study, and, through such interactions, I was able to observe how they perform their day to day life in the village. In this sense, this research project attempts to determine how the inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil, as agents, managed to navigate, negotiate, and contest the social context they have been forced into after their exile from Palestine since 1948. Based on that, the research concentrates on how the storytellers who are involved in this research, my interlocutors and myself, managed the performance of both *being* and *doing* while living in the village of Jazirat Fadil. The core idea is about the ghostly/shadowy existence of the people of this community and how they managed to penetrate what was forced upon them by their active agency and their cultural heritage of survival. In other words, this project is about the dialectical discourse between *being* and *doing* as seen in the daily life of my interlocutors and myself.

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<sup>1</sup> The village in which my ethnography was physically conducted was mentioned in this book under the name of *Jazirat Abu Fadil* in pages:59 and 199. (El-Abed 2009:59,199).

The field experience conveyed three different dimensions of this process of negotiation across past, present, and future times that are overlapping synchronically. For the purpose of mapping my co-storytellers' steps until their settlement at Jazirat Fadil, the first section is entitled the (up)rooted and is related to their past history and where they come from. The present has its own dimensions that are related to their past memory and to the actual process of agency as they try to survive: how they managed to overcome being (un)seen within their new context as well as being (un)certain about their memory, as is the case of the old timers of Jazirat Fadil. Finally, when it comes to the future of an exiled community living in the midst of Egyptian society and suffering from uncertainty and lack of recognition by the international humanitarian aid organizations<sup>1</sup>, the question will be whether the community of Jazirat Fadil holds some sort of hope regarding their future or if it is too (un)imaginable for them to bear hope.

The constellation of chapters that compose the body of this thesis are not written for the purpose of proving a certain argument. They do not proceed toward a certain point, but rather try to capture different moments within the social life of the village of Jazirat Fadil that I witnessed during my stay there. These moments are “juxtaposed in mutual discordance so as to echo the discordance of the phenomena being studied,” (Daniel 1996:6). This being said, the story that is narrated through the chapters of this thesis is not only about my interlocutors, but it is also about me as an outsider who went to the field with certain assumptions and was altered through the experience.

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<sup>1</sup> UNRWA for example does not include the community of Jazirat Fadil or any Palestinian gathering in Egypt under its working areas.

## *The Community*

### *A Village or a Garbage Garden - Being*

I arrived in the field on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 2015 and left during the last week of August of the same year. For this ethnography to be better understood, a more detailed spatial image of the place should be drawn to give the reader, alongside photos and figures, a deeper view of the reality of the field. The word “village” may convey different images such as farming, harvesting, green gardens, sounds of water pumps, running agrarian business, growing crops, men waking up early in the morning and taking their animals to the field, farmers using ploughs to dig their lands and working the entire day to return back home before sunset, women milking cows and making bread using clay ovens, and many others images that depict rural life. However, the village of Jazirat Fadil represents another definition of what a village may be. Like most of the Egyptian villages, the inside of the village is like scattered pieces that are randomly attached to each other, for there is no one single, straight road within the village. One will always end up taking a detour to the same alley after going around a house that cuts the alley one was walking in.

Indeed, the place is surrounded by gardens that are protected by high clay walls, a fact that made the village more like a hidden pearl inside a closed seashell (Figure 1), but in reality, most of these gardens are owned by *falaheen*. The word *falaheen* literally means peasants or farmers. However, from the perception of my co-storytellers, they use the word *falaheen* to refer to Egyptians, while they refer to themselves as being *arabawiyah* which means descended from Bedouin roots. It seems that my co-storytellers define themselves as *arabawiyah* (as related to Arab and sometimes to people of Bedouin origin) by attaching their identity to the place they live in, their village and their origin of being “Arab” who descended from Bedouin roots near Al-Naqab (the Negev desert in Palestine). According to Abu-Lughod (1986), the Bedouins who live in Egypt believe that all the non-Egyptian Arabs are

Bedouins (p.14). It seems that Awlad Ali's perception of Bedouin identity is somehow close to the perception of the inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil. Both set themselves apart from the Egyptians as a distinct ethnic group. Briefly, among the villagers of Jazirat Fadil the word *falaheen* commonly stands for Egyptians. The *arabawiyah* of Jazirat Fadil do not allow exogamous marriages from *falaheen* (marrying an Egyptian from outside the village), for they support endogamous marriages only from other *arabawiyah* (marrying a Palestinian from the village inhabitants). Regarding this issue, they witness a generational conflict between the middle generation and the older one. The middle generation, which includes people in their twenties to their forties, thinks that marrying an Egyptian is the best way to get out of this village and to have a better life for themselves and for their future offspring. For this generation, marrying an Egyptian is a way of salvation that encapsulates the division between generations. On the contrary, the older generation, people in their sixties and above, thinks that marrying an Egyptian is shameful and the youngsters from the village should keep marrying *arabawiyah* from their village. They think that marrying a *falah* (an Egyptian man)/or *falaha* (an Egyptian woman) is less worthy in regards to the social value, while marrying *arabawy* (a Palestinian man from the village)/or *arabawiyah* (a Palestinian woman from the village) is highly appreciated because of its social value even though the people of Jazirat Fadil work for the *falaheen* Egyptians during the harvest season.

Abir, a Palestinian woman in her thirties and a mother of five, once explained to me that only the very lucky ones will be chosen by these garden owners, who are mainly Egyptians, to collect mangoes, lemons, and oranges. They have to gain the trust of the owners to allow them to work in their gardens based on the previous work experiences. However, I was introduced to

another perspective by Haj<sup>1</sup> Mohamed, one of the old timers. He ‘informally’ owns a garden because according to Egyptian law the title deeds of a garden have to be under an Egyptian's name<sup>2</sup>. The Egyptian law allows foreigners to own land, i.e. the Saudi Prince Alwaleed bin Talal owns hundreds of acres at the New Valley Project, *Toshka* project. However, for Palestinians, it is against the law to entitle them land for the sake of preserving *El-Haweyah El-Falestyniah* “the Palestinian National Identity”. I once asked Haj Mohamed that given the law how they manage inheritance: “*It is up to the person’s conscience,*” was the only answer he gave me. Later on, when I asked Haj Mohamed about the reason that drove him to surround his garden, amongst other gardens at Jazirat Fadil, with a high thick clay wall, he said that everyone does that:

*to prevent thieves and children from climbing inside and stealing the fruits. I do not work in garbage my daughter. This garden beside trading in cattle and selling a cow, an ox, or some goats during the weekly animal market<sup>3</sup> is the only way to secure a decent livelihood for my old wife, my unmarried daughter, and my sons and their children and wives.*

After this conversation with Haj Mohamed, it was not surprising to me any more to find that all the green garden are like hidden walled treasures within the village. The gardens also worked as demarcation lines to plot out the village houses.

The village itself (Figure 2) is located in Al-Sharqiya province and belongs to the administrative division of the city of Abu Kabir- Markaz Abu Kabir Ash Sharqiyah Governorate. Abu Kabir includes different villages among which is Jazirat Fadil, or El-Ezbah or Ezbet Al-

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<sup>1</sup> The word Haj within the Egyptian culture is used to refer to an old person, more specifically, an old man as a way of showing respect. Literally, it means that the person has performed the holy pilgrimage to Mecca, but it is not always the case in reality. For a female, it would be *Hajah* instead of *Haj*.

<sup>2</sup> “Palestinians refugees have the same right to own immovable property as foreigners. Property ownership in Egypt is limited to a single private residence, but a business may require a partnership with an Egyptian national. Foreigners are not permitted to own agricultural land or desert land in Egypt” (Badil 2005:18).

<sup>3</sup> There is a cattles’ market *Souq El-Mawashy* that is held every Saturday in an open area on *Alsiad Abdo Naser* road at the outset of Jazirat Fadil. It lies at the beginning of the road that leads to the village.

Arab<sup>1</sup> as its inhabitants like to call it. In order to get inside the village, a visitor has to pick one of three different entrances. Each one of them leads to a different area inside the village. I used to follow the longest entrance as it leads directly to the small mosque in the village and the house beside it where I used to live.

I used to live with a widow, Rahel, and her four unmarried daughters (Asmaa, Dina, Rimas and Basant), and one 10-year-old son (Yousef). Rahel has two other older sons, Khairy and Basil, who are married and live separately. Basil has a motorcycle that he uses to continue his father's business when traveling to Faques, the nearest big town to the village from the east side. The other son, Khairy, owns a tricycle that he uses for collecting garbage, also from Faques. He used to come to our house early in the morning every day after *Fajr*<sup>2</sup> to find Yousef waiting for him to go ride the tricycle together and collect garbage.

Rahel gave me the best room she had in her house with a bed and a mosquito net. All the seven people who live in this house share one tiny bathroom and sit on the floor during breakfast and lunch to eat some dry bread, old cheese and fried vegetables (potatoes, aubergines, and green peppers) from a huge round tray for every meal, every day. Rahel and her daughters and son were more like a family to me. We spent a lot of joyful time doing different things: baking bread, which they call *Esh Songey* or *Esh Safaha* on a curved metal surface using small pieces of wood for fire; or working with Yousef on a *fanous Ramadan*, a symbolic lantern for the celebration of the holy month of Ramadan. We made it out of paper using some old books that he gathered from the garbage. I also took part in making *kounafah* and *beqlayah* / *baklava* with Asmaa, some famous dessert dishes made especially for the celebration of Ramadan. I used to spend the

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<sup>1</sup> Later on within the coming sections, a full description of the different names of the village of Jazirat Fadel and their significance will be provided in detail. Please refer to section under the title “Different Names; People, Places – Being” in the third part of the thesis (the unseen).

<sup>2</sup> Fajr Prayers in Arabic is known as *ṣalāt al-fağr* is the first prayer of the five daily prayers practiced by Muslims and has to be conducted by dawn.

evenings teaching the five children how to read and write, as we, the girls, were not allowed to go outside the house after sunset. To be more specific, I was not allowed to go anywhere alone even if I informed them of my whereabouts at any time of the day. Borrowing Abu-Lughod's words "I was restricted in where I could go, by whom I could be seen, and with whom I could speak" (Abu-Lughod 1986:15).

Sometimes, I also had the chance to join Dina during her early mornings to bring grass for their four goats from the only open garden owned by Haj Abbas who allowed them to collect the unhealthy grass from his garden that might affect the trees. I still remember the smell of the freshly cut green grass with the *Shansharah*, a harvesting knife. She used to collect the grass while the bird *Abo Irdan*, known in English as the cattle egret, used to stand by our side fearlessly. Haj Abbas's dog used to bark at us every morning to alarm his owner to the intruders on his land. We would hear the sound coming from the small water stream that we had to jump over to go to the other side which had richer taller grass. Finally, the silence of the early morning disappeared when the sun woke all nature's creatures. All of these scenes are still inscribed in my memory as the most beautiful moments I enjoyed during my field work.

Rahel was only thirty years old when her husband died two years ago. Her husband was Grandma Latifa and Haj Mohamed's son. Rahel's husband was the only son who used to bring a new black cloak for his mother every Ramadan. Before his death, Rahel's husband managed to build a new house for her and their seven children. I was staying there with six members of the family during my fieldwork. The house has three bedrooms, a guest room, a kitchen, a tiny bathroom, and a small yard for the goats. During the husband's life, the family was considered one of the wealthiest in the village as Rahel's late husband used to work as a cloth merchant. However, that was not the general trend for all families.

Rahel tried to convince me that I was very lucky to live with them, as one of the richest families in the village, and she advised me to visit one of her neighbors, Bouthaina in order to compare the differences in living standards. I went to visit Bouthaina who had had a fight with her father-in-law and had to leave the family house with her husband and their children. They moved to a barn which was owned by Farida<sup>1</sup>. The barn was mainly for Farida's donkey; now it houses a family of a man, his pregnant wife, and four children. The place was a rectangular room with clay walls, dirt floor, and a roof made of straw. They had no bathroom in that room, so they had to use the neighbors' bathroom and share with them an electricity line as well. The family is supposed to pay 100 LE every month for rent and extra for the water bill to Farida, the owner. The place was very small, unclean, unhealthy, and, to my senses, inhumane as well. The husband works in garbage collecting, as most of the village inhabitants. The children help their parents too. Each of the children is supposed to carry a sack of garbage that they collect from the nearest areas to the highway. The wife, Bouthaina, worked in the gardens collecting lemons and mangoes. Apparently, there is no schooling for the children and no healthcare for the pregnant woman or for her four children. Bouthaina was happy about my visit, as she hoped that I could help her by any means to have a better life for her family. After this visit, Rahel did not try to force me into visits of that kind.

The village houses have a single-ground floor with clay walls and roofs made of wood and straw. Few houses are made of red bricks and cement. The highest house is three-floor high and is owned by the man who introduced garbage collection as a profession to the inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil (Figure 3). Ironically, my co-storytellers call this man Abo Safiha which literally means the man with the tin can and might refer to his earlier days when he used to collect

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<sup>1</sup> Based on my co-storytellers, Farida is a very wealthy Palestinian woman living in the village of Jazirat Fadel. She is Mahdy's wife - the one who took a huge amount of money from the people in Jazirat Fadil and ran away.

garbage on foot using a tin can that he carried on his back. An old woman once told me that at the beginning, they used to laugh at him. Now, almost all the village inhabitants work for him. They had left agriculture to collect garbage, as it is more profitable. Now, Abo Safiha owns a truck scale and different trucks which his sons drive to deliver the garbage to be recycled at one of the factories in El-Senbellawein city in Al-Mansoura governorate about 85 km away from El-ezbah. In front of his house lies a huge yard that functions as an assembly point where all the people of Jazirat Fadil dump the garbage they collect every day and where collect their money once a month for their efforts in the collection of garbage.

During my stay in the field, I noticed a quick transformation for most of the green gardens in to garbage dumping areas whether owned by Abo Safiha or by other families trying to follow his lead by transforming the village into garbage dump yards (Figures 4 & 5). A generational conflict is visible here. There is a sense of contentment or discontent, depending on the generation, in relation to the profession of garbage collection. The younger generation complains their life style orbits solely around this profession, whereas the older generation justifies the profession by saying:

*“what else can we do? This is the best job we can do? This is the best for us and for our children.”*

Logically, such profession should generate a lot of money, but it does not seem to for my co-storytellers. This strange discrepancy requires further study for the reason is not known; it could be as a result of misuse, misplacement, or unequal distribution. I remember how Hajah Sanaa used to cry over her money and her and her daughter’s money that was lost in vain after being scammed by a *falah* called Mahdy. The scammer was an Egyptian man who gathered money from the village inhabitants and those in nearby villages with the promise of quick

multiplication through investment, but after collecting the money, he disappeared from sight. To my surprise, the inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil did not have a unified name for the person who scammed them; some called him Mahdy, others called him Mohanad which are completely different names in Arabic. I was shocked at how willingly they would give a stranger all their money and life investment without even knowing his exact name. They would tell me,

*“We cannot read and write, and it seemed to us a guaranteed way for some quick money with no effort. He told us, one thousand will be ten, and ten thousand will be one hundred in a flash of time, and we believed him”*

Most of the houses in the village have a dirt floor except for the entrance which has an intricate and beautiful mosaic floor (Figure 6). To me, this beautiful floor resembles the fragmented history they are the product of, and their agency in transforming the scattered conditions of the life they have lived since 1948 into something livable and useful at the same time. We used to live beside the smaller mosque of the village. There is a bigger mosque located in the center of the village. Both mosques serve only men because, according to the people of Jazirat Fadil, it is forbidden for women to pray outside of their houses. There are no shops except one small kiosk that sells very cheap brands of candies to the children. The nearest vegetable and grocery market is located 4 km away in Abu Kabir city. I used to go to this weekly market with Dina using a tricycle that we could only find on Wednesdays for the sole purpose of transporting the village women to the market. All of the roads inside the village are dirt roads, and the nearest main asphalt road is a fifteen-minute walk from any entrance, or thirty minutes from inside the village. This road, Al-Said Abdo Nasr Road, links the village with Abu Kabir (Figure 7). It also links the village from the other side with Faques, another nearby large city.

Different villages surround El-Ezbah<sup>1</sup> and provide it with different educational and other services (Figure 8). About 3 km away, there is a village called Sintiris where the nearest primary school is located. Kafr El-Baz is about 2.5 km away, and has the nearest subsidies bureau. Ezbet El-Sis is where they can buy bread. Ezbet Barradah and a place called Al-Gabah (the forest, it also gives in Arabic the meaning of cruelty and savage) are places which provide the inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil with different basic needs such as LPG pipes, flour and oil. During my almost three-month stay at the village, there were continual water cuts with brief periods of dark brown smelly water. The village does not enjoy a sanitation infrastructure which, as a result, requires every household to build a small underground room called *taranch* (septic tank) which works as a dumping place for the bathroom sewage. The village does have an official bread bakery subordinated to the Ministry of Supply. However, it only serves the Egyptian inhabitants of the surrounding villages because they require a government issued bread card that grants them access to the bread at a subsidized price. As a result, the *Arabawiyah* of Jazirat Fadil buy bread from them at a higher price. This is an example of how they are marginalized and alienated as the card allows the Egyptian citizens to buy all essential products including rice, oil, flour, and bread with a reduced price.

During the actual fieldwork I had to go through different struggles of gaining access, getting acceptance, fighting rumors, dealing with the state-security laws and state apparatuses, while trying to survive as a human being in difficult living conditions. Getting access to the village was not an easy task. And, it was even harder to secure my presence inside the village for the whole three-month duration of the field work because I had to suspend my field work upon

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<sup>1</sup> The word *el-ezbah* within the Egyptian culture gives the meaning of ownership of acres of agriculture land that requires hiring a lot of people to work on farming and maintaining its business. The land will be owned by one wealth family and the workers are perceived as a part of the entire process of the farming production. Ironically, this is not the case of Jazirat Fadil as they are not entitled to owning agriculture land as mentioned before.

orders from state representatives. Their rationale was that it was for the sake of ensuring my 'personal safety'.

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### *New Methodological Techniques of Survival*

Conditionally, in order to get permission to start the field study, ethnographers are asked to provide and submit an IRB form (An institutional review board) to guarantee the ethical dimensions of the conducted research and to verify no intended harm to the target interlocutors. After my field experience, I started to ask myself: *Who is responsible for my safety? How can our safety as ethnographers and outsiders be ensured while conducting our field studies?* This being said, the field became like a “frontier zone” as coined by Belousov (2007:159). The field is a policed space where ethnographers can feel unsecure and unsafe. I might have managed to build and maintain rapport with my people at the field as we still exchange phone calls, but I am only a human who had to carry out a research while feeling unsafe and insecure in the field. Simultaneously, I was also uncertain as to whether this “study” would survive and have a life of its own or not.

It was not that easy to contact and gain access to the field. My first official contact was with a man working as one of the heads of a local non-governmental-community-services association located in Abu Kabir. During a thirty-minute call, he tried to convince me not to go to this village by myself as it will threaten my “*personal safety*”. Back then, I did not understand his reasons for doing his best to scare me away from a community of Palestinian people who work in garbage collecting other than describing them as being *nas hareseen we mish sahleen* (a very tough and not easy going people). I decided not to call him again. Rather, I needed to know somebody who would know somebody who lives inside that village and was willing to help me gain access to that remote village in Al-Sharqiya. Then, I was introduced, by one of my AUC friends, to a group of physicians who frequently provided the village with medical supplies. After frequent phone calls and lots of appointments, I found myself finally in the car of one of

the members of this group on the way to the village with a journalist friend who wanted to create a documentary about the village.

However, the field experience did not stop at these hurdles. Some of my co-storytellers demanded written state approval for conducting research in their village and took me to the police station in Abu Kabir, which subsequently handed me to the National Security Office in Al-Zagazig<sup>1</sup>. Apparently, the inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil did not give much value to all the official documents I had from the university, the department, and the IRB<sup>2</sup> approval. I even managed to get an extra official supportive letter in Arabic from the department chair acknowledging my status as a Master's student in anthropology working on a thesis on the Palestinian community in Al-Sharqiya, as an official approval to study this community in fulfillment of my master degree at SAPE department<sup>3</sup>. However, after paying different visits to different state representatives, I had to suspend my research until further notice as they denounced all responsibility for my "personal safety" while being in that village all by myself.

At this phase in the research, I was commuting between Cairo, Alexandria, Al-Mansoura, and Al-Zagazig in order to obtain all of the required documents to continue my research. As a result, I define my field site to include all of these places. My daily journey would start from my place in Al-Mansoura all the way to Jazirat Fadil via the public train. The whole trip usually took ninety minutes and would start early in the morning from my place in Al-Mansoura to the train station, on to the train trip, and finally end at Jazirat Fadil after riding a Tok Tok<sup>4</sup> from Abu

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<sup>1</sup> Al-Zagazig: is the capital city of Al-Sharqiya province.

<sup>2</sup> IRB: I had my Institutional Review Board form before going to the field at April 17, 2015; in which one of the "anonymous" comments I got was explained the reviewer's concerns about my "*personal safety*" while being in the field inside this village.

<sup>3</sup> Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology, Egyptology-SAPE department at The American University in Cairo.

<sup>4</sup> Tok Tok: is a small vehicle runs on three wheels, mostly used in rural areas or the narrow streets in urban areas as well in Egypt. Nowadays, this kind of transportation is gaining a lot of popularity as a cheap way to the youth for making livelihood/ earning money within the atmosphere of lacking job opportunities. Plus, anyone can drive it even without having a driving license and it is more untraceable because most of the vehicles are not licensed.

Kabir. At the beginning, it was so hectic and I was not happy because of the long and tiresome daily trip. Then, I realized that I am actually benefiting from this trip as I am expanding my field and, consequently, gaining deeper insights. In addition, that daily trip was the only escape for me to write my field notes everyday away from my people at Jazirat Fadil who would also ask suspiciously “*what are you doing?*”

This constant movement in and out of Jazirat Fadil created a new sense of the field. The field for me was not merely a spatial physical area. Actually, I still find it too hard to define my field. Was it the remote village in Al-Sharqiya province where I lived for almost three months or the house that my mother provided in Al-Mansoura province in order to facilitate my field research by reducing the train trip to the field to one hour instead of the five-hour trip if I were travelling from my home town of Alexandria? Could the field be stretched to include the public train wagons that I used to take from Al-Mansoura to Abu Kabir and in which I found my only escape to write my field notes away from my ‘suspicious’ co-storytellers? Could the field be all of these material and immaterial spaces that I encountered while conducting this ethnography?

I have come to believe that the field included all of the above and the following: the streets of Al-Mansoura where I used to walk in the early morning to catch the 7-am train to Abu Kabir, as well as the public train wagons that I used to ride every day from Al-Mnsoura to Al-Sharqiya. The field even expanded to my home-town, as Alexandria was not excluded from this equation. It was there, almost accompanying me every step of my trip in, to and out of the field. I was asked almost every day by the people of Jazirat Fadil about my hometown Alexandria, and this felt like a new dimension of space being created in my life. I used Edward Said's perception of Alexandria as a place of wind and sea to convey to them how I feel about my hometown<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Please refer to: Edward Said. 2000. Cairo and Alexandria; Reflections on Exile and other Essays. Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press.

This space was created by remembering my home in Alexandria as well as by my daily experience going to the field. I started to develop a new sense of the big terms I took for granted: home, identity, belongingness, and the field.

I have to admit that reading about different exiled Palestinian communities around the world before going to the field was a good preparatory step; however, it was not sufficient. The uniqueness of the case of the community of Jazirat Fadil forced a new reality that required following, if not inventing, new methodological techniques. Most of this ethnography is based on my daily interactions with the inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil in a way that resembles what Victor Turner has said about putting away the conventional ideologies and starting to learn from each other “when [and] then [we] no longer need in the endless safety of ideologies but prize the needless risk of acting and interacting” (Turner 1982:122).

A vast part of this study is about the idea of “complex selves<sup>1</sup>” as an ethnographer tries to understand her ‘inner-world’ while being in a strange field. Being in the field, as an ethnographer, was a unique life experience for me. The experience made me question many fundamental beliefs I had as a human: who I am and what I represent. I never imagined that a simple question like, “Tell me who you are, where you come from, to where you belong to, and what you are doing in this life” could provoke different connotations regarding one’s fundamental beliefs. I have to apologize to the people of my study as the answers to these questions are not just about them but also about ‘me’ as a human being starting to question some fundamental beliefs in her life. Thus, this thesis is about the social life of an alienated forgotten village that houses exiled people, and it is about the autobiographical experience of the person who went to the field for the first time and went through all the field experiences, as well as

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<sup>1</sup> Please refer to: Cohen, Anthony P. 1994. *Self Consciousness: An alternative anthropology of identity*. New York: Rutledge. P. 8.

about her surviving techniques to gain acceptance to penetrate the social context of this field. The coming sections highlight some of those methodological techniques I followed during the fieldwork in Jazirat Fadil for three months.

### *Cultural Restrictions- Being*

I was only allowed to communicate with the female members of Jazirat Fadil, a matter that can be attributed to the male dominant culture of rural areas in Egypt. One day, while Grandma Latifa, one of the elders and member of the first generation, was telling me of her late son's story, the village was to hold a funeral for another young man who died the day before. His name was Ahmed, and he died because of a motorcycle accident at Al-Said Abdo Nasser Road along with two other *falaheen* (Egyptian men.) The whole community came together to mourn Ahmed's death. While Grandma Latifa was preparing to attend his funeral, I asked her if I can accompany her and she agreed as long as I was wearing the 'proper' dress, the black *abayah*. After making sure that my appearance follows their dress code, another cultural restriction highlighted in her concern of how to reach the dead man's house, where the female were gathered, to condole his mother and sisters without passing in front of the men's gathering.

We had to maneuver in the dark through small, narrow alleys while being chased by dogs so as not to be seen by the male mourners who occupied the main wide area near to the central mosque at the heart of the village. She was telling me different proverbs to express the agony, grief, and loss to their relatives. One of these proverbs was *koloh naseeb*, which means "All has been written" (known within literature as *Maktob*) and gives the sense of believing in a very fatalistic course of life. Another proverb was *ahi e'shah we akhretha el-moot*, which literally means "It is only a life that ends with death". Although the above-mentioned saying was

repeated by most of my co-storytellers, it held different meanings that captured generation disparities. The children at Jazirat Fadil were more optimistic about their future than the middle generation members who seemed more fatalistic.

### *The Ring of Deception- Doing*

Thanks to my sagacious supervisor who advised and cautioned me about the complexity of the human relations that might occur in the field and could cause a lot of problems for a *single* female ethnographer working in the Arab region, I went to the field wearing a wedding ring and claimed that I was engaged. For some reason, I remembered the lines written by Laila Abu-Lughod describing her experience as a non-married female conducting her research at Awlad Aly tribal community. Her words echoed in my memory when she started to comprehend her father's persisting endeavors of accompanying her to the field during her first visit there. My mother tried to do the same with me, but I was not as wise as Abu-Lughod to accept what I considered back then as 'humiliation' to my grown-up-independent personality. Abu-Lughod's father and my mother both knew that sub-culture societies, especially Bedouin and Rural ones, do not welcome with open arms any single-strange woman because for them “a young, unmarried woman travelling alone on uncertain business was an anomaly” (Abu-Lughod 1986:11). For me as a person coming from Alexandria, the second biggest urban city in Egypt, I did not think that such cultural aspects of marriage could be so dominant within the rural areas of my society. I thought that all I needed was to behave properly, act respectfully, and obey their cultural rules, but I did not know back then that being a thirty year old unmarried woman was against these very cultural demarcations. I thought that what Abu-Lughod wrote during the

1980s about how marginal communities perceived single women would not be applicable to my 2010s field site, but again I was completely mistaken.

The only wise precaution I made before entering the field was to buy a wedding ring on the eve of travelling to the field site. I found that “the particular stage of a woman's life cycle is important in availing her of access to and rapport with the research community, as well as providing her with a specific cultural niche” (Diamond 1970:126; Gonzalez 1986:85)<sup>1</sup>. Being married, wearing a wedding ring, and having some pictures on my phone of my husband to show them (which were photos of my brother) were all material evidence to defend my position in the higher stage of a female's life cycle in which gaining respect is equal to being married. In other words, it was preferable to seem to belong to a certain male than to lose their respect if I were just a single female that had no man to belong to.

I entered the field as an ‘acclaimed’ married female Egyptian researcher by circling the ring finger of my left hand with a golden round object. Now, I keep thinking whether they would have accepted me without having this object around my finger. In other words, would they have accepted a stranger, an outsider, female researcher to live among them for three months for the purpose of conducting research study? Would this object have affected the type of gathered knowledge from the field had it not existed? I also questioned whether it highlighted other cultural attributes in our society, as an Arabic Islamic one<sup>2</sup>. How does the society in general perceive “unmarried” female members and what are the effects of such perspectives on their roles in the community? Now, I am trying to link all that cultural attributes to Lila Abu-Lughod's

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<sup>1</sup> Please refer to: Arab Women in the Field; Studying your own Society. edited by: Soraya Altorki, and Camillia Fawzi El-Solh. Syracuse University Press.1988. pp. 6-7.

<sup>2</sup> From a gender perspective and linking this story to some of the upheaval I faced during my fieldwork; some of the people of Jazirat Fadil spread a rumor about me being a fugitive who ran away from her family and came to hid in their village. Now, I'm thinking: would they have said the same about me or act the same with me if I was perceived as a single woman and not a married one?

introduction about how the Bedouin society perceived her and what she had to hide/or intentionally show in order to get accepted and the fact that she was accepted because of her “male introduction” by her father to the society. This led me to question whether we as members of a “modernized” society still uphold the same perceptions about married versus single women. Have these perceptions changed since the time of Abu-Lughod and whether these views are considered to be modern or retroactive thinking? Finally, it is important to consider the fact that we, ethnographers, sometimes deceive our interlocutors in the field and thus we need to question how ethical it is to participate in an act of deception for a noble end of the production of knowledge.

#### *Ethical Considerations within the Field- Being*

Now after discussing this point with some of my academic colleagues and getting to know some of their gender related experiences in different field sites, whether from a male or female perspectives, I consider what I have done as resembling a doubled-faced coin. Indeed, it was an act of deception, but also it was an act of responsibility for protecting both my life in the field and the social life of my research project while respecting the community's cultural norms. The question is at what point would the ethnographer be considered to be lying and whether there is such a thing as a necessary lie. It is a question about the knowledge that our ethnographic work produces and the validity of the information in it. That lie was a way to overcome the risk of losing information and not getting the required data from the field. Now, by telling this story of the ring, I am trying to be genuine to the reader as a way of being honest about the production of knowledge for this thesis. On the surface, it is not just an act of deception, but if we go deeper it is rather an act of responsibility to secure the life of the researcher and an act of following the

community norms. It seems that when we break the rules or bend some, we actually discover new perceptions. In that sense, I totally agree with Sara Roy when she said “conflicts of values and ethics, as well as of interpretation, are part of the process of knowledge production; they inform it, drive it, trouble it” (Roy 2007:55-56).

### *I’m No More a Mzungu<sup>1</sup> - Doing*

The inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil granted me different identities based on my interaction with them during the field study. In the field, I was conceived as being: a journalist (*El-sahafyah*), a teacher (*Ablah Amal*) who was teaching their children how to read and write, or a fugitive who had run away from her family to hide at the village as it was too hard for them to believe that I came to live with them for three months without the company of a “male” member of my family. Some of the old members of my co-storytellers used to call me *ya benty*, means my daughter in English, as a way to show their kindness to me. The inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil also coined me as being *El-falaha* which means, for them, the Egyptian woman or simply not *arabawiyah* like them, an American spy, or an Israeli Jew—a notion that changed after seeing my Egyptian national ID and watching me pray as a Muslim.

Finally, they also saw me as a secret agent that was helping the Egyptian government to get rid of them by studying them. All of these identities were overlapping and overplayed, and they caused me some problems with some of my interlocutors, who apparently were afraid of any stranger coming to their village. Now I think that they coined me all these multiple identities to raise the “personal safety” guard and get me out of their village. Personally, being coined as a

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<sup>1</sup> Mzungu in Uganda means the white lady, as distinguished by the color of one’s skin while walking in the street. That was during my visit to Uganda summer 2015. When I asked my friends there why they keep calling me the Mzungu: “*is this because of being veiled so people stare at me?*” They said “*No, it is because of your color.*” For me, Mzungu, as a category, resembles the constant feeling of not fitting in the surrounding social fabric.

“spy” and a “governmental secret agent” made me wonder about the potential aspects of this idea in the first place, as some anthropologists have already drawn attention to “the various uses of fieldwork that have been made by governmental intelligence agencies, for example in order to help plan counterinsurgency operations<sup>1</sup>.”

All of these rumors drove me to engage in different conversations with all my friends in the field of ethnographic studies to seek their advice on how to overcome these hurdles in the fieldwork. During these academic conversations, I was introduced to different survival techniques that followed my colleagues followed in different areas around the world. One of these survival techniques that I followed was to mingle within the social context and gain acceptance by literally following their cultural norms. For example, and upon the advice of my friend from Makerere University in Uganda who works within the same field of research, I went to the field wearing a black cloak '*abaya*' during my daily trips to Jazirat Fadil. What I have noticed is that people would sit beside me in the train instead of gaze at me. They would start to talk to me and share personal stories. They would even ask for my help with their luggage. They would enter my space without hesitation, instead of staying five meters away from me when I used to wear my jeans and cotton shirts. The situation made me think that my cloak is an invisibility cloak and not a black one. I was able to mingle, more often, with people in my surroundings during the daily trips to the field instead of being “a strange object” at which they gazed. This was the case when I used to wear my jeans. Also, the people at Jazirat Fadil started to be more social and friendly, and they asked to have photos with me wearing the '*abaya*'. They would grab my camera asking where to press to take the photo instead of gazing at me while I was interviewing some of their old relatives.

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<sup>1</sup> Please refer to: Konstantin Belousov et al., “Any Port in a Storm: Fieldwork Difficulties in Dangerous and Crisis-Ridden Settings”, *Qualitative Research* 7:2 (2007), p. 159.

At first in the field, I used to feel as a strange object out of their space due to the way that people looked at me. After dressing like them in an *abaya*, I started to feel invisible and it was all new to me. I had the feeling that instead of hating cloaks as I always did, I started to love this magical black one that helped me disappear within this particular social context. It gave me the feeling of being invisible, not being noticed, to the extent of being (un)seen like a ghost. It made me feel like I was no longer the *Mzungu*, no longer the shiny new toy that deserves to get stared at and peeped at through the doors just to examine. The way people used to look at me in these streets of both Al-Mansoura and Abu Kabir while wearing my jeans and cotton shirts and the way they totally ignored me after wearing *abaya* as an invisible moving object and the way people look at me and dealt with me during the hour and half train trip starting from Al-Mansoura to Abu Kabir made me realize that I did exactly the same as what the people at Jazirat Fadil did to gain access to their new social context. It had become their act of survival to mingle and disappear into a new social fabric they were forced to live in for more than sixty years now. Wearing that black cloak in order to dissolve within their community and to disappear during my daily train trip helped me understand their endeavors to forget their past roots and kill their past memories. They simply found themselves living in a country that is not theirs, having a nationality of a country that they cannot return to and know nothing about, and occupying this black hole in the galaxy, inside a crack in the international legal system. Nevertheless, they want to survive, hold on to life and refuse death. The question is how they could survive while being neglected and unrecognized in the social-economic-political-legal context they live in. They followed different survival techniques such as disappearing and dissolving into the social fabric by changing their ways of dress and talk, working in garbage collection, or even killing all their ties to the past. The journey of my co-storytellers started since 1948 when they were uprooted

from their original village in Palestine. Their journey of exile highlights some of the genealogical aspects of their life which will be mentioned within the following section.

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*Part One: The (Up)rooted*

*Kanet Tal'ah malaha Rag'ah*, (It was a flight with no return)

--Hajah Khadra, one of the first generation members in Jazirat Fadil

*Their Itinerary from Bi'r El-Sab'a<sup>1</sup> to Jazirat Fadil<sup>2</sup> - Being*

The inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil went through different historical trajectories since their escape from their original village Bi'r El-Sab'a in Palestine in 1948 (Figures 9). Walid Khalidi's documentary study about Palestinian villages in 1948 tries to capture the dispersal and blockade of the indigenous Palestinians out of 418 Palestinian villages (i.e. Acre, Beersheba, Baysan, Lydda, Majdal, Nezareth, and al-Ramla) that were destroyed and depopulated during the 1948 war in order to mark the Zionist colonization of the Palestinian land. The aforementioned places represent Palestinian villages that have witnessed a long history over the centuries of different wars and major battles. In that vein, Khalidi describes "the fate of the 418 Palestinian villages destroyed and depopulated in the 1948 war, the ineluctable climax of the preceding Zionist colonization and the great watershed in the history of the Palestinian people, marking the beginning of their exodus and Diaspora" (Khalidi 1992:xxxi-xxxiii). Khalidi emphasizes that most of these villages had been in existence under their Arabic names for many centuries before 1948 (Khalidi 1992:xxxi).

According to Khalidi, Bi'r El-Sab'a, sometimes known as Byr Sab' in Arabic and Beersheba in Hebrew, represented a Bedouin society that descended from an Arabian tribe called 'Arab Al-'Atawina'. (Khalidi 1992:74). Accordingly, the exploration of the Arabian Bedouin roots of the people of Jazirat Fadil can help us reach the genealogical horizons that link back to their Palestinian village Byr Sab' in 1948; a case which will raise a question about how their Bedouin roots affect their present particularity within the social realm of Jazirat Fadil. Could these Bedouin roots lead us to understand the obvious dichotomy between two different identities at Jazirat Fadil? The first identity is *Arabawy*, while the second one is *Falaheen*. My

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<sup>1</sup> It is known also as Byr Sab'

<sup>2</sup> Please refer to (figure 8) at appendices section about the internal and external displacement of the Palestinians back in 1948 with a focus on their fleeing from Bi'r El-Sab'a in Palestine to regional Arab countries.

co-storytellers used to highlight this difference during their talk with me highlighting that I am not like them or *Arabawya*. They used to identify me as being *Falaha* which was explored within the previous section of describing the community.

Their journey from Palestine to Egypt was mentioned through other previous studies as well. One such journey was written by Benny Morris, Professor of History in the Middle East Studies Department, Ben-Gurion University, who mapped out the Arab settlements, which according to him were ‘abandoned’ in 1948-9. The area of Beersheba (Figures: 10,11 &12) is considered one of the areas whose inhabitants' flight was caused by the military assaults on their settlements by Haganah or the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and the expulsion of the Jewish forces on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October, 1948 (Morris 2004:ix, xiv, xviii).

Laurie A. Brand also mentioned their flight in her book *Palestinians in the Arab World* when acknowledging the thousands of Palestinians who have fled from the hostilities that broke out on April 25, 1948 and came to Egypt in different ways. These Palestinians entered Egypt either through Port Said and Alexandria using boats or by camels through Gaza and across Sinai. The first wave managed to settle down in different areas spread out all over Egypt and grouped with their relatives inside Egypt. With the continuation of the Arab-Israeli War on the Palestinian soil, the Egyptian authorities back then established its first camp at Al-Abbasiyyah inside Cairo to provide shelter to the Palestinian exodus. Later on, Al-Abbasiyyah camp was transported to Al-Qantarah Sharq camp near Al-Esmailia governorate (Brand 1988:43). In the narratives that I heard from my co-storytellers, Al-Qantarah Sharq camp was mentioned several times along with other nearby places within the areas of the eastern and western sides of the Suez Canal. It seems that after their displacement my co-storytellers were scattered around Egypt before getting together in Jazirat Fadil. I would still like to mention their journey inside Egypt to reach Jazirat

Fadil as they did not come from one place, but, instead, got together through marriage and business ties from scattered places across Egypt.

I heard about their 'detailed' life at *Bi'r El-Sab'a* and their journey from there to Jazirat Fadil from a 100-year-old man called Haj Ahmed, who came to Egypt as a 30-year old Palestinian young man and then settled at Jazirat Fadil for the rest of his life. It was not easy to reach him; it was more like a matter of serendipity in the course of meeting other old timers.

One day, I was sitting with Hajah Nawal, another member of the first generation, and when she had finished all that she could tell me and could not find anything “new” to say, she asked me:

*“Have you met Haj “Ahmed”?”*

*I said, “No, who is he?”*

*Hajah “Nawal” replied, “ooh, you should meet him; he is the oldest now amongst us. He lives here. “*

She pointed out to the house right across her own and added,

*“Come on, I will introduce you to him now, so he will approve talking to you”*

She knocked on a wide rusty broken door and asked the person:

*“Is Haj “Ahmed” awake? We want to talk to him”*

*Haj “Ahmed” Grandson: “Who is this? Oh, El-sahafya (the journalist)? Come on, I will inform him”*

Hajah “Nawal” and I entered to *sahet el manzel*, a wide open area with trees, a clay oven, and a sitting area on the ground, surrounded by open doors of several rooms of the house. I noticed that Haj Ahmed's house was one of the very few houses that planted a fig tree within *sahat El-manzel*. Haj “Ahmed” came in through one of these doors. He was a long thin bronzed

hair man wearing a white *galabyah* and gray vest (*sudairi*). He seemed to me very old and weak, but still in good enough shape to walk on his own supporting himself with the walls. He sat in front of me on the ground, asked whether they had offered me something to drink yet, and then asked me,

*“What do you want to hear about?”*

I felt like this was a practiced ritual for him after having met a lot of “journalists”. While talking to him, I found myself looking at three generations: Haj “Ahmed”, his daughter, and his granddaughter. His talk knew no boundaries in time, places, and events. However, he knew exactly what he was talking about, what he wanted to say, and was linking the past with the present without any reference to the future. He knew where to stop and where to emphasize something. I did my best to remember the history lessons, dates and events just to follow his talk. Sometimes I felt lost and did not know whether he was talking about something in the present or something that had already happened as his time shifts were not clear and that was when his eldest daughter would interrupt to say,

*“Don’t believe his words, he is so sick because of his old age and doesn’t know what he is saying, all is takhareef (absurd talk)”*

The word struck me, and I looked back at him to see tears in his green eyes as if asking me, *“Are you like them believing that I only speak takhareef? Do you believe them?”*

I looked directly at his eyes smiling to encourage him to continue as I did not care what they call his talk, and I was curious to hear his story. He ignored them and continued:

*“I was born in Palestine, in Beersheb(o), Beersheb(a), Beer El-Sabaa”-* as he emphasized the three different pronunciations. Then he continued, *“We left all our camels and goats and took only one camel to carry one sack of grain for the escape journey. Right before*

*dusk, two yellow aircrafts came and opened fire on Kobanyah El-Sir (the police station) at Beer El-Sabaa, and everything went black. After Isha the tanks with the Israeli soldiers came in; their main goal was to seize the White Mountain. If they succeeded, then we would lose the entire area of Beer El-Sabaa. Within one year, all prices had doubled: those of grains, sheep (el-ganam), flour.... all within one year, just one year, and the people were so poor, only rich ones were able to buy a rifle and fight the Jews, Israelis. When we heard that the Jews had seized Gaza's road all the way from Jordan to El-ougah, we decided to flee to Egypt. We fled in the dark. We were seven men when we fled and a woman who carried a pillow and thought it was her new born baby. We stayed in El-malagaa (the camps) for fifteen or maybe twenty days, I can't remember now. Then, we reached El-ougah in Sinai where flocks of thieves frequently attacked us; we called them El-Sho'aat. They would take the women, the camels, and we never knew whether they were Egyptians or Palestinians.*

At this moment, it seemed to me that Haj Ahmed was trying to confirm his story, so he started to talk about some of his friends who joined him in this past journey from Palestine to Egypt, as Ahmed interrupted himself saying:

*"You went to Salman El-Asmar, the black man, didn't you?"*

I replied, *"No, his son just died two weeks ago in a motorcycle accident"*

*"Good, good, don't go to him now... later, later, he will tell you everything. We witnessed everything together as we came from Palestine,"* He said.

After a pause, Haj "Ahmed" continued, *"The area here now has a lot of bad people and thugs. They are involved in drug dealing, kidnapping, and terrorizing everyone. If any woman walked by herself, they would kidnap her. I wish the president would hire more police patrols in the streets. Now, I am over 100 years. I came in 1948 when I was 30 years old. I didn't have a*

*wife or a daughter; I only had a rifle. Then I got married when I came to this place here,” and he knocked by his finger on the ground where we were sitting, “We fled with our bodies and the clothes hanging on our shoulders and nothing more. The Israeli soldiers used to cut open pregnant women’s bellies just for the amusement of knowing whether she was having a girl or a boy. A lot of people with red faces and Egal (headbands) came to rob us in an area whose name I don’t remember right now.”*

At this point, some of the younger people sitting with us interrupted him, “*See, we told you, he is too old to talk. All this is just takhareef (absurd talk), you know”.*

Haj “Ahmed” determinedly continued, “*The police patrols should be increased to protect people from thugs. Don’t walk by yourself, my daughter, it is not safe for you here, and that is all. Enough my daughter, switch this off,*” and he pointed at my recorder.

Back in the field, I have always asked for an oral consent from my co-storytellers before collecting their oral history testimonies. Thus, at such a point I always followed their demand of switching my recorder, or in some cases, my video camera. However, what I have noticed that after having all my recording gadgets switched off, the old timers will start a five-minutes *doaa* for me (making prayers for me to be safe and secure while being in their village). This repetitive custom done by my old co-storytellers would always revive the issue of ‘*personal safety*’ which made me wonder what notions of social life are perceived by this community and make them consider it as an “unsafe and unsecure” community for both its inhabitants and for any stranger coming to visit their village. I believe that the idea of security around such remote rural areas should be explored further through other studies.

Listening to the stories told by the old members of my co-storytellers revealed this sense of nostalgia to a forgotten past which on many times and occasions back in the field reminded me of Mahmoud Darwish poem “I Belong There”.

*I Belong There*

*I belong there. I have many memories. I was born as everyone is born.*

*I have a mother, a house with many windows, brothers, friends, and a prison cell with a chilly window! I have a wave snatched by seagulls, a panorama of my own.*

*I have a saturated meadow. In the deep horizon of my word, I have a moon,*

*A bird's sustenance, and an immortal olive tree.*

*I have lived on the land long before swords turned men into prey.*

*I belong there. When heaven mourns for her mother, I return heaven to her mother.*

*And I cry so that a returning cloud might carry my tears.*

*To break the rules, I have learned all the words needed for a trial by blood.*

*I have learned and dismantled all the words in order to draw from them a single word: Home.*

Following Veena Das's argument about the tangible and intangible traces of violent historical events on the human body, we can understand further how the historical traumatic events that mark an exiled community history and uprooted people leave its traces not just on the structural entities of their community but also on the bodies and memories of its people. She says,

In each case of violence and terror alluded to here, changes in the institutional structures of society have led to important differences in the constitution of the body. This in turn leads to changes in the representation of terror in the narratives

of victims- the climatic point being the one in which narratives of the self are themselves part of the experienced terror (Das 1995:190).

The old generation always refers to how they were uprooted from their home and how they feel fatalistic about the course of their lives; while the younger generations see their presence in the village as a mundane fact and the village as their place before, now, and then.

### *The Orality of Death and Life-Doing*

I was only allowed to communicate with the female members of Jazirat Fadil, a matter that can be attributed to the male dominant culture of rural areas in Egypt or attributed to their Bedouin roots. For most of the women in Jazirat Fadil, the memory of their dead relatives was extremely vivid, as if they were using the act of mourning as a continuous reincarnation of their dead to live in the present moment. Another probable explanation is that the old timers refused the present, with all its connotations, and tried their best to create a new moment for them to live in. At the same time, the reality of the present might not be favorable to them so they try to escape to their past memories by having a continuous conversation with their dead sons and husbands to make their everyday life bearable.

Besides having the act of agony and mourning of their dead sons and husbands as a common attribute shared by most of the female members of Jazirat Fadil, they also suffered from a general decline in health after the death of their “male” relatives, all of which had traumatic and unexpected deaths whether by a car accident or just suddenly for no particularly known reason. What also surprised me was the seemingly disregard of “female” deaths whether they were of their daughters, mothers, or any other female relative—that was and still is a strange thing to be noticed within the field. Even though almost all of the women in Jazirat Fadil have narrated the mourning of their deceased male relatives, none of them talked about any dead

female relative which creates another interesting point to follow in future research. No one ever mentioned to me the death of any daughter, sister, or mother, which made me think that maybe they do not care enough about the loss of female relatives.

In the circle that I knew and interacted with inside the village, I monitored different cases related to death and agony in the female community at the village, i.e. Grandma Latifa once told me:

*“mabehesesh belnar ela elekabeshha we tarekha tewalaa fe galbooh,”* (“no one can feel the fire of losing a dear one except those who grasp it tight in their hands and keep its burning flame in the heart”).

She continued saying,

After the death of my son, I'm not attending weddings anymore. I'm only attending funerals. Whenever I hear that there is a funeral, I seek my husband's permission to go and attend it. I would cry not for the recently dead person, but because of the remembrance of my dead son. My eyesight grows dim crying for him. Who would think that someone like him who was so young and healthy would die?

In this vein, their shadowy ghostly existence in present time is related to the narratives of their dead people as they act like ghosts in their relationship to death. Grandma Latifa told me that her late son was the only one who used to buy her new clothes, a new *abayah* (black dress) every year in Ramadan to attend Eid in new clothes. She also has a grandson who is named after his late uncle because he was so loved in his family. Every time I sat with her, she would mention the same story of her late son: how he died, how he looked like with his green eyes, tall body, white healthy skin and wealthy business. I remember how Grandma Latifa iteratively used to mention her son, describing his appearance, the color of his green eyes and healthy skin as if he were still alive, but then she would remind us of his death “by inserting the phrase *Allah*

*yarhamu* (may God have mercy on him/ may God bless his soul) into the process of the dream telling” (Mittermaier 2010:151). It seems that even their dead relatives have a ghostly existence within the present time for my co-storytellers. This was a dominant theme of their present narratives.

Moreover, during the field work at Jazirat Fadil, I heard a lot of stories told by my female co-storytellers acknowledging that they had been 'visited' by their dead relatives in their dreams, as most of the female members always mention different dreams of their deceased sons and husbands. Grandma Gameela has the same experience, as she always cries the death of her husband and two of her sons along with her son's friend who helped her family to restore her house years ago before they all died at The Salem Express Passenger boat accident in 1991. She explained to me that one of her dead sons still visits her very often in her dreams while the other does not do the same anymore. She used the word 'visiting' *yethor* here to express that she had a vision of a dead person in her dreams (*helemt beh fe elmanam*).

Most of the female inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil think that the *Ruh* (the spirit) of their dead relatives, mostly their dead sons and husbands, frequently visit them in dream whether to ask for something to be done for them in life or to inform the living of their prospective state in the afterlife. Most of these narratives capsule a new sort of gift, following Marcel Mauss, when the dream becomes a 'site of exchanges' as Amira Mittermaier confirms (2010:151). Mittermaier classifies different practical functions in dreams in which a dead person comes back to visit the living, and states that dreams becomes sites of exchanges of knowledge, demands and blessings. Furthermore, she explains that the only gift that the dead person can give to the dreamer in this sort of exchange will be both knowledge and the visit itself, itself, and, thus, the dream becomes an informative mode of exchange.

Hence, the question here is: Why do the old timers keep narrating different stories about their dead husbands and sons? Do they create a new dimension for their beloved ones' past life in order to keep them alive in their memories and narratives? And how is this related to their traumatic history as an uprooted exiled community?

This act of mourning reveals another form of performance in life as Turner notes, we have to go into subjunctive world of monsters, demons, and clowns, of cruelty and poetry, in order to make sense of our daily lives, earning our daily bread when we enter whatever theatre our lives allow us, we have already learned how strange and many-layered everyday life is, how extraordinary the ordinary (Turner 1982:122).

In this vein, my co-storytellers' acts of agony could be seen as ghost whispers to express their own perception of the present time and of reality. Grandma Latifa told me that she used to attend funerals to be able to mourn her son again and again. This act highlights the dichotomy between real versus reality. Mourning in public could be interpreted as an act of solidarity with others, while in reality she is seeing another picture or practicing another state of mourning for her own son. She considers the new funeral as an opportunity to mourn her own son and bring him back to life.

A lot of camouflage is involved, which equals the ghostly existence of the memory of the dead in their unique state of exile. The same act was highlighted in different African studies about the commemoration of dead; the newly dead person will send the family regards from the dead people from a very long time<sup>1</sup>. In this sense, it is questionable whether the act of mourning

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<sup>1</sup> John S. Mbiti. 1991. Introduction to African Religion. Heinemann.  
[https://books.google.com.eg/books/about/Introduction\\_to\\_African\\_Religion.html?id=i9ezVqxxqgC&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.com.eg/books/about/Introduction_to_African_Religion.html?id=i9ezVqxxqgC&redir_esc=y) ;  
Okot p'Bitek. 1970. African Religions in Western Scholarship. East African Literature Bureau.  
[https://books.google.com.eg/books/about/African\\_Religions\\_in\\_Western\\_Scholarship.html?id=bKXXAAAAMAAJ&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.com.eg/books/about/African_Religions_in_Western_Scholarship.html?id=bKXXAAAAMAAJ&redir_esc=y) ;  
Okot p'Bitek. 1971. Religion of the Central Luo. Kenya Literature Bureau, 1971 - Luo (Kenyan and Tanzanian people).  
[https://books.google.com.eg/books/about/Religion\\_of\\_the\\_Central\\_Luo.html?id=WjMTAQAAAMAAJ&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.com.eg/books/about/Religion_of_the_Central_Luo.html?id=WjMTAQAAAMAAJ&redir_esc=y);

is actually an act of performing. Turner states that, “when we act in everyday life [...] we act in frames we have wrested from the genres of cultural performance. And when we act on the stage [...] we bring into the symbolic or fictitious world the urgent problems of our reality” (Turner 1982:122). In this sense, could the old-timers of my co-storytellers be using the act of commemorating their dead relatives as a way to fight oblivion in their present time? Could it be that they were using it as a weapon against the younger generations’ tendency to forget about the past and their attempt at ‘killing the old memories’ of Palestine and as a way to sound their inaudible complaints against the way the younger generations were treating them?

Veena Das highlights the relation between dreams and the formation of history in certain millstone events that were inscribed in the material and immaterial aspects of the human being (the body and the memory), when she says,

It is in the light of the relation that we can establish between the institutional structures and the phenomenological experience of suffering—as embodied in dreams, memories, and other idioms of the body—that we come to realize that the inner world too has a history (Das 1995:190).

Sherene Seikaly expressed the same idea of mourning the individual past condition and hoping for a better future one. The condition of certainty generates feelings which are linked to past experienced memories of a ‘younger self’ and a promised future of ‘an older self’ (Seikaly 2013:228).

At Jazirat Fadil, it seems like the generation of old members live in a two-dimensional asynchronous time. These stories of the dead create a new dimension of memory. In this case, two time zones intersected: the present time where the living dwell and the past time that the

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Okot p'Bitek . Song of Lawino and Song of Ocol. December 29, 2013.

<http://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poetry/poems/song-ocol> ;

John S. Mbiti. 1990. African Religions & Philosophy. Heinemann,

[https://books.google.com.eg/books/about/African\\_Religions\\_Philosophy.html?id=eTUpo9IH-fYC&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.com.eg/books/about/African_Religions_Philosophy.html?id=eTUpo9IH-fYC&redir_esc=y) .

dead bring with them. In that sense, dreams can be perceived as “the interplay between the realms of the living and the dead” (Mittermaier 2010:150). Sometimes the line between past and present would be blurred as if they were talking about someone who was still amongst them in the realm of the living. Their remembrance of the dead creates what Nora calls “the surrealist encounter of the umbrella and the sewing machine” (Nora 1989:23) where a moment of belonging emerges to this particular place, their village Jazirat Fadil, where they managed to create a wholeness of scattered entities as they came from different places all over Egypt to settle down at Jazirat Fadil by marriage or business connections.

I remember back in the field when my old co-storytellers had the opportunity to talk freely with me. They would talk about their dead relatives, mourn the deaths of old dear ones, recall old memories and dreams they saw while sleeping, recall the life before the present time, and reminisce about their youth. However, when they are surrounded by their sons and grandsons, they are forced to speak about the current situation; namely, the lack of financial support from the government, the bread problem, subsidy commodities, and the pension for widows and the elderly that they do not receive anymore<sup>1</sup>. At such moments of present interruptions, the old timers would lose focus. I see that they do not only feel distracted, but also feel completely lost as if they were pulled away from their ‘safe zone’. This conflicted situation between the older generation and the younger one at Jazirat Fadil reveals a struggle between the self and other entities that represent the self through time. This conflict represents,

the experience of asynchronous time [when] the self in the very moment of self-awareness is ‘anachronistic,’ as a result of experiencing, living, the past in the present [...] when the ‘other’ in the present is the alterity of past and future [...] One lives with the other (the dead, the not yet born) and the other in the self (the younger, older, larger self) (Seikaly 2013:228).

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<sup>1</sup> According to my co-storytellers; they used to have a pension for elderly people and widows from The Ministry of Social Solidarity, which they do not get anymore after the presidential changes in Egypt during the last years.

This anachronistic self-awareness created new dimensions of memory not just to fight oblivion, but also to act against the lack of recognition within present time.

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*Part two: The (Un)certain*

*There is yet another road in the road, another chance for migration.*

*To cross over we will throw many roses in the river.*

*[...]*

*Yet there is another road in the road, and on and on. So where are the Questions taking me?*

*I am from here, I am from there, yet am neither here nor there.*

*I will have to throw many roses before I reach a rose in Galilee.*

From Mahmoud Darwish's poem "Another Road in the Road"

### *Fragments of an Epic Memory- Being*

It has now been two weeks since I started my field study at El-Ezbah. Two weeks, and every day I discover a new member of the first generation who came from Palestine since 1948 and still lives among the inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil as a hidden treasure or a torn page from a fragile memory. That is how the people of the village treat their elders of the first generation. When I started to ask about the first generation, the only answer I got was,

*“No, too sad . . . you are too late . . . they all are dead now”*

That is, until I met the beautiful grandma Gameela. I discovered that she is one of the first generation in the presence of her grandsons, who had denied this fact earlier. She introduced me to another member of her “rare” generation, who introduced me to another and another, and so on. Just like making a snow ball, I kept meeting people until I found more than ten members of the first generation; I managed to meet only seven. Some allowed me to record their oral testimonies and some did not even allow me to hold a paper and a pen, so I just sat with them for hours, listening to their stories of a fragmented past, bewildered present, and unknown future. Their stories hold in its essence what it means to be exiled from your home of origin for so many years, while being forced to build a new sense of home on a foreign land that is not yours.

Here, on the doorstep of an earthy three-room house, the beautiful grandma *Gameela*—or as her grandsons called her *El-Sitt Gameela*—was sitting on the ground, as usual. A lot of flies gathered around her green tired eyes because of her age, unclean surrounding environment, and neglect, as nobody takes care of her despite the fact that she lives with her son, his wife, and their sons. Her transparent white skin showing her veins and her dim-sighted narrow green eyes are hard to erase from my memory. She has no remembrance of her own age but her fragile elderly

body spoke of her old age. Through grandma's timeworn black cloak I was able to see her wrinkled tired body burdened with different catastrophes.

The place with its brown clay walls, dusty ground, arbor ceiling, and thick air felt more like a barn than a home. With the narrow walled holes acting like windows, there was no light inside the house so we had to sit outside with the barking dogs and peeping children who had come to see the stranger for whom Grandma Gameela had come out of her solitude. Sewage smell filled the air coming from the septic tank under the house. Many flies were bothering Grandma Gameela's tranquility, just like old memories haunting her otherwise peaceful state.

A journey of remembrance and revelation occurred when her 35-year-old grandson discovered that his grandmother was born in Palestine more than 60 years ago, and as a 16-year-old girl had fled her homeland with other people only to settle in Jazirat Fadil. Jazirat Fadil had defined Gameela's life, as she had gotten married to a fleeing Palestinian man from the same village of Bi'r Al-Sab' and conceived all her children in the village of Jazirat Fadil. She outlasted all her offspring except for a son and a daughter, who are now grandparents of their own. Her remembrance of all her dead descendants brought a wailing outcry, especially for the son that never visited her in her dreams, as if a promise had been broken or a commitment not fulfilled. For me, this scene depicts the fragility and fragmentation of the lives of the inhabitants of the village of Jazirat Fadil in miniature with all its tumbledown buildings, narrow roads, excessive poverty, noticeably rampant sickness, extended personal histories, and government neglect.

The scene revealed different crusades of how the people in this remote village, as human beings, struggle to live and survive on a daily basis. It sketches all the circumstances that encapsulate the brutality and ugliness of the reality they live in, starting with the uncertainty of those inhabitants as Palestinian refugees, the lack of recognition regarding their status, the

marginalization of their state, and the confusion about who they are and what they represent within a deranged realm of representations and power relationships.

I used to sit with different members of the old-timers whenever there was an opportunity to do so; however, I was always welcome to sit with Grandma Gameela who encouraged me to visit her almost every day to give her the chance to talk about her home, Palestine. She used to describe our daily session of remembrance as being *tkhareef* or absurd talks. She used to encourage her friends to sit with her for that absurd talk as she used to tell them,

*“ta’alo nekharef lana tkhareften,”* (“come on, let’s have some absurd talk together”). I do not know the reason behind that description she used to coin her own narratives, whether it was a fatalistic act for remembering would not guarantee her return back home or if there were any other reasons.

Whenever I heard the word *tkhareef* within the field it reminded me of Diana Allan’s documentary *Still Life* when the old man keeps repeating *“I want to remember, I don’t want to forget”*<sup>1</sup>. The opening scene of Allan’s documentary was a sight of reflections on the sea water surface. The reflections mirrored a boat number in the present, but also depicted the past life of an 83 year old Palestinian fisherman called Said Ismael Otruk who used to live in *‘Akkā* (Acre) a coastal city in Palestine before being displaced to *Ṣaydā* (Sidon) in the southern coast of Lebanon. Throughout the movie, the Palestinian fisherman keeps showing Allan, the director, different photos of the “Golden Age” in Acra “that will not be forgotten,” as he keeps saying in order to fight oblivion. Back in 1948, the people of Acra were trying to flee their home on small fishing boats. Otruk shows us another photo of the dock of the harbor of Acra where people were fleeing to Lebanon or Syria, and he keeps repeating *bady atzakar* (I want to remember). He was

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<sup>1</sup> “Still Life” is a 25 minute documentary about displaced Palestinian from Acra to Sidon back in 1948 in Palestine. The documentary was produced in 2007. According to Cambridge Dictionary, the phrase (still life) means a type of painting or drawing of an arrangement of objects that do not move, such as flowers, fruit, bowls, etc.

fighting oblivion using those photos and a calendar “marking the time since this day” (Allan, *Still Life* 2007). Otruk’s story depicts Freud’s uncanny as the stranger that mirrors nothing but the very own reflection on the mirror of memory and oblivion “when the one unbidden and unexpectedly is stroked by his own image in the rolling door” (Freud 1997:225).

The same happened in the field when I tried to recall the memory of some of my co-storytellers, especially the old timers, by bringing some photos of *Beer El-Sabaa* village back in the 1940's. I was faced with different reactions. Some, especially the male old timers, refused to look at these photos or even touch them when they knew that the photos were of their original home village, the place they came from. Others, especially the female old timers, were so eager to see the photos and even asked me to reprint them in color, not in black and white as I did the first time, and to bring them the next day. Hajah Khadra called upon her grandsons to come and look at these photos. She kept saying "*ya hasrah ya Awlad ala elomr ely da*" (oh boy! Look to our lost life). Tearfully, she started to recall the costumes, food and an entire way of life when they used to eat *Za'atar* (Thyme) with olive oil, and wear the traditional Palestinian costumes, and when they used to embroider their black dresses that were more embroidered as opposed to the plain black *abaya* of Egyptian rural women that they had to wear.

Another reaction to these colorful images from the past was provoked by the middle generation who used to stop any talk about the past by calling it *tkhareef*. Their attempts of killing the memories of their past history by calling it *Tkhareef* can be seen as a surviving technique so as to prevent the past from being called upon in the present and preventing these people from being fully accepted in their current social context.

Within the discourse of displacement and exile, dealing with the memory of those who fell could reveal new realities other than if dealing only with the memory of the conquerors.

Listening to the stories told by my old co-storytellers showed new dimensions of memory, realities, belongings, and beings. The stories the old timers told me depicted a full picture of nostalgia to their original home Palestine in a way that I did not sense with the younger generations. The younger generations used to kill the memory of their elders, as they used to stop any narratives about Palestine from the beginning. For instance, Grandma “Gameela” once told me that years ago when her son brought her a TV, she saw her old house in Beersheba on the screen, and when she pointed this out to the people around her, no one believed her and doubted that she still remembers how it looked like or that the house remained the same after all these years. They called the whole situation *takhareef*.

*Takhareef (Killing Memory); New Techniques of Survival- Doing*

After going to the field I found that for the inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil, Palestine is like a torn memory, a bad omen or even a curse. They will mention it only for the sake of performing their Palestinianness in front of a stranger who is usually a journalist who came to study this exiled Palestinian community. Otherwise, it will disappear through their daily life activities. Pierre Nora once said “We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left” (Nora 1989:7). However, exploring the idea of memory in the context of Jazirat Fdil is not a repetitive act, as the fieldwork revealed new dimensions of memory among the same members of the community. The new opposing dimensions were noticed and observed in two different narratives when certain past memories were brought to the present by the old members of my co-storytellers. The first moment was when they recalled their original home, Palestine. The second moment was when telling me about their dead sons and husbands. Strangely enough, the two moments would provoke different responses from the younger generation who would describe

the first narrative as being *takhareef*, while acting very respectfully while listening to the stories of the dead members of their families. A question would be why they coin the narratives told by their elders about Palestine as being *takhareef* and picture the old timers as being insane or going crazy just by remembering these kinds of stories about their old home? At the same time, any other narratives told by the same old members of their community about their dead sons and husbands would be welcomed stories that ought to be listened to humbly and respectfully.

I had no definite answer for this question until I came across Pierre Nora's article about the dialectic relationship between history, memory, and the successive evolutionary stages of the existence of nations. Nora's article made me realize that my presence during the fieldwork at Jazirat Fadil provoked certain connotations of where they came from, why they are here, and why I am studying them. All these connotations worked to create this moment of consciousness of the break my co-storytellers already had with their Palestinian past that is bound up with their sense that this particular memory of Palestine has been torn beyond repair, or at least it should be torn as it hinders their complete integration in their present unavoidable situation in Egypt. Now, I realize that my presence at Jazirat Fadil caused a moment of awakening, as a reminder of their past history, while remembering their dead relatives brings this new form of history of what we can call their present history in Egypt. They have showed me pictures of their dead family members, taken me to their cemetery, and told me stories about their dreams of their dead loved ones; all in an attempt to create this new form of present history to which they can belong to and have materialistic evidence of their belonging to this particular space in history.

Using another theoretical perception from J.L. Austin's book, *How to do Things with Words*, to understand their reflective acts with regards to the narratives of Palestine and the narratives of the dead, it seems that the younger generations of my co-storytellers have employed

the same concept of acting or doing through utterance. They practice the act of ‘killing memory’ by calling their elders’ narratives *takhareef*. At their village, they are forced to follow new survival techniques such as practicing ‘the right to kill or to allow to live’<sup>1</sup> for certain memories and ideas in order to gain acceptance in a new social fabric that they are forced to live in. Their actions of coining a certain memory as being *takhareef* depict their agency in performing the erasure of certain memories. As Austin profoundly explains,

‘doing something’ is a very vague expression. When we issue any utterance whatsoever, are we not ‘doing something’? [...] For example, we may contrast men of words with men of action, we may say they did nothing, only talked or said things, yet again, we may contrast only thinking of something with actually saying it (out loud), in which context saying it is doing something (Austin 1962:91-92).

Regarding the actions performed by the younger generations despising some of the old generation narratives, it seems that the young generation decided to create a split between their Palestinian history and their remembrance of the dead. In this process of “acceleration of history” (Nora 1989), they needed to create their current society not their Palestinian nation. It is a society where they have, or can show, certain tangible assets as sites of memory (their present memory) to prove their belonging to this particular place and aspire for a probable future in the same place. Nora explained this desire in communities by saying “with the advent of society in place of the nation, legitimation by the past and therefore by history yields to legitimation by the future” (Nora 1989:11). The same phenomenon of living in present time that we call living in the “present history” is explained by Leonardo Schiocchet as living “time with time” (Schiocchet 2011:12). As when my co-storytellers iteratively narrate the stories of their deceased family

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<sup>1</sup> Please refer to: Bednar, Robert M. 2013. Killing Memory; Roadside Memorial Removals and the Necropolitics of Affect. Cultural Politics, Volume 9, Issue 3. P.p. 337-356.

members “they live the present time as a time within time- in contrast to the ‘normal time’ of non-refugees” (Schiocchet 2011:13).

In his talk about bringing the torn scattered, old form of history that hinders the individual human beings from reaching future or living in present, Pierre Nora explains the phenomenon of *takhareef* that I witnessed at Jazirat Fadil. When a certain memory is related to a traumatic break with the past and is brought into the present time, it solicits the same unpleasant feelings while creating “a moment of awake(ning) from [the people’s] ethnological slumbers” (Nora 1989:7). The people of Jazirat Fadil have managed to create a new history, or at least, claim their belonging to a new trajectory of history that coincides with Egyptian historical events. In other words, through the idea of *takhareef* they managed to practice the “eradication of memory” by creating a new form of history that they can belong to (Nora 1989:8).

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*Part Three: The (Un)seen*

*Eskety Ya-amah, Ehna Mesh Aysheen*, (SHH, You know nothing. We are no longer alive)

–Hajah Naifah, one of the first generation member in Jazirat Fadil

### *The Ghostly Existence Now and Then*

In the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli War at the beginning of the year 1948, more than 700,000 Palestinians fled their homes in Palestine to the nearby Arab countries, among them was Egypt. Some thousands settled in different areas all over Egypt. The Palestinian refugee issue is defined as being a result of a very prolonged conflict that “began in 1948 as a result of fighting between Zionist Jewish settlers and indigenous Palestinian Arab population and the surrounding Arab states” (Dumber 2006:2). As a result of this, a community of exiled Palestinians was created of which one-third is registered as Palestinian refugees and live in 59 recognized refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, whereas “the other two thirds of the registered refugees live in and around the cities and towns of the host countries, and in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip” (Dumber 2006:3).

Inside and outside their homeland, Palestinian refugees suffer from different forms of exclusion: political, legal and academic. Obviously, Palestinians suffer from a set of difficulties that are “manipulated by forces eager to see the Palestinians disappear [...] here the blindness of politics and the coarseness of oppressive power appear in almost text book form” (Said 1979:119). In political terms, the refugee experience has more or less been marginalized from the Palestinian project as a whole. Legally, the Palestinian refugees represent a unique case of refugees that drove the United Nation to establish a specialized agency called the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) that functions under the supervision of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which is the main humanitarian agency that works for the protection of all displaced and vulnerable cases of refugees around the world.

Indeed, all Palestinian refugees share the same reality of living a “long-term displacement” whether in Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Brazil, or any other place around the world. On the one hand, the Palestinian people do not formulate a cohesive body as they are scattered between those who live in exile outside Palestine and those who are internally displaced and live under the Israeli military occupation. Politically, those who are within the Arab countries “tended to see themselves in terms of Arab politics, or try to be assimilated to their new places of residence, [while the Arab Israeli] were cut off from the Arab world, as they tried to shape their lives as much as they could within the small space provided them by Israel’s domination” (Said 1979:117).

Moreover, the entire Palestinian body of refugees is distinguished as a unique group of refugees amongst all the other world groups of refugees for the Palestinian refugees fall under the mandate of UNRWA, rather than the UNHCR (Roberts 2010:187-188). In addition, they do not share the same experience of exile. Within the Lebanese context, Rebecca Roberts argues that “Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have continued to survive, but the focus on political issues and Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza has meant that little is known about their domestic lives and coping mechanisms that they have developed” (Roberts 2010:185). The same can be applied to the case of the Palestinian refugees in Egypt, specifically, to the community in Jazirat Fadil for the knowledge that exists about their day to day survival is insignificant in comparison with that of other Palestinian communities around the world.

From an anthropological point of view, the dominant mainstream perception within the existing literature on Palestinian refugees seems to tackle the Palestinian case from different perspectives influenced by the mass exodus of migrants from their homeland. Such perception takes for granted the recognition of the state of “refugee” of the exiled Palestinians around the

globe. As we read about Palestinian refugees, we find a mention of a certain set of ideas that are always juxtaposed with each other: *sumud* (Palestinian steadfastness), *hawiya* (Palestinian National Identity), and *haqq al-‘awda* (the right to return to Palestine). Whether the study is about a Palestinian community in Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Brazil, Egypt, or any other place, we can trace a repetitive trend of these three ideas with regard to the different places of exile of the Palestinian Diaspora around the world.

Academically, there is a large silence surrounding the status quo of different unrecognized Palestinian refugee communities—a matter which has created an additional impediment to conducting any theoretical or practical study of them. Therefore, talking about the Palestinian Diaspora should not only include the refugee camps in Lebanon and the Palestinian community in Jordan. It needs to be expanded to include the unrecognized refugee communities such as those in Jazirat Fadil. Undeniably, the Palestinian refugee crisis is considered one of the most pressing and unsolved humanitarian crises today, and while politicians remain unable to reach a fair resolution for such the sixty-year-long conflict, scholars bear the responsibility of studying such a pressing issue in order to voice the suffering of human communities that live in a state of oblivion and their lack of recognition from all local, national, and global parties. Such a task can be achieved by learning from these unrecognized communities, revisiting their ethnographic library, opening a gateway of knowledge production, and inventing new methodological and ethnographic fieldwork techniques.

In the same vein, the Palestinian Diaspora not only convey displacement, nostalgia, and loss, but also attempts to reestablish life regardless of their 'temporary permanent' status in the host country. By definition, diaspora "denotes displacement in the sense that one lives outside one's primary land of attachment [...] Diaspora also means reattachment and is a mechanism that

expands the space of the nation beyond the borders of the state” (Brettell 2003:xx-xxi). Consequently, the plight of refugees fleeing from Palestine in 1948 raises several key questions regarding their historical fragmentation as a nation and their future.

The people in Jazirat Fadil live outside the Palestinian remembrance of the Palestinian villages archival website<sup>1</sup> as people who have fled their village of Byr Sab' in 1948 and reached their final destination in Al-Sharqiya, Egypt. Concerning the unique state of the remote village in Egypt whose residents are all Palestinians, the main ethnographic concern should be the study of these people's resistance and struggle to survive and stay alive within a time and space that only acknowledges their physical existence as walking bodies. However, the main driver of this research proposal is to highlight the agency of the global neglect that the inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil suffer from, while taking into consideration the very real threats of dismantlement, instability, and ongoing displacement which citizens of the Middle East region are currently facing.

The exclusion of the inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil inhabitants from the legal accounts of refugee can be seen through the canonical perceptions of terms such as Diaspora, refugees, asylum seekers, and refugee camp. Therefore, this research is going to work against the conventional mainstream politics of recognition for the Palestinians of Jazirat Fadil as a minority and for the politics of recognition for them as a group of indigenous exiled people and their presence in the anthropological library. Generally speaking, the UNHCR distinguishes between refugees and asylum seekers. According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, a refugee is someone who,

owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside

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<sup>1</sup> Please refer to the "Palestine Remembered" website: <http://www.palestineremembered.com/>

the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (UNHCR 2010:14).

Asylum seekers are defined as those who are seeking refugee status. Therefore, not everyone who seeks asylum meets the legal definition of refugee as stated in the 1951 convention (Schuster 2011:1392-1393). Within the same context, Palestinian refugees are defined as “persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period from 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict” (UNRWA 2015).

Thus, the Palestinians of Jazirat Fadil seem to be excluded from the legal definition of refugees provided by the UNHCR as they are excluded from its areas of operations which include 58 recognized Palestine refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem<sup>1</sup>. Consequently, UNRWA does not provide the inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil with its services. The reality here conveys a state of exclusion based on judicial international definitions that derive their legitimate power from the international organization acknowledging them. Veena Das says,

we might see how the affective force that particular legal concepts acquire might be traced to the notion of life, not only as a social construct or an entity to be managed by the State, but also in the insistence by inhabitants living in illegal shanty settlements, that they have a moral standing to call upon the State (Das 2011:322).

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<sup>1</sup> UNRWA: The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees. The agency was established by the United Nations General Assembly resolution 302 (IV) of 8 December 1949 after the 1948 war, to carry out direct relief and work programs for Palestine refugees. Source: UNRWA website: <http://www.unrwa.org/who-we-are?tid=85>

After living this reality with the people of Jazirat Fadil, it seems that the veracity of what is there is different from the existing conventional knowledge about the Palestinian Diaspora. Their case forces us to re-visit old notions within the domain of refugee studies. In order to expand our knowledge, we need to go to reality and start from there to build new theoretical stands. I am not trying to prove something in particular; merely, I am arguing that there needs to be a serious revision to the current library about Palestinian refugees. After my experience living with and observing my subjects, I found a community of exiled Palestinians who is not only unrecognized and suffering from oblivion, but also are excluded from the Palestinian refugee body of literature. In other words, they are unseen because they have been living a ghostly life in the Egyptian context for more than 67 years.

In the Palestinian context, the body of Palestinian Diaspora might share the same historical moment of creation represented in the two historical moments of *Al-Nakba* or Catastrophe and *Al-Naksa* or Setback. However, they differ historically according to their course of life up to the present moment. Lena Jayyusi pointed out that the Palestinian nation has gone through different historical trajectories of dispersion and reconnection since the *Nakba* on May 15, 1948 by *Naksa* on June 5<sup>th</sup> 1967, which provide different reconstitutive historical moments (Jayyusi 2007:109). For example, the *Nakba* as a distinct historical moment has led to the fragmentation of the Palestinian memory. Such historical memories have created their awareness and knowledge against a backdrop of world ignorance and silence. In other words, the Palestinian diaspora split around the world into three main categories: the exiled refugees, the Palestinians in Israel (known as the Arab Israelis), and the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. In this sense, the Palestinians' way of acknowledging their situation has been defined as "us" against "them", "us" being the Palestinians and "them" representing the rest of the world.

Jayyusi also points out that the Palestinians' sense of fragmentation creates a general feeling of uncertainty, as she states: "For Palestinians, the acceleration of history means that they know exactly where they come from, but not necessarily where they will end up" (Jayyusi 2007:125). Thus, memory in its basic sense is not just about history as it is formulated from the point of view of the present. Rather, it suggests a reference of their existence as an 'objective' characteristic of the place (Jayyusi 2007:107-109). In terms of the above mentioned division of Palestinian refugees into various categories, the inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil do not fit within them. Down to earth, it is not about ideally meeting the legal benchmarks of the former categories of displacement as it is more about the circumstances that caused them to flee. Technically speaking, they are refugees who live in exile. However, they have not even gained a symbolic recognition within the literature of the Palestinian Refugees. Thus, regarding the peculiarity of a Palestinian people living in Egypt as a host country for more than 60 years and despite the differences between the aforementioned categories of displacement, I will address them as one unit under the term of "refugees".

With regards to the anthropological literature about the Palestinian issue, there is a need to challenge the steady perceptual stream of the "Palestinian Refugees." Such a category is perceived as a national project that is constructed through different historical trajectories and is used as a strategic tool through peace negotiations with Israel under the name of "the right of return", amongst other strategies to maintain the "Palestinian National Identity" (*hawiya*). Simultaneously, the core of this research project is to investigate how an unrecognized refugee community performs agency against a structure that refuses to acknowledge their presence at all levels: globally, nationally, and locally. Another contested notion is related to the conventional perception of the *sumud* (Palestinian steadfastness). Studying the case of exile of the Palestinian

inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil imposes a fundamental question of why they do not fit within the current mainstream discourse of Palestinian refugees. This study attempts to tackle such question by starting with the idea of *sumud* (steadfastness), revisiting some old notions, and contesting previous understandings of both categories of Palestinians and Palestinians Refugees<sup>1</sup>.

In the field of academia, it seems that the dominant perception of *sumud* (Palestinian steadfastness) is influenced by the mass exodus of migrants from their homeland, while in reality it is a mutual interaction between the academic sphere and the studied communities, between what is stated there in academic circles and what the reality imposes on human beings, between what can be read in books and what can be lived, experienced, and encounter through ethnographic research of a real community of exiled people (Schicocchet 2011). As Valentine Daniel said “theory is a way of understanding reality and not a collection of observations about reality [...] it enhances one’s understanding of the real . . . it is often forgotten that even ordinary life is not transparent to theory” (Daniel 1996:6). Thus, the Palestinian Diaspora around the world may share the same historical origin, but they vary according to their living conditions and experience of life. After tracing most of the documented and undocumented accounts of the Palestinian people of Jazirat Fadil that manifest their displacement and exiled status on Egyptian soil, I found only informal information, all in Arabic, in the form of press reports, scattered stories, reportages, and documentaries; however, there were no official records of these people.

Based on the above mentioned, it seems that the people of Jazirat Fadil do not fit within the legal definitions of exiled people: refugees, asylum seekers, or stateless. They do not even fit within the Palestinian refugees definition of UNRWA as being “persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home

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<sup>1</sup> Ted Swedenburg. The Palestinian Peasant as National Signifier. *Anthropological Quarterly*, Vol. 63, No. 1, Tendentious Revisions of the Past in the Construction of Community (Jan., 1990), pp. 18-30.

and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict (only those who meet this definition, live in one of the UNRWA areas of operations, and who are registered with the Agency and in need for assistance can enjoy its services and recognition).<sup>1</sup>”

Most of my co-storytellers have told me that whenever they have to deal with issues of documents or registration at one of the state registrar offices, the first question they are always asked is: “*are you a refugee or a ‘Palestinian’ refugee?*” This made me see them as being truly ‘Not-not refugees’. Their inability to read and write, and incompetence to follow the global discourse about Palestine have put them in the category of “those who focus on the struggle of survival” as Palestinians living in exile, as opposed to “those who are active in resistance” as Palestinians living in the Palestinian territory. These two categorizations were coined by Ilina Feldman, which somehow excludes them from the discourse of the right to return (Feldman 2008:500). I think that referring to them as exiled people will be the best depiction of the case of Jazirat Fadil inhabitants. They are living on a land that they cannot own, have a nationality of a country that they cannot go back to, were born on a land that is not their grandparents’ land, and do not share the same history of the place they have lived in for their entire lives.

### *Palestine as a Ghost- Being*

A ghost is unseen when it comes to its *being* or its ghostly existence, but it is a *doing*—living or really existing—when it comes to performing its haunting agency even inside the human imagination and have its own reflections on the reality. The same can be applied to my co-storytellers, their home of origin, their present community, and even to me by the end of the

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<sup>1</sup> UNRWA definition of Palestinian Refugees through the Agency website: <http://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees>

field research<sup>1</sup>. Using Pierre Nora's argument about sites of memory and people of memory, we can perceive the village of Jazirat Fadil as a 'site of memory' where the Palestinian cause can be depicted as a whole through memories of war, savage displacement, exile, relocation, and survival. At the same time, the inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil can be perceived as 'people of memory' as their physical existence capsule a historical tale of exile. In this vein, prominent questions can be asked to understand the process of ghosting and shadowing through which an entire nation and their country have been transformed into an ethereal existence. How can flesh be made to disappear? How can the visible be made invisible? Some argue that ghosts do not exist, so how can an entire nation just 'not exist'?

In his article, "Out of Place, Out of Time", Elias Sanbar, as many other scholars, highlights the year 1948 as the zero point or the point of disappearance of the entire nation of Palestine. In the year 1948, an entire country and its people disappeared from both maps and dictionaries (Sanbar 2001:87) when the universal actors started the ghosting process of Palestine itself. This is the point when they decided that "the Palestinian people does not exist [...] and the Palestinians would be referred to by general, conveniently vague terms, as either 'refugees', or in the case of the small minority that had managed to escape generalized expulsion, 'Israeli Arabs' [as] a long absence was beginning" (Sanbar 2001:87).

For many global actors, my co-storytellers' home of origin has a ghostly existence. In 2012, the state of Palestine was granted a non-member observer state status at the UN – which amounts to a de facto identification of a statehood<sup>2</sup>. Palestine is more like a ghost state that is not

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<sup>1</sup> The family members whom I stayed with during the field work wished to keep the memory of my presence with them for three months, so we went to a photography studio in Abu Kabir for a "family" photo with me. Upon the end of the field study, I showed the photo to some of my professors at AUC and to my surprise; it was very hard for them to identify me surrounded by my co-storytellers. My mentors told me that I look exactly like my co-storytellers as if I had been one of them for years.

<sup>2</sup> Charbonneau, Louis. Palestinians win implicit U.N. recognition of sovereign state. United Nations. Thursday Nov 29, 2012 6:46pm EST. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-palestinians-statehood-idUSBRE8AR0EG20121129>

recognized as a dependent state from most of the powerful global actors; however, it keeps haunting as a ghostly existence in reality on the ground. Sanbar explains the roots of the Palestinian obsession with places and land in that “they would live as if they were everything – Palestine and Palestinians, a people and its land [...] and having Palestine travelling around on the shoulders of its children” (Sanbar 2001:90). This explains having *Jazirat Fadil* as the core point within the life of its inhabitants. Sanbar explains how the Palestinians, after their first displacement, found themselves trapped in an ephemeral dimension of time, and how they now “occupy a temporal space made up of both a past preserved by a memory afflicted by madness and a dreamt-of future which aspired to restore time” (Sanbar 2001:90). Actually, they were driven out of time when “their history and their past were denied. Their aspirations and their future were forbidden” (Sanbar 2001:90).

The community of Jazirat Fadil shows a new meaning of Palestine and of Palestinianess. Although my co-storytellers prefer using the Egyptian dialect, sometimes they down play this dialect in order to appear as true Palestinians. In some cases, they want to be recognized as Egyptians and in others they want to be seen as Palestinians, which goes back to the idea of the ghostly existence. Their original identity only appears when it will help them gaining something then it disappears again. Through their cultural representations, they are able to gain visibility, and they practice their agency when it is time to keep invisibility. They will appear as both Palestinians and Egyptians when needed, which goes back to the idea of a ghost that can take any shape at any time. This ghost occupies people’s minds and is capable of taking any form of existence like a shape shifter. When they appear in that black cloak, that is their appearance during their performance on the stage where they create their ‘reality’, but this reality is merely a form of acting and not a reality.

### *Jazirat Fadil; the Generalized Exception- Being*

The shadowy existence is also seen within the present life of the community of Jazirat Fadil. The people of Jazirat Fadil perceive their existence as a ghostly one that is enforced on them by others as an exiled community for more than 67 years. Therefore, within the discourse of belonging and home creation of the exiled Palestinians living in Jazirat Fadil in Egypt after the 1948 war, it is not a question of national identity but rather of gaining visibility through physical and materialistic aspects. The community has more than five thousand exiled Palestinians. They are unseen, live like ghosts, and suffer from a lack of global and local recognition. They are not recognized globally as they do not live in a refugee camp and consequently do not fit within the UNRWA legal definition of refugees. They are not recognized locally as they managed to integrate within the Egyptian social fabric in which they have lived for more than 67 years now. They suffer from a lack of basic necessities as is the case with any poor rural area in Egypt. They live like scarecrows benefiting their surroundings but with no visible gains directed to their fixed existence. In addition, they do not enjoy the substantial services provided by the government to the Egyptian citizens. They do not enjoy the freedom of mobility that is attributed to any ghostly existence as they enjoy the freedom of mobility within the Egyptian borders only and not outside of it. They are in a state of limbo where they have neither a Palestinian nor an Egyptian nationality.

Different scholars tried to identify the experience of displacement and exile, yet the more they try to neutralize the experience of exile using some generalized ideas, the more they are faced with the uncertainty and unpredictability that bestows a 'meaningless existence' on the refugee experience (Schicchet 2011:10). In this regard, studying the community of Jazirat Fadil as a unique case of exile, it is necessary to disarm what we have always known, and start our

critical investigation from reality itself. Sara Roy describes this process when she notes that by “making more information available to critical scrutiny, by presenting alternatives too often marginalized and thereby contesting our comprehension of reality, so long protected and inviolate” (Roy 2007:57). The reality at Jazirat Fadil shows a community of exile Palestinians who suffer from oblivion legally, politically, and academically. They seem to be excluded from the recognized Palestinian population as refugees defined by the United Nations, the body of anthropology studies of Palestinian refugees, and the recognized Palestinian refugee community inside Palestine. Moreover, they are suffering political exclusion inside the Egyptian society as a minority of indigenous non-Egyptians. They also do not appear within the dominant body of Palestinian studies intended to direct more focus to the Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan.

Within the Egyptian context, the latest UNHCR report *Global Appeal: Egypt 2015* holds no mention of the Palestinian refugees in Egypt. The report also points out the fact that Egypt is a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention, its 1967 Protocol, and the 1969 OAU Convention. However, in reality, UNHCR carries out all of the functional responsibilities for all aspects of registration, documentation, and refugee status determination (RSD) under the 1954 memorandum of understanding with the Government of Egypt (UNHCR 2015:1). Such a case does not apply to the particularity of the Palestinian refugees in Egypt, as they have been issued a “Refugee Travel Document” (RTD) by the Egyptian authorities (Figure 13), which has to be renewed every 3 to 5 years (Shiblak 2006:8). However, when the question of where Palestinian refugees live arises, UNRWA website defines a Palestine refugee camp as “a plot of land placed at the disposal of UNRWA by the host government to accommodate Palestine refugees and set up facilities to cater to their needs” (UNRWA 2015). The same website acknowledges only 58

recognized Palestine refugee camps located in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem. There is no mention of any Palestinian refugee camps in Egypt. With regard to the case of the Palestinian refugees in Egypt, they have been received as 'temporary guests' until the political conditions that caused displacement cease. Until this happens, they are seen as a separate class, which makes it harder for them to be integrated and makes them more vulnerable. Ignoring their presence in exile causes a 'spatial segregation' and hinders their positive engagement within the host society, though it would have been better for them to be integrated into the context and given freedom of movement and freedom to create social networks (Fabos and Kibreab 2007:3).

Moreover, most of the inhabitants of the village do not have a formal registered marriage certificates, for they are quite expensive and require a visit to the Palestinian Consulate in Cairo. They do not occupy a formal profession, as their garbage collection occupation sets them directly outside the formal employment system in Egypt. Moreover, the majority of the children of Jazirat Fadil are not registered in the formal education system for many reasons. First, I have been told by most of the parents that it is hard for them to pay an annual visit to three different authorities in Cairo<sup>1</sup> in order to obtain a document that permits their children to attend public schools. Second, most of the parents depend on their children as labor in the collection of garbage, their sole source of income. They are also not entitled to land ownership and depend on the ownership of third parties by registering their gardens under the name of Egyptian citizens.

The only formal document that acknowledges their presence is a blue passport. The document holds a title of "Travel Document for Palestinian Refugees" issued by the Arab

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<sup>1</sup> I have been told by most of the parents at Jazirat Fadel that in order to obtain admittance for their children to a nearby public school they have to visit *The Mogamma Al-Tahrir* downtown Cairo, The National Security Office in Zagazig, and finally The Educational Administrative Building in Zagazig. The visit to the three state authorities would require a lot of time and each administration will issue a document to be received by the other state authority and so on.

Republic of Egypt's authorities in Mugamma Al-Tahrir in downtown Cairo. In one of the reports of the Badil Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, there is verification of this information as "most Palestinians residing in Egypt hold temporary residency permits, which are valid for one to three years. Egypt is the only Arab host state that requires all Palestinians refugees to regularly renew their residency status" (BADIL 2005:17). The people in Jazirat Fadil told me that this blue passport permits them to travel only to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to conduct the Islamic ritual of pilgrimage of Hajj and Umrah. They are not allowed to travel to any other country around the world, and they are not allowed to work in Saudi Arabia, either.

Moreover, they do not appear on the map of the UNHCR or UNRWA as recognized Palestinian refugees because of certain political considerations of the official authorities in the Egyptian state. For example, the 2004 amendments of the 1975 Egyptian nationality law acknowledges the naturalization of non-Egyptians born in Egypt as long as they can verify that the father was also born in Egypt and belongs to the majority of the population of an Arab or Islamic country (Badawy and Khalil 2005:9). Such a law is not applied to the exceptional case of the Palestinian refugees in Jazirat Fadil since the village has almost four consecutive generations who were born in the Egyptian but were never granted the Egyptian nationality. From my point of view, such a paradoxical situation can be attributed to the perceived identities in the Egyptian mindset against certain groups with regards to ethnicity and cultural aspects under the allegation of "protecting the Palestinian national identity".

#### *Different Names; People, Places- Being*

Another form of being unseen was revealed while being in the field. I discovered that most of the inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil have more than one name and in most cases all are

different than the original names indicated on their birth certificates. Being ‘the stranger visitor’ who could read and write while being in the field, I attracted a lot of attention and drove a lot of the families of Jazirat Fadil to ask for my help to go with them to the Civil Affairs Registrar Office at Abu Kabir and Al-Zagazig in order to extract their correct birth certificates. I found that siblings from the same mother and father could have different parent names due to some mistakes, ignorance, or my co-storytellers' illiteracy. The case provoked the idea of pseudonyms as an ethnographic ethical issue because at the end of the field study, I asked every one of my co-storytellers at Jazirat Fadil to choose a pseudonym for themselves, and to my surprise, they did not like this idea and thought that “*I’m up to no good*” because of that. Up until now, I cannot find an adequate reason for that fear expressed by my co-storytellers, and they failed to give me any reason apart from being very suspicious of any outsider getting into their community.

Beside all the different identities I have been assumed to be while being in the field, my co-storytellers sometimes dealt with me as if I were a humanitarian agency that would support them with not just relief aid, but with recognition as well. Most of their talks with me would end with a list of certain exact repeated demands: providing bread, the monthly subsidies and the elderly and widows pension, and citizenship to enjoy the full ‘rights’ of any Egyptian. Their attitude made me ponder about the importance of the humanitarian apparatus to national visibility (Feldman 2008: 501). They turned my existence, my being, in their village into an instrument that would achieve a sort of an existential visibility to them. This assumption from my side has proven to be true during the last week of my field work, when I asked my co-storytellers to choose their pseudonyms that would appear in my thesis. To my surprise, none of them liked, appreciated, or approved this idea. They were between some who thought that “*if I’m changing their real names, then they were right about suspecting my real intentions behind*

*studying their village, as I'm up to no good at all*". The others disapproved my endeavors of keeping their anonymity as it would prevent them from enjoying any prospective relief distribution or official identification documents that might come to them in future as benefits from my research. I came to understand how they perceived me as a new hope for a better future, or in Feldman's words, how I "opened new spaces of visibility" to them (Feldman 2008:500).

Going back to the past, their original village from which they came from in 1948 has different names in the body of historical and ethnographic literature. A set of authors use the Hebrew names while others use the transliteration of the Arabic names. For both Dan Rabinowitz and Daniel Monterescu, in the introduction to their book *Mixed Towns, Trapped Communities*, use the name *Bi'r Al-Sab'* located within the Najaf (Negev) desert to indicate the depopulated, colonized mixed town in Palestine where my co-storytellers originally came from. Both authors highlight the cultural erasure of the colonizing project of Israel by changing the original names of the ancient Palestinian cities. They state that,

a number of semi-urban peripheral communities such as *Majdal, Beisan, Mjeidal, Hals, and Bi'r al-Sab'*, which prior to 1948 had been exclusively Palestinian, and whose entire populations became refugees and displaced persons during the hostilities, were eventually included in Israel's post 1948 territory. Their locations were soon rebuilt, repopulated and reinvented as the exclusively Jewish Israeli towns now named, respectively, Ashkelon, Bet-Shean, Migdal Haemeq, Kiryat Shemona and Beersheva<sup>1</sup>. (Rabinowitz and Monterescu, 2007)

Coming back to the present, the current village of Jazirat Fadil has different names. For example, during my frequent visits to the National Security Office in El-Zagazig, the officer insisted on naming my field site Jazirat Abnaa' Fadl, which can be translated to the island of the sons of a man called "Fadl". While the administrative office of the General Commission for Adult

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<sup>1</sup> Introduction: the Transformation of Urban Mix in Palestine/Israel in the Modern Era. In: *Mixed Towns, trapped communities: historical narratives, spatial dynamics, gender relations and cultural encounters in Palestinian- Israeli towns*. Editors: Dan Rabinowitz and Daniel Monterescu. 2007. UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited. Pp. 1-34.

Education and Eradication of Illiteracy where I went to finish some official documents for the illiteracy class I planned to open in the village called the village Jazirat Fadil, the island of a man called Fadil<sup>1</sup>. The inhabitants themselves along with their neighbors called the village Ezbat El-Arab and used the short name El-Ezbah. Ironically, the word Ezbat in Arabic means estate or a property owned by a wealthy family in which a lot of farmers work. Even Oroub El-Abed mentioned them twice in her study under a totally different name which is Jazirat Abu Fadil which means the island of a man who is the father of a son called Fadil (El-Abed 2009:59,199).

Thus, the field reveals that every person in Jazirat Fadil has different names, and at some point the person cannot tell what his/her real name is since they cannot read their birth certificates and do not remember their names either. In other words, most of them do not know their real names. Similarly, their place of origin has gone through different stages of name changes within the literature, and their current place is not recognized by a unified particular name even within different state apparatuses. Thus, the question is: Do personal names formulate part of our identity? Some scholars, along with some psychologists, have proposed a relationship between a person's name and her or his sense of identity and self. These scholars, in their studies, have drawn a relation between personal identity, personal names, self-acceptance, and the attention paid to one's memory and one's name. These studies concluded a significant relation between names, identity, and self-recognition<sup>2</sup>.

The daily life of my co-storytellers is more oriented towards their profession in garbage collection. They use this profession not just as a way of earning money and supporting their livelihood, but also as a way of identifying themselves by setting rules of how to live and survive. They are using the spatial proximity of their village to other villages to support their

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<sup>1</sup> The village has different names in Arabic with different meanings. جزيرة فاضل/ جزيرة فضل/ جزيرة أبناء فضل

<sup>2</sup> The description of the article on the journal website: Dion, Kenneth L. Names, Identity, and Self. Volume 31, Issue 4 (01 December 1983), pp. 245-257. <<http://www.maneyonline.com/doi/abs/10.1179/nam.1983.31.4.245>>.

lifestyle that is centered on collecting garbage. This focus on garbage collection is seen in the transformation of every green space into a dumping area. In this case, the question is how they formulate their existence in this life and whether they are ‘being’ oriented around the physical aspects of their life rather than the intangible aspects of their names.

### *Hierarchies of Being; Bodily Identity versus the Unseen- Doing*

Based on the fieldwork experience I gained after living in this community for three months in order to collect oral history from the first generation, I can argue that even if they lack the proper legitimate recognition, they are still there physically. Their bodies are considered the proof of their existence among us. They create their identity of being based on their physical existence. At the beginning, it was hard to notice this new corporeal dimension of identity and how they profoundly crafted a spot within existence through their bodies and the physical existence of their village, "because the most forgotten alien land is one's own body" (Benjamin 2007:132)

In the movie *Dirty Pretty Things*,<sup>1</sup> the process of alienation was so obvious to the immigrants who experienced it in the host country. It is a state not just of the soul being cast away from home, but also of their corporeal existence transformed into recycled objects. While being in the field, my co-storytellers narrated many stories of kidnapping and trafficking of the human body for spare parts in the surrounding area of their village. I do not have any evidence to connect such narrative with the status of exile that my co-storytellers suffer from; however, these stories highlight the vulnerability of their situation as strangers because “the living bodies of strangers can easily be ‘shaped’ according to the desire of the powerful groups in society” (Karakayali 2006:328). Following this trend of narratives, a lot can be said about the

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<sup>1</sup> *Dirty Pretty Things*, a British movie released in 2002. Directed by: Stephen Frears.

victimization of the inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil and their portrayal as passive receivers to the vulnerability of their situation. Nevertheless, this is not the case here as I only heard these stories towards the end of my fieldwork in the village after spending almost three months amongst them.

My co-storytellers showed me that indeed “strangeness is inherently a political and ethical relation” but also it can “be used as a way of resistance” (Karakayali 2006:328). Profoundly, the people of Jazirat Fadil managed to use their political vulnerability of being exiled in a strange land to call for media attention corresponding to certain ongoing political situations. Every now and then, different media and medical campaigns will find their way to the village of Jazirat Fadil to assist its inhabitants with medical aid or different ration commodities such as rice, oil, flour, and blankets especially during winter and Ramadan. They seem to be remembered and seen by media and civic society agents according to certain political circumstances whether within the political situation inside Egypt or in Palestine. A quick internet search using the village’s name in Arabic or English will show a lot of YouTube videos and journalistic articles that narrate the story of a Palestinian forgotten community in Al-Sharqiya governorate in Egypt. A little focus on the dates when these video clips and journal articles were released will show that they were corresponding to the political unrest not just in Egypt, but also to what happens in Palestine and Syria as well.

Within the discourse of the politics of representation, it is argued that refugees must be ‘visible’ in order to attract all forms of material and immaterial humanitarian aid. (Baines 2004:36-38). This act of visibility, provided by UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies, tends to use the vulnerability of refugees, especially that of women and children, in order to attract more global support. However, comparing theory with practice, this is not the case within all communities of refugees as reality has shown that ‘women and children’ in most cases are (T)he

‘agents of change’ within their communities (Baines 2004:38). In reality, during my stay at Jazirat Fadil, the only active agents that I have witnessed were mainly from this ‘acclaimed vulnerable body’ of women and children.

Within the community of Jazirat Fadil, most of the narratives were told by women. Most of the garbage collecting work was done by children (Figures: 14 & 15). Indeed, I was only permitted to interact with the female community and their children at Jazirat Fadil, but this did not hide the truth. I have noticed that most of the male members sleep during the day while leaving their women and children to work in collecting garbage. When I asked about the reason behind this, my co-storytellers told me that their men are used to staying up all night in order to protect the collected garbage from theft. Responding to these paradoxical representations between victimizing women and empowering them as agents of change, I call for a revision of most of the global humanitarian policies and ways of interaction with refugee communities around the globe. Undeniably, women and children are considered the weakest party especially within refugee communities in terms of sexuality and gender perspectives, but in reality they could show us how powerful they are fighting their endemic situation.

Another form of agency was experienced with my younger co-storytellers, the children of Jazirat Fadil. Most of the photos that I am enclosing in this thesis were taken by Ibrahim who is a gatekeeper, a friend from the field, and a twelve year old boy. He used to help me get access to the forbidden places that I as a female stranger was not allowed to enter, such as the men’s sittings, garbage gardens, and men’s assembly points during funerals. He also acted as my protector when he accompanied me to the asphalt main road to get a Tok Tok on my way back to Al-Mansoura at the end of the day when the commuting phase started and I had to take the train

between Abu Kabir and Al-Mansoura every day. Ibrahim was not free to accompany me every day as he sometimes was too busy working.

A normal day in Ibrahim's life would start after *fajr* when he woke up, rode his cart, and led his donkey to the nearest garbage dumping area on the way to Faques. He used to collect everything including, plastic objects, cans, papers, and cardboard. He would be so happy if the outcome of the day was mainly cans, as they are the most profitable when delivered to Abu Safiha by noon. I once witnessed the Ibrahim's early morning preparatory rituals as he lived in the house next to mine and used to accompany Yousef, the ten year old boy in whose family house I used to live. The two boys would have specific daily work clothes. Two pairs of trousers that were worn above each other, two pairs of socks that had to close on the neck of the beneath trousers a little above the foot to prevent any kind of insect from harming the body, and a lot of t-shirts that are covered by a thick jacket. Luckily, Yousef had a leather torn jacket that he had found one day in the garbage and which he used to protect his body. Finally, they would wear a high-neck boots (ankle-boots). All these objects were always unclean as they were the "work uniform" that does not need to be cleaned every day. The boys explained to me that as garbage collectors, they have to take a shower and wear some cleaner clothes after coming from "work" and after delivering their cargo to Abu Safiha's dumping area.

During the field study, I noticed that most of the children at Jazirat Fadil, whether boys or girls, seemed to be very mature and responsible people. They acted like adults when it came to carrying responsibilities of work, funeral preparation, market days, or at any social gathering. They also talked like grown-ups. I remember at the beginning of my field experience in the village when one of my interlocutors was drawing the demarcation lines for my presence in their village: of where I'm allowed to go, to whom I could talk, which family I could visit, and that I

was never allowed to walk by myself. I was a little bit upset of all these rules that I feared that they would hinder my interaction within the community and negatively affect my research. I remember that two of my young friends (Yousra and Islam) told me “*don’t be upset / sad or angry with my father’s talk. He only aims to protect you. It is not safe for you to wander alone, so listen to his words*”. Even their voices, as most of Jazirat Fadil children, have that strange unified husky tone that does not belong to minors who are only at the start of their second decade of age. My co-storytellers managed to be seen, heard, and noticed through every physical aspect of their existence. Through creating a new sense of home and belonging to their village and their profession they managed to influence their social surroundings.

Veena Das (1995) argues that the tangible traces of violence on the human body creates part of the victim’s identity, but what about the intangible traces of war, trauma, and displacement? Mainly, when the word 'identity' comes into use, it indicates a question of 'belonging'. For most exiled people who were forced to flee their homes and live in a new social context for more than 67 years now, it is not just a question of what they belong to as much as how they manage to create a new sense of 'being' while building a new home. Within the discourse of belonging and home creation for Palestinian displaced people after the 1948 war in Palestine, it is no more a question of identity. It is about *belonging* and *home creation* at three levels: body, and orality creation, plus the everyday life survival techniques. The fieldwork revealed that the argument is no more about the Palestinian identity as it is about 'bodily criterion' of personal identity, as when dealing with post trauma forced displacement people. The question would concern how identity does not come from nationality, race, family, ethnicity, or religion, but rather from the everyday practices of survival because identity is formulated through actions. Claiming a spot in existence through the body, as in the community of Jazirat

Fadil, there is no such thing as a Palestinian national identity. It is rather about how your body is there, exists, and how you claim a spot using it in existence. It is also about how the body can signify unjust historical events in the trajectory of history of a certain exiled community, while, at the same time, justify a materialistic existential recognition of these exiled people. Both, Arthur and Joan Kleinman, in their study of the culture revolution in China, show,

how personal and political distress comes to be bodily experienced by an individual. In a political milieu that censors speech, the physical symptoms of a patient . . . become condensed expressions of feelings of historical injustice, the sense of shame, grief, and the desire in the patient to right a terrible wrong (Das 1995:177).

The life of the inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil highlights another stratum of being or existence not just within the body of the anthropological literature, but also in reality itself.

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*Part Four: The (Un)imaginable*

*Home is the places I've been and where I'd like to go*

*Home is a photo I never threw away*

*Home is the smile on my face when I die*

*[...]*

*I'm always gonna feel at home*

*No matter where I may roam*

*I'm always gonna find my way back home*

*No matter how far I'm gone*

*I'm always gonna feel this longing*

*No matter where I might stay*

*[...]*

*Teitur, song (Home, 2015)*

### *Belonging and Home Building from the Perspective of (No)return- Doing*

Edward Said highlights the uniqueness of the state of all exiled Palestinians around the globe since their displacement in 1948 and how it is linked to their right to return as an ongoing discourse between all political actors involved in the Palestinian issue since its emergence. The Palestinian right to return to their original homeland created a ‘paranoiac view’ about them as being “a synonym for trouble- rootless, mindless, gratuitous trouble. They will not go away as they ought to, they will not accept the fate of other refugees” (Said 1979:7). The same attribute was highlighted by Randa Farah who indicates that between the Israeli rejection of the right of return, and the Arab refusal to abandon the Palestinians right to return, the Palestinian refugees were distinguished from all other refugees around the world as “the Arab states rejected UN proposals and plans for integrating refugees into host countries [in order to] facilitate the repatriation [...] of the refugees and the payment of compensation” (Farah 2003:160-161).

The particularity of such a community forces us to raise different theoretical and pragmatic questions. What if the key questions are not about national identities, abstract borders and nationality? What if identity is created through our physical surroundings? What if identity is what we do in life, what we have done, and what we will keep doing? How can simply existing make a certain community be seen and recognized? How can this signify unjust historical events within the trajectory of history of a certain exiled community? At the same time, how can it justify a materialistic existential recognition of these exiled people?

“There is a differentiated network to which all of these separated identities belong, an unconscious organization of collective memory that is our responsibility to bring to consciousness” (Nora 1989:23). My co-storytellers tried their best to belong, to gather their scattered pieces, and to create a possibility of their existence in Jazirat Fadil—a possibility of

creating a Palestinian village even though it lies on a foreign land. The old timers of my co-storytellers managed to develop a new form of agency as related to the creation of new dimensions of memory as well by “making images of the dead in lasting materials” or through “the language of dreams” (Freud 1997:210). My co-storytellers used pictures as lasting materials of their deceased sons and husbands by which they decorated the walls of their houses. By making reference to their uncanny present after going through different traumas of losing home then losing relatives, they kept remembering their dead relatives to create a new dimension of memory by bringing the past into the present; as if without doing so they would have no noticeable being or they would only have a ghostly existence within the present time.

Through this act of commemoration, the remembrance of their dead, we can identify their ghostly agency in the present and mark that “the subject identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitute the extraneous self to his own” (Freud 1997:210). It is also essential to look into the issue of the village as a community in order to find out if they act like a community or not. When it comes to marginality and displacement, some communities tend to practice suppression on others as a result of their marginality, which raises the idea of what should be recalled from the memory of past violence and traumas and by whom. In other words, who decides what should be remembered and what should be forgotten. Finally, it is important to investigate the idea of exile in itself from the perspective of a person who has no country and no nationality—a displaced person living in exile—and how this would drive the individual to care less about his/her history and the original society from where he/she came. In brief, a question arises as to whether they practice their *agency*, in what ways (through *being*, *doing*, or both), and in which forms.

The inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil for more than four generations have been living in that village. They came to understand that what constitutes their life is the combination of things that craft the existence of their lives as it happened, is still happening, and will continue to happen, as long as they are still alive. In that sense, identity will be what gives them the sense of belonging to some particular place where they would build their sense of home inside their village.

In that context, it is well known that the Palestinian refugees' symbol is the Key of Return, which represents the Palestinians' right to go back to Palestine (*Haqq al- 'awda*), a sign of having a home to return to. However, the return of the refugees is one of the pending and unsolved issues in any Israeli-Palestinian negotiation. Following Diana Allan in *Refugees of the Revolution* when she asked what it would mean for the generations born in exile to return to a place they have never really left (Allan 2013:5), I raise another question. How could generations of refugees build their life around a place that exists only in the mind of others? When it comes to the Palestinian refugees, it would be hard if not impossible to return. Such historical context makes us question the performance of their life under the conception of *sumud*. Different layers of visibility can be detected in the performance of their daily life and in history trajectories. Theoretically speaking, the idea of *sumud* can be understood in the context of the lack of recognition that was explored in Antonio Negri's work as he says,

“Despite the myriad of mechanisms of exclusion to which he is subjected, the poor expresses an enormous power of life and production. What is excluded through the legal and economic forms of capital is nevertheless included in the circuits of social and biopolitical production (Negri 2003:1-2).

In the perspective of *No Return*, the idea of *sumud* should be scrutinized carefully with regard to global political circumstances. The conventional understanding of *sumud* is attached to the Palestinian community and the ways in which it practices resistance within the occupied

territories inside Palestine. However, a new trend in the ethnographical studies of Palestine criticizes this conventional understanding of *sumud*. For instance, Leonardo Schiocchet argues that the Palestinian right of return (*haqq al-awda*) in a contemporary world should be substituted by the ‘power to go’ (*qudra al-dhahab*). In this sense, *sumud* will not be about the political power to go to the occupied homeland; rather, *sumud* would be attached to the idea of *tawtin* within other lands and survival in exile as well (Schiocchet 2011:21-22).

Applying this to the case of the villagers at Jazirat Fadil, regarding their economic and political activities, we can say that they endure different forms of exclusion. They are not included in the economic, political, and social realms, as they do not have national IDs. The Palestinian refugees have the right to employment; however, they have to obtain an Egyptian residence and a work permit issued by the ministry of Labor and Training in order to join the employment sphere in the Egyptian society. Plus, they cannot join the public employment sector due to their stateless status (Badil 2005:17). In reality and in economic terms, the people of Jazirat Fadil are excluded from the process of formal production, but at the same time they are integrated in the informal process of production as they work in garbage recycling and agricultural work. Moreover, they have told me during my spring visit that their harvests of lemons and oranges are exported to the Gulf countries. Politically, they cannot vote, so they are excluded from the political map of any parliamentary representation. However, they represent a prominent political actor in the global realm as they live in the heart of the political struggle between the Palestinian diaspora inside their village. More generally, their state as part of the whole Palestinian exodus around the world plays a crucial role in the political dialogue between Egypt, the Palestinian Embassy in Cairo, and Israel with regard to their rights to return. All these

forms exclusion/inclusion relationships depict a new meaning of *sumud* that needs to be deeply explored in the anthropological literature especially in the case of Jazirat Fadil village.

When it comes to belonging and being, Sara Roy argues a new dimension with regard to the relation between our existence and what we belong to. She argues that as human beings we belong to humanism in the first place before any being can be claimed. She says,

we belong to [neither] something before we are anything [...] nor does growing in being diminish the link of belonging [...] it does mean situating oneself within a cultural value system and choosing ethical consistency over collective engagement, exposure over concealment (Roy 2007:62).

Thus, despite their ghostly existence, being uprooted, and feeling like strangers sometimes, the residents of Jazirat Fadil are able to maintain their humanity by belonging to their community. The field experience showed an important lesson that might be helpful for the case of exile in any community: *to live in the now, not in the nostalgic past, not in the imagined future.*

Although the inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil lack the “visibility makers” as listed by Feldman (2008), in terms of the Palestinian dispossession and their continued existence, they managed to invent new icons of their agency of being and doing. They do not have land ownership papers. The flag that flutters on the roofs of their houses is the flag of their host country. They lost most of their Palestinian documents (*awraq Alhayah al-Falastinya*) in a fire a few years after their residence when their houses were still totally made of straw, so they lack the documents that prove their legal claims. They also do not have the luxury of bringing their Palestinian house keys, as for them it was a flight with no return (*Kanet Tal’ah malaha Rag’ah*). Even all their iconic moments are in parallel to the milestone events in the Egyptian history and marked by the

different eras of king Farouk, Naser, Sadat, Mubarak, Morsi, and Sisi<sup>1</sup>. Moreover, they do not hold on to any musical or narrative heritage as they did not pass their traditional Palestinian songs and stories from one generation to another. Even their village, *El-Ezbah*, does not represent a “National iconography” the way that Gaza strip does, as Feldman confirms “these practices have an internal voice, the refusal to forget the past,” (Feldman 2008:504-505).

In this case, it is questionable if we can consider the community of Jazirat Fadil as a ghostly one that failed to meet the benchmarks of a Palestinian community and, consequently, cast them away from the Palestinian nationalism, as unseen, unrecognized, and invisible to the international audience. To be honest, this was my initial perception of this community during the early weeks in the field visit. Later on, they proved me wrong. Through my participation in their daily life and upon getting more and more engaged in the tiny details of their everydayness, I started to notice their agency of being and doing. It was manifested in their creativity in gaining visibility while obeying their own rules in life that are completely different from what we take for granted when we label them as exiled Palestinians. They managed to invent their own culture of survival based on what they have access to.

It was especially visible in two particular moments: the market and the funerals. Their everyday life tools helped them overcome many obstacles in their daily life. For example a child bag would be hung around by their necks to leave their hands free while collecting the garbage which they call (*Shantat Mesafar*) (Figure 16). They invented this tool as a way to help them survive. I asked a Palestinian friend from Jerusalem, and he assured me that this is not a Palestinian heritage or a matter of cultural significance. So, maybe they managed to create a new

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<sup>1</sup> According to different previous studies, the Palestinian refugees in Egypt used to enjoy the same rights of any Egyptian citizen till a Palestinian man attempted the assassination of Yousef Al-Sibai—an Egyptian writer and a close friend of then-President Anwar Sadat in 1978. BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights. 2005. Closing Protection Gaps; Handbook on Protection of Palestinian Refugees in States Signatories to the 1951 Refugee Convention. Bethlehem: Palestine. p.17.

sense of home through the cultural aspect of their everydayness. Maybe they managed to practice their agency and prove their existence via certain repetitive cultural moments at the weekly market where they are distinguished from others despite looking like them or even seen in a simple act of solidarity during funerals. Both moments, the market and funeral ones, depicts similar forms of agency within the community of Jazirat Fadil when the community comes together as a solid unit of existence that performs certain acts to create in return a new sense of home.

#### *Other Meanings of Sumud (Steadfastness) - Doing*

Based on almost three months of field work in the village of Jazirat Fadil in Al-Sharqiya province, I argue that a serious revision of the current literature about the Palestinian Diaspora is needed to allow for new concepts to emerge and for new understandings of old ones. The ethnographic experience shows that it is important to highlight the visibility practices they perform in their everyday that prove their existence in this world despite all the local, regional, and international negligence of their presence as a Palestinian exiled community.

This part of the study is about contesting the ideal understanding of “Palestinian refugees” in the dominant mainstream discourse of the ethnographic library and the question of *Palestinianess*<sup>1</sup>, the state of being a Palestinian. Are there other dimensions of *sumud* steadfastness that can be uncovered and discovered through studying different Palestinian communities? *Sumud* highlights their mode, techniques, and strategies of survival and the way they managed to claim a spot for themselves in this world through the spatial/ physical attributes of both their village and their existing walking bodies. Could the idea of *sumud* have new

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<sup>1</sup> Please refer to: Leonardo Schiocchet. 2011. Palestinian Sumud: Steadfastness, Ritual, and Time Among Palestinian Refugees. Birzeit University Working Paper 2011/51. Migration and Refugee Studies Module.

dimensions related to the visibility through physical and materialistic aspects as opposed to the conventional ones within the dominant studies about Palestinian refugees in relation to armed resistance?

A scarecrow might seem as a passive immobile object, but a deeper observation to its role demonstrates the vital role played by any scarecrow in casting away any potential crop harm from birds. In that case, a scarecrow has its own agency of doing a certain job despite the superficial knowledge of its passivity. The same is applicable to the case of my co-storytellers, as they might seem passive and fatalistic in regard to their reality but are actually engaged actively in life. In different narratives and on several occasions, my co-storytellers tended to repeat certain demands to me. Since they originally thought I was a journalist, they expected me to deliver their demands to those in power. Their demands consisted of having access to ration cards similar to any Egyptian, social welfare pensions for elderly and widows, bread provided through public bakeries, monthly food supplies (rice, oil, flour), and cooking gas cylinders. The inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil, as is the case of any non-Egyptian, are not entitled to these basic government subsidies. For all these reasons, my co-storytellers tend to buy bread from other villagers rather than the bakery shop which is located inside their village.

Furthermore, they are engaged in garbage collection as a type of profession that is spared to strangers. In our attempt to understand the tendency of the inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil to work in the profession of garbage collection, we might need to use three different theoretical lenses: Leonardo Schiocchet's ritual tempo, the stranger by George Simmel, and, finally, Walter Benjamin's concept of the collector. Firstly, garbage collecting can be seen as a ritualized mode of behavior within an exiled Palestinian community. Leonardo Schiocchet described this using the term 'ritual tempo' when he witnessed in different communities of Palestinian refugees in

Lebanon, Jordan and Brazil that the circle of the individual intersects with the circle of his daily performance and creates a ritualized context of the refugee daily life in exile. The same can be applied to the profession of garbage collecting that my co-storytellers too consider being their primary source of provisional living. Within Jazirat Fadil, garbage collecting could be perceived as a 'ritualized mode of behavior' for a community of exiled people by which they organize the rhythm of their daily life (Schiocchet 2011:10).

Secondly, George Simmel's lenses of "the stranger" as opposed to the "native" member of the group in which the stranger lives. Simmel argues that, "the denial of certain rights to the unwillingness or inability of group members to occupy a different position than they used to engage in the type of activities that are 'spared' to strangers" (Karakayali 2006:317). The inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil represent a very specific form of *otherness* based on the tension between the intangible distance and the spatial nearness amongst their nearby Egyptian surroundings. They depict the figure of the stranger which in their case takes both a metaphorical and real sense. The post-colonial stranger can be embodied in immigrants who would carry on the lowliest jobs at the host community, as Karakayali describes "the modern stranger appears to be far too traditional, too backward, too community oriented, too little educated, and unskilled [...] always takes upon the most dirtiest tasks" (Karakayali 2006:325-326). The same can be applied to the case of Jazirat Fadil as being an uneducated community whose inhabitants mostly work in garbage collection. Despite the fact that they have been in Egypt all their lives, they seem to represent the figure of the stranger due to their main profession of garbage collecting. The community of Jazirat Fadil highlights their task of inventing a new system of exchange for profits between them and between their host community. In other words, their profession of garbage collecting is not a task 'without pay back', as they "do not exchange something they

have produced for another product. Yet, they endow the already produced products with a new sense and a new mobility” (Karakayali 2006:327). Their profession of cleaning their host community from its impurities or garbage is a sort of a gift circulation in exchange of financial profits.

Lastly, thinking practically, they are ‘collectors’ and their very action of collecting disposed objects and transforming them into something useful, though not pretty conveys their agency. The mosaic floors in their houses exemplify the ‘transfiguration of objects’ to make sense to their unreasonable life. In Walter Benjamin’s conception of the ‘collector’, the rooted practices of 'becoming' and the performance of life throughout historical developments uncovers the human capacity to produce similarities. Their ability to gain their existence by ‘doing’ and not just by ‘being’ represents a new strategic way of survival. From Benjamin's mimetic stand, the people’s struggle to survive in Jazirat Fadil, with regards to their history and present status, is not about imitating certain practices performed by similar groups or done in the past. Instead, the ‘performance of life’ in Jazirat Fadil is about their ability to absorb all these past and present conditions and reduce them to certain techniques of survival. Obviously, their life is much more different than the life of those living in any Palestinian camps in the Arab world, and it does not match their past Bedouin life in Beersheba, either. Thus, these strategies gain their uniqueness from the actuality of the village as a place representing nothing but itself.

For me, they seem to be thinking very practically as they do not enjoy any sort of aid from refugee humanitarian agencies nor do they get a pension provided by the Egyptian state<sup>1</sup>. They do not have access to formal jobs as they are not educated, and they do not have enough

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<sup>1</sup> According to my co-storytellers, there was a monthly pension provided by the Egyptian government local bureaus of the Ministry of Social Solidarity to old people and widows from the village. However, such financial support was cut off during the last few years along with the invention of ration cards that are issued to Egyptian citizens only to allow them to buy bread, get the monthly subsidized rations, and one gas cylinder every month at a reduced price.

money to start their own business or own land to farm. This leaves them to collecting garbage that will not cost them any money and that people already throw away. At this moment of epiphany, I had a mental conversation with Walter Benjamin about his perception of *collecting* as “the redemption of things which is to complement the redemption of man [...] in which things are liberated from the drudgery of usefulness”. He perceives the “collector of dreams” as a way not just to escape the doomed past, but to overcome the shortage of support in their present everyday world (Benjamin 1968:42). I started to consider whether Benjamin was forecasting the future of *garbage collectors* through his vision about the collector of dreams as a way of liberating the materiality and ethereality of our existence and our being.

Another form of *sumud* that was seen within the narratives of the dead which were narrated by the female members of Jazirat Fadil. From these narratives a new form of the Palestinian steadfastness (*sumud*) can be understood in which the female members of Jazirat Fadil tend to “live the present time as ‘time within time’—In contrast to the ‘normal time’ of non-refugees”(Schicocchet 2011:13). In that sense, the old timers of my co-storytellers were able to create a new conception of time that is related to their particular experience in their village—Jazirat Fadil. They refused to obey the historical trajectory of their past that deprived them of their original home by displacement and refused to live in the present time that deprived them of their family members by death. As a result, they created a new dimension of time within time where they can live in that unprecedented space of time with their past memories and beloved deceased relatives.

In the context of Jazirat Fadil, we can notice the idea of being Palestinians and playing Egyptians. The definition of *performance* for the inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil can be seen as one that “comprehends the impulse to be serious and to entertain; to collect meanings and to pass the

time; to display symbolic behavior that actualize ‘there and then’ and to exist only ‘here and now’; *to be oneself and to play at being others*” (Turner 1982:122). My co-storytellers managed for more than six decades to look like themselves while playing others. This is evident in how their existence is manifested in their physical bodies that walk around, while their doing will be the actions performed by these human beings whether in orality or materiality.

In reality, there are measureless differences between being Palestinian and acting like Egyptians in terms of various cultural aspects related to costumes, dialect, and food. Thus, the distinction made between “the being” and “the doing” for the case of the people of Jazirat Fadil is a fundamental aspect which can be used here to understand the fact that although they are originally Palestinians, they look and act like Egyptians. The kind of life they lead is more like a life of camouflage that is performed through their everydayness on a live theatre stage. Sometimes my co-storytellers would choose to downplay their Palestinian-ness and act like Egyptians, especially when they dress like Egyptians, talk like them, and try to appear like them. The women of Jazirat Fadil, for decades now, have appeared in the black cloak that most of the rural Egyptian women are used to wearing.

### *Cultural Aspects of Existence – Doing*

During the fieldwork, I noticed two moments when the community comes together as one unified unit creating a new sense of home despite their prolonged exile from their original home. These two moments were observed during the weekly market day at Abu Kabir and during funerals.

#### *The market moment*

Today is one of the field Wednesdays, and I tried to reach the market from Abu Kabir train station. I failed. I completely lost my way. I kept walking from one street to another, from one alley to another, but I could not reach the place where the inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil gather for their weekly market. I remember when I used to attend this market with them every Wednesday. The market was like attending a festival and the preparations from the night before were like a ceremony. I remember that Dina used to be so happy on Tuesday nights thinking of which cloak to wear the following morning. If her best cloak is in the washing, then a negotiation process would go on with her older sister, Asmaa, to allow her to wear her best *abayah* the next morning. A certain kind of compensation should be paid in this process such as who will prepare lunch the next day, or who will buy something expensive from the market. The next morning, at about 5am, Dina came to wake me up knocking on my door saying, “Wake up Amal, we will miss the tricycles, come on, wake up”. I woke up, and got dressed in my only *abayah*. I came out to see Dina fully dressed in a clean, not torn *abayah*, her best slippers, and best head cover (*tarha*). We walked together to the middle entrance of the village where the tricycles were gathered to take the village women and their baskets (*sabat*) on a 30-minute trip to the Abu Kabir weekly market. I noticed that only one family owned the entire “tricycle business”. All these vehicles were owned by the family of Suliman Al-‘Asmar. They were driven by his sons and his brothers’ sons.

The trip cost 1.50 le per each individual, while the price would go one pound higher for the return journey. The reason for these varied prices for the same distance is as follows: the baskets (*sabat*) are empty while going in morning, so they can be put inside each other. However, they will be filled with groceries and market goods during the return journey in the afternoon reducing the space for other cargo in the tricycle. The tricycle driver, usually just a

boy, can take fewer passengers to pay him at the end of the trip. Eight women with their *sabats* in the back, and two young boys who will help their relatives at the market sit in front next to the driver. The boys are able to load their tricycle with ten passengers during the trip going to the market. During the return trip with the *sabatas* fully loaded, the number is reduced to six women at the back of the vehicle, along with the goods they bought from the market.

The whole day is not just for shopping for weekly food, but it is also a meeting point to exchange news, marriage proposals, and meeting married relatives who now live away from their parents' house. Being far away from the parental house does not mean living outside the village, as all villagers live within the same spatial surroundings of the village. They just do not exchange a lot of familial visits during the week except in case of sickness, death, or weddings. That's why they depend on the Wednesday market as a weekly social gathering. During the two way trips, the women tend to ask their relatives about their lives, their children, and their new life at their in-law's houses. I even witnessed a marriage proposal during one of these Wednesdays. It is also an opportunity for them to know more about the strange woman living with them at the village, me. *Ablah* Amal, or *Alsahafya* as they used to call me. They used this opportunity of spatial closeness during the market trip at the back of vehicle to examine me closely. Looking at my hands to look for the wedding ring I used to wear during the field, they would ask what kind of gold it is, what my fiancé's occupation is, and when we will get married. It was hard for these women to believe that "my future husband" agreed to me living by myself in the village for three months for the purpose of conducting my research.

Upon our arrival to the market place, another assembly point is created using some of the village vehicles that would wait for us until we finish shopping while the rest went back to the village to bring other women. They knew their assembly point here at the market; the same point

I failed to reach when I tried another way back from the train station. It was easy to find my way to their places while living with them. But after the suspension of my research due to security concerns and being responsible for my ‘personal safety’, I had to commute to the field each day from Al-Mansoura. Now, I'm completely lost and unable to reach their assembly point on my own. Should I turn back to the train station and try to find one of them to lead my way? Or, should I take a Tok Tok to the village, instead, and wait for the women to return back from the market?

I remember one day I saw a little girl arrive to the market riding a donkey by herself, which meant that her family is richer and can afford a donkey ride to the market instead of a tricycle ride. She was the same girl I saw upon visiting the village for the first time. Back then, she was carrying a garbage bag on her back, so I wondered why she did not use the donkey during the garbage collection as she used it now to the market. It seems that the market is like a theatre stage for them and they appear in their best performance in front of the village women there, while garbage collecting is their daily work routine, the everydayness of their life. The donkey is not allowed to be used for carrying the grass they collect every morning for the goats, unless it would be ridden by a mother who will be able to bring three times more cargo than her ten year old daughter would be able to carry on her head. There are limited numbers of vehicles going back to the village, which allows the women to sit together and exchange more stories and news with their relatives while waiting for their turn back home. The ride can be easily interrupted by the heavy load of the cargo which will force the driver to ask the younger women to step down from the car or even carry their *sabat* on their heads in order to lighten the weight and allow the small vehicle to pass through unpaved roads.

The scene of the girl carrying the garbage bag is like returning home. This was her way back home after collecting grass for the goats in the morning, and then collecting garbage to be delivered to Abo Safiha's yard. My first encounter with her was on her way back home, not from school but from work. The evenings are not for play or rest; rather, they are for taking care of the house and cooking.

### *The Funeral Trays*

I witnessed the second astounding scene during the first days of the fieldwork when a young man from the village died because of a motorcycle accident. The consolation went through systematic phases. The main act of consolation was while waiting for the body to come from the morgue. I am talking from the women's perspective here as no woman is allowed to join the men in their separated place. The village women went to the dead person's house to comfort his mother and sisters. They gathered in the courtyard and sat in peripheral circles that orbited around the core in which the relatives of the dead were sitting. Then, I was told not to visit any one the next morning from the upper part because all of them would be busy preparing food, an early lunch for men and outside visitors who would be coming to console the family of the recently deceased. The lower part of the village, which I could visit in the morning, would prepare the dinner trays. Lower and upper here depend on the location of the deceased's house.

The very next morning, all men went to Abu Kabir to buy food for the trays. The food preparation process, which is called "the trays", involves all women and girls who were engaged diligently. It was like a competition between all upper part houses, who would prepare "the tray" and deliver it foremost and in a very well-prepared manner at the same time. The coming scene was like a demonstration of women in black carrying huge trays above their heads to the

consolation tent where their men were waiting for them. Each man took the tray from his woman to carry it inside the tent and sit with local and visiting mourners to eat. Any tray that would come later than the afternoon would go to the women's place, and it would be considered a shame for its owner because it wasn't delivered early enough to secure a place inside the men's tent. By the noon prayer, all men finished eating and the trays were carried out. Each man carried his own tray and delivered it to his woman who would carry it back home where the rest of the family could eat directly from the leftovers as their feast-dinner meal.

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*Final Remarks of the Ethnographic Journey (Conclusion)*

*Fill my wide with a narrow,*

*Fill my safe full of danger,*

*Fill my bed full of shadows,*

*Fill my dreams full of strangers,*

*Fill my ears with a ringing,*

*Fill my heart with a fear of fear.*

*Song "Fear of Fear", by: Passenger, 2015*

*Fear of the Figure of the Stranger*

According to Khalili's study of Palestinians that fled to Egypt during the 1948, 1956 and 1967 wars, it is estimated that there are up to 50,000 Palestinians in Egypt. However, they do not have permanent residency rights, nor can they register as legal refugees with the different correspondent international humanitarian aid agencies (Khalil 2009:14). The general state of Palestinian refugees within Egypt applies to the case of the Palestinians of Jazirat Fadil. Their work in garbage collection places them out of the formal system of production and subjects them to different health risks along with other kinds of risks related to their state of marginality. Their case of marginality labels them as 'the enemy' to the society, as explained by Antonio Negri when he says that "the flexible worker-mobile and precarious, capable of producing cognitive and intellectual surplus- is the enemy, threatened by means of exclusion, as if poverty was not enough" (Negri 2003:1). Though, it could also be useful to understand the inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil as they represent 'the figure of the stranger' who perform some of the dirty, low, and marginalized jobs of the community and help it to endure these low professions.

Despite these ‘useful’ roles of the people of Jazirat Fadil as being the ‘distinguished others’, their figure of the stranger does not guarantee them a full acceptance within their surroundings. I have noticed that during the weekly market they are noticed and observed by the salesmen at the Abu Kabir Wednesday market. The whole system of the market day made me realize how the people of Jazirat Fadil are so differentiated amongst the neighbors of the nearby villages even though they wore exactly the same black cloaks. Somehow the merchants at the market could easily recognize *Alrabawyah* coming from Jazirat Fadil. I remember one market day when upon our entrance to the market, one of the merchants stopped calling on his goods and said “*elarabwyah waslo, how malhom beghnawy we yahlowy kedah?*” (the women from Jazirat Fadil are here. Why are they getting prettier and richer?) Then I got to know that they are differentiated by the objects they carried above their heads, the baskets, as the women from other villages had bags or small trolleys instead of *sabats*.

Even a small object represented in this basket attributed a certain identity to the people of Jazirat Fadil with regards to their different roots. This act of calling upon them in the market depicts another dimension of the figure of the stranger when ‘fear’ becomes the dominant feeling. Ironically, I was associated with them as being this feared stranger inside the market that day. I was coined as being *arabawiyah* from El-Ezbah while walking with them in the market. I felt how I was feared by the people at the market as being a stranger or maybe for them, as being not Egyptian at this moment. The whole incident and this negative reaction towards the figure of the stranger depicts the idea of ‘fear of the self’, as “the stranger as an ambiguous social category, that cannot be defined in terms of exclusion or externality to a well-specified ‘native’ community [...] there is no stranger in contemporary society because we are all strangers now” (Karakayali 2006:324).

### *The Ghostly Effect in Self*

Talking about *fear*, which was my constant companion during the field experience, brings one's mind back to Franz Kafka's piece *Before the Law* that was published for the first time during his lifetime in 1915. The gatekeeper always holds the door open, but only those who know the proper strategies to cross the door can pass through. I am a believer that the doorkeepers for our contemporary communities are the community of scholars and especially anthropologists how can apply their unique methodologies for the purpose of studying the human societies. I cannot declare that I have managed to cross the gate of the community of Jazirat Fadil. During the field study, I kept knocking on the door asking for admittance and the only answer I got was "It is possible [...] but not at the moment" (Kafka, 1915). Different actors in the territory of Jazirat Fadil played different roles in order to spread fear and cast away any researcher who might be interested to study this community.

Prior to my first field visit, my first contact was a person who works as one of the directors of *Ahl El-Kheir* association for the development of Abu Kabir and who played that role of a gatekeeper. During a 30 minute phone call, this NGO representative tried his best to frighten me away from the people of Jazirat Fadil before even seeing them, as he kept describing them to me as being very mean and tough people and that among them my personal safety could be jeopardized. He also described their village as an unhealthy and unclean place. Then, during the field research, the state representative, acted like a formal gatekeeper, who refused to guarantee me permission in order to stay in the field and decided to suspend my research indefinitely. Finally, my co-storytellers worked as robust gatekeepers to their community. I went as an ethnographer knocking on their door and seeking admittance from them. They suspiciously accepted me as an acclaimed married female who gave them her word to respect their cultural norms during her stay at their village in order to study their social life.

I kept wondering about the reason behind the scarcity of previous ethnographic studies about this community and the life of its inhabitants. I did not understand why there were only very few ethnographers who came to this community seeking admittance until I experienced the fear of different gatekeepers who surrounded this field site. Every gatekeeper reminded me that he is “only the lowest doorkeeper [as] from hall to hall keepers stand at every door, one more powerful than the other” (Kafka, 1915). That being said, I had to learn how to survive as a person and as a researcher working hard to keep the social life of her research. I “learned to know even the fleas in the doorkeeper’s fur collar [... begged] the very fleas to persuade the doorkeeper to change his mind” (Kafka, 1915). Holding on to my grounds at the doorsteps of the community of Jazirat Fadil cannot guarantee me the full story but a glimpse of the social life of an exiled Palestinian community. The uniqueness of their condition as inhabitants of a poor rural area in the Egyptian society in addition to being holders of a ghostly nationality of a ghostly state all opens the door for more ethnographic research in the future, as “no one but you could gain admittance through this door, since this door was intended only for You”<sup>1</sup> (Kafka, 1915).

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<sup>1</sup> The researcher uses the word “You” here to refer to all ethnographers, humanities and social sciences researchers.

*Epilogue*

*“Palestine”*

At the checkout register

At an office supplies store

I am getting ready to

Buy the world –

The globe that is

Fifty dollars, the man says

195 countries all for fifty dollars

I am thinking –

That means 25 cents a country.

Can I give you a dollar

And you throw in

Palestine?

Where do you want it? He asks.

Wherever there are

Palestinians

*To all of the Palestinians who have never seen Palestine...*

*By: Ibtisam Barakat*

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## Appendices



Figure 1: one of the fenced gardens at the village; the photo was taken by Ibrahim, one of the village children, using my camera



Figure 2: An overview of the village, photo from Al-Masry Al-youm website



Figure 3: The heist house at the village during my stay; the photo was taken by Ibrahim, one of the village children, using my camera



Figure 4: A dumping area behind one of the houses. The photo was taken by Ibrahim, one of the village children, using my camera



Figure 5: One of the two mosques at the village in front one of the hidden gardens by a clay wall and beside a garbage dumping area; the photo was taken by Ibrahim, one of the village children, using my camera



Figure 6: One of the houses entrance, the mosaic floor. The photo by the researcher



Figure 7: The main road leading to the village, Alsaid Abdo Nasr Road. The photo by the researcher

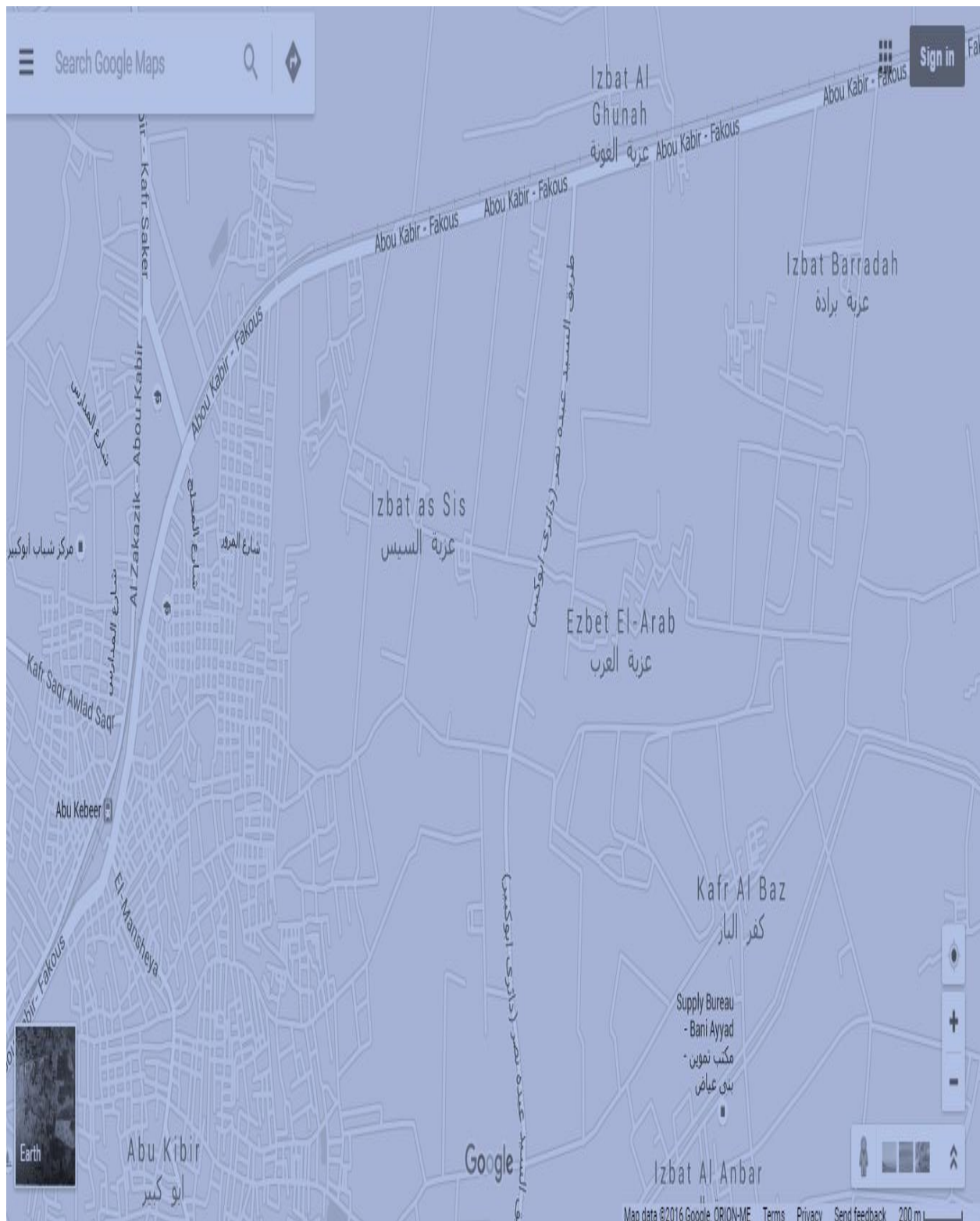


Figure 8: Ezbet El-Arab (El-Jazirah) and the nearby villages, a print screen from Google maps



Figure 9: Fleeing from Bi'r El-Sab'a in Palestine to regional Arab countries, photo extracted from:  
<http://www.palestineremembered.com/Articles/ArabicMaps/Story2508.html>

Figures 10, 11 & 12: the area of Bi'r El-Sab'a in Palestine, photos extracted from the library of the United Nation in Geneva

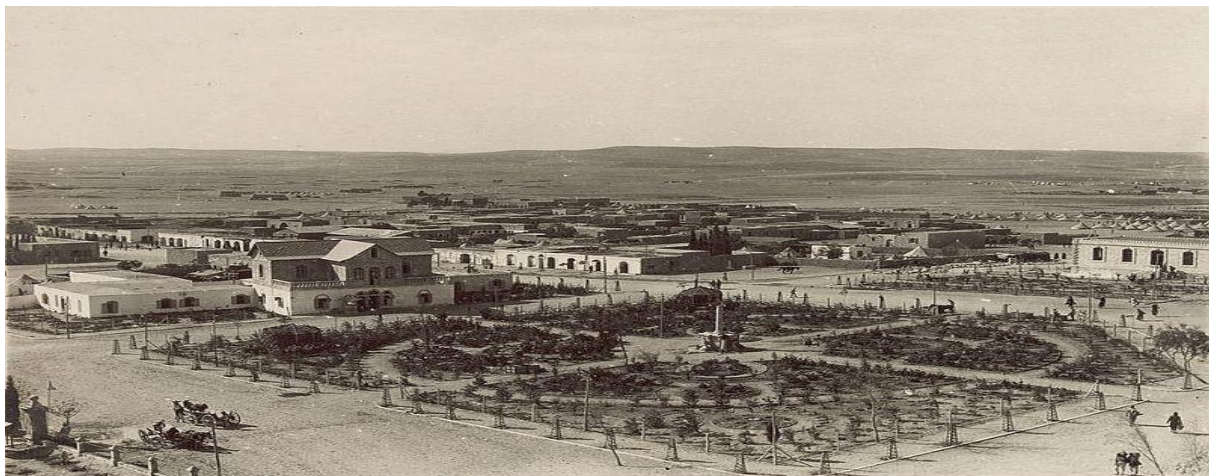




Figure 13: Travel Document for Palestinian Refugees, photo extracted from:  
[http://farm8.static.flickr.com/7308/8729279062\\_4097ba857d.jpg](http://farm8.static.flickr.com/7308/8729279062_4097ba857d.jpg)

Figures 14 &15: some of the village children in their way to work/ coming back from work "collecting garbage"; the photo was taken by Ibrahim, one of the village children, using my camera





Figure 16: The baby's bag or as the inhabitants of Jazirat Fadil call it *Shantah Mesafar*. Photo by my friend Mustapha Elsayed, a freelance photographer, March 2015