

# Palestinian Diaspora or Exile?

## Affective and Experiential Dimensions of (Im)mobility

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Leonardo Schiocchet

### Introduction

I have a confession to make: I regret having used the term diaspora in an edited volume I published in Portuguese, entitled *Between the Old and the New Worlds: The Palestinian Diaspora from the Middle East to Latin America* (2015). This chapter explains why and how the use of the term at large, and my regret in particular, are tied to questions about refugee regimes and refugee agency.

In refugee studies, “the refugee regime” is very often expressed in singular. This usage implies the terms “global/international” and “legal”, which in turn means that “the regime” has been analyzed as a complex but single institution, or as a multi-level structure (Betts 2010; Kleist 2018). However, actual situations of flight and the intrinsically interwoven multipolar regulations and restrictions on human (im)mobility suggest that “the refugee regime” is in fact a much more complex meshwork of social relations and political principles, but also moral imperatives, dispositions, and experiences replete with affect. With this in mind, This chapter draws on the emerging literature on “regime complexity”, referring to “the way in which two or more institutions intersect in terms of their scope and purpose” (Betts 2010, 20 and 35) and offers a more nuanced approach to the study of what I prefer to call “refugee regimes”, in plural, including but not limited to: the United Nations; the Geneva Convention and its amendments; Nation states’ forced migration policies; the humanitarian intervention at large, including NGOs. In sum, refugee regimes are sets of norms, rules, principles, and decision-making procedures – what I call instruments (deliberate) or more broadly mechanisms (both deliberate and unintentional) – to regulate refugees.

The argument above suggests that we must problematize how even the academic discussion on refugee regimes may be embedded in, and often unintentionally may help to reinforce, mechanisms of refugee control (see for example Cabot 2019; Szanton 2004). As part of such considerations, this chapter discusses the academic mobilization of the term “diaspora” to characterize the Palestinian exile. To achieve this goal, it first considers the Palestinian global dispersal and social belonging subjectivity as a background for a debate around conceptualizations of the term “diaspora”. These two parts then inform a discussion on how fitting this term is for the Palestinian case, and what it may leave out of the picture.

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Many Palestinian and non-Palestinian authors working on Palestinian displacement stand by the use of the term “diaspora”, and their reasoning is not easily dismissed (see, for example, Doraï 2002; Lindholm Schulz 2003; Shiblak 2005; Hanafi 2005, 2003; Khalidi 2010; Zaidan 2012; Suleiman 2016). Finding myself among such fine authors in itself is a statement that this chapter is not a tribunal for condemnation, but an invitation to academic reflection.

I used the term diaspora in *Between the Old and the New Worlds* because the book drew significantly on case studies of Palestinians who for the most part had migrated to Latin America in the beginning of the Twentieth Century, and therefore before the first mass displacement of Palestinian refugees in 1948. These established migrants, some of third or even fourth generation, often employ the term diaspora themselves to express how they connect home country to homeland. Their migration narratives partially overlap with those of much larger Lebanese and Syrian communities in Latin America, who dominate the Arab milieu of a whole genre which we can provisionally call here “migrant literature”. This literature is mostly written by migrants and for migrants, and is characterised by two interlocked tropes: longing for the homeland and a rhetoric of what Sonia Hamid (2015), in her chapter in *Between the Old and New World*, aptly called a “pedagogy of social ascension”. Pedagogy of social ascension refers to the narrative that migrants, in this case, Arabs, migrated to Latin America decades ago without anything. In having to fend for their lives, they became very successful owing to their own tireless efforts and strong moral character, all while playing a central role in the nation-building processes in that continent. Having grown up looking at large-sized, easy-to-read table-top books with fantastic photos of their homelands, and hearing

about the heroic feats of heroes from their home country and homeland, these established generations of migrants typically celebrate a continuum between nation of origin and nation of residence, while eschewing other groups that take their place in the host nation and nation of origin for granted.<sup>1</sup> It is also important to note, however, that some authors (myself, as well as Rosemary Sayigh, Ilana Feldman, Anaheed Al-Hardan<sup>2</sup> and Amanda Dias) in that book used the term diaspora also when referring to Palestinians outside of Latin America, mostly as an umbrella term within which more precise variations relating to different contexts of (im)mobility could fit. The general principle behind the use of the term then, I think, was trying to account at once for the experiences and expressions of Palestinian who had largely migrated to Latin America before 1948 and those of Palestinians living as refugees in the Middle East. While I cannot speak for others, it seems reasonable to me to suppose that the contemporary catch-all definition of the term diaspora seemed promising in that regard to many authors besides myself.

Today, however, I have come to agree overall with Julie Peteet's (2007) more cautious assessment of the use of the term diaspora for the Palestinian case, apart from a few considerations. First, unlike her, I do not claim that the term diaspora may not fit the Palestinian case, while agreeing with her premise that it may not be the best term to express the Palestinian dispersal worldwide. In this chapter, I play devil's advocate and explore the extent to which the term diaspora can be applied to the Palestinian case, while also questioning a few alternatives. While Peteet singles out limitations among the many staple definitions of "diaspora", I look for definitions that are inclusionary enough to support the usage for the Palestinian case. As was the case for Peteet, however, this chapter is not about finding – or not – a suitable definition per se, but is rather about what we may learn in the process: problematizing the advantages and disadvantages of applying such a definition. Second, like her,

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1 The chapters in *Between the Old and New World* (2015) about Brazil (Sônia Hamid; Denise Jardim), Peru (Denis Cuche), Chile (Cecilia Baeza), Argentina (Sílvia Montenegro and Damián Setton), and Paraguay (John Tofiq Karam) particularly illustrate this point.

2 Al-Hardan's use was perhaps the most cautious among those I mention. Yet, while she problematised other authors' usage, pointing to their own justifications, she employed the concept herself once. Since her chapter in the book was a translation (Al-Hardan 2012), I will quote the original article directly in English: "The Palestinian Right of Return Movement (RoRM) emerged among diaspora refugee communities following the Oslo accords and the perceived threat to the right of return" (Al-Hardan 2012, 62).

my main argument departs from comparing the terms diaspora (*shatat*) and exile (*ghurba*). But while her argument for supporting the term *ghurba* departs from political positioning with a solid ethnographic support, mine is first and foremost ethnographic, with political implications. This chapter suggests the usage of “exile” – not primarily due to political positioning, but rather from proposing an anthropological perspective that puts experience and affect at the centre of analysis. In doing so, I focus on these terms’ capacities not only to relate to various forms of Palestinian (im)mobility, but also to relate intimately to the varied experiences of Palestinians. Thus, my approach shifts the discussion from politics to agency. While agency and politics are ineluctably interwoven, the former is more overtly committed to our research interlocutors’ own experiences and expressions, rather than to a political positioning that may be extrinsic to them.<sup>3</sup>

## Dispersal

At the end of the First World War, the victorious allies partitioned the newly conquered Middle East. The outcome of this partitioning was a series of treaties relating to the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire, and among them the secret Sykes-Picot agreement (1916) and the Balfour Declaration (1917). According to the Sykes-Picot agreement, the British created mandates in Palestine and Mesopotamia. The mandate of Palestine was soon divided into Palestine and Transjordan (today Israel, the Occupied Territories and Jordan). In turn, the Balfour Declaration was a letter from the British government addressed to Baron Rothschild – one of the leaders of the Jewish community in Britain. While the correspondence promised “a Jewish home” in Palestine, it did not specify how the Jewish settlement would proceed nor whether it

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3 Here it must be noted that the differences between our approaches are more methodological than practical. On the one hand, I understand that Peteet’s groundbreaking article decisively puts Palestinians’ own considerations at the forefront. On the other hand, as much as I may try to give a central consideration to the experiences and expressions of Palestinians, I am not Palestinian, and I can only hope that my ethnographic assessment is correct. In this regard, I take stock on my conversations with numerous Palestinian studies specialists and on the academic publications I read, but also – and especially – on my experience since 2006 among non-academic Palestinians in the Middle East, Latin America and Europe.

would be a national state.<sup>4</sup> The declaration also pledged not to harm “the rights and political status of non-Jewish communities in Palestine” (Encyclopaedia Britannica, [s.d.]). At the time, most Arabs in Palestine viewed the Zionist plans with suspicion, as they had witnessed since the late 19th century the arrival of Zionist Jews with intentions to repopulate the entire country. During this period, Jews bought Arab land – sold mostly by absent landowners many of whom were not even Palestinian – while the peasants, who were then the vast majority of the Palestinian population, found themselves jobless and landless as Jewish labour replaced them (Khalidi 1998). Nevertheless, the lack of clarity in the Balfour declaration allowed the British to negotiate with Arabs and Zionist Jews simultaneously, without being completely unmasked by either. Both Zionists and Arabs had signed the Treaty of Sèvres (UNISPAL 2011) but the Arab elite who had signed the document were far from representing all Arabs. The British mandate over Palestine was registered at the League of Nations in 1920 in the San Remo Conference. In 1922 the mandatory power, Britain, through the so-called memorandum of Transjordan, then separated the territory of Transjordan (those to the east of the Jordan River) from Palestine (to the west of the Jordan River). The right to autonomy was granted to Transjordan (which later became Jordan), and Abdullah I bin Al-Hussein was appointed ruler of the new kingdom. Meanwhile in Palestine, Britain imposed direct rule, which lasted until 1948 with the creation of the State of Israel – at British recommendation and by approval at a meeting of the new international entity created from the League of Nations, the Organization of the United Nations (UN).

In 1947, Resolution No.181 of the UN General Assembly decided to divide Palestine in two, while Jerusalem would be under international mandate on behalf of the UN itself. However, only the Zionists accepted the proposal. This was the beginning of the main phase of the conflict that continues to this day, with about 250,000 Palestinians fleeing or being expelled from Palestine. When the terms of the mandate expired in 1948, Ben Gurion declared Israel’s independence, causing a declaration of war by a junta of Arab countries comprising Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, Iraq and Jordan. 700,000 Palestinians had to leave the region during the conflict. With the ceasefire in 1949, Egypt annexed the Gaza region (now known as the “Gaza Strip”) and Transjordan

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4 The history of Israel is directly related to the history of displaced persons in Europe – particularly the Holocaust (also known by the Hebrew term “Shoah”, meaning catastrophe) – and therefore to the emergence of the so-called “International Refugee Regime”.

annexed the West Bank, where East Jerusalem is located. After annexation of the West Bank, Transjordan was renamed simply Jordan (Pappe 2004; Sayigh 2007). While the independence of Israel (Hebrew, Yom Ha'atzmaut) is celebrated every year, the event that caused the exile of Palestinians from almost all the lands of the mandate to the neighbouring Arab countries was called by Palestinians and Arabs in general "*al-Nakba*"<sup>5</sup> (The Catastrophe). This event changed the Middle East forever, informing the social actions of individuals who somehow relate to the region (Schiocchet 2011a).

Yet, the Independence of Israel was not the last event generating the mass expulsion of Palestinians from their lands. In 1967, the Six-Day War broke out. It was largely motivated by the Suez Crisis, but also because one of the most important platforms of Nasser's Pan-Arabism was precisely the "liberation of Palestine". The trigger for the onset of the war was the expulsion of UN troops from the Sinai Peninsula (one of the banks of the Suez Canal), which according to the Israeli government justified an invasion. Not only was Egypt involved in the conflict, but also Jordan, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon. An effective peace accord was only reached in 1978, now in the middle of the Lebanese Civil War and with Egypt under the leadership of Anwar Sadat. Jordan sought the restoration of the West Bank as part of its own territory, only giving up in 1988 on behalf of the PLO. Both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank would from then be under the military control of Israel. As time passed, Israel gradually left the interior of these territories so as to more effectively control their borders, and during this period has made only periodic military incursions into them. However, East Jerusalem, the Shebaa Farms and the Golan Heights were never completely returned to their own governments and are still today at the centre of the Arab-Israeli conflict (Pappe 2004). The aftermath of the Six-Day War produced around 250,000 more Palestinian refugees (Segev 2007, 15). The overall number of Palestinian refugees today has soared, and UNRWA – the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees – counts 5.6 million registered Palestinian refugees in the Middle East (UNRWA September 4, 2020).

Far from being circumscribed to the Palestinian case, to live, conceive, and express collective experiences of (im)mobility through affective relations be-

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5 It is worth noting, however, that many scholars have since then proposed using "Nakba" to refer to, not only the events leading to the Israeli independence, but also the series of events leading up to the continuous Palestinian displacement and dispossession. In other words, they speak today of an "ongoing Nakba".

tween community, place and displacement is a human trope. Anthropological categories aiming to characterise forms of human (im)mobility must reflect on this premise. Palestinian refugees and their descendants are legally considered refugees by the UN, which acknowledges their “right of return” since 1948, as UN General Assembly’s Resolution 194, article 11 (1948), attests. In practice, however, Palestinian refugees and their descendants have not been allowed by Israel to return to their places of origin. Instead of enforcing this right, the UN and the international community have sought to appeal to permanent resettlement in a third country, or simply maintaining humanitarian aid through the UNRWA when the former solution is not possible.

## A Polyvocal Arena of Social Belonging

My long-term personal research program focuses on the nexus between the subjunctive space of Palestinianness and the diversity of expressions that vary according to subject and context. This subjunctive space – that is, shared and idealized, mingling past, present and future – must be seen as a public arena of negotiation of values, practices, dispositions, techniques, affects and embodies sensibilities expressed through complex motivations irreducible to practical reasoning and conscious strategies on the one hand, or to moral imperatives and unconsciousness on the other. This idea of such subjunctive space comes from memory studies and especially from Lena Jayyusi (2007), who argues that Palestinian refugees tend to conflate the present time with an imagined past before the Nakba. To Jayyusi, contemporary memory articulates a “past condition”, a “bibliographical event”, and a “historical facticity”, but always from the point of view of “present interests”, “viewpoints,” and “subjective (even also subjunctive) modalities.” Yet, in English, the subjunctive mood is not limited to the articulation of past and present, since it denotes expressions of what is dreamed, imagined or wished. In other words, the subjunctive mood articulates the present to idealized past *and* future. Thus, my own usage of the term “subjunctive space” of Palestinianness departs from Jayyusi’s subjunctive mood, adding to the equation a moral destination (Malkki 1992), often an utopian future, based on dreams of return to an idealized Palestine.

Between pre-1948 Palestine and what was left of it today, and between the Middle East, Europe and Latin America, the contextual space for the negotiation of Palestinianness is far and wide, and the experience of Palestinianness

varies greatly. A given Palestinian subject's social belonging is not limited to their Palestinianness, while Palestinianness is also not only engendered by Palestinians themselves. Part of my research has been to understand how, for example, part of the Latin American, European and Middle Eastern political left understands the idea of the "Palestinian cause" as being universal, secular and often socialist, and puts this sense into the very idea of Palestinianness. Approaching something as complex as the Palestinian dispersion in the world, entails encountering a dialectical relationship between the polyvocal, shared and disputed idea of Palestinianness and unique forms of being Palestinian.

Being Palestinian in the West Bank is not the same as being Palestinian in the Lebanese refugee camps, in a small city in Denmark, in the Austrian capital, or when resettled from Iraq to Brazil. My fieldwork among Palestinians in all these settings has taught me about unique contextual and subjective dimensions, while it also taught me how important tendencies of social belonging processes form within this subjunctive arena of Palestinianness. How is it possible to conceptualize, then, this shared but inherently disputed space of social belonging? In these terms, to what extent can it be called a "Palestinian diaspora"?

## The Palestinians in the World

The Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel are still largely imagined by many Palestinians as a part of Palestine. However, conceptualizing this idealized territory, this moral destination as such does not necessarily imply the non-acceptance of the state of Israel. To many, Israel is an independent state, no less recognized as a country as the USA, for example, and at the same time is Palestinian territory. To understand this logic, it is necessary to remember that an overwhelming majority of the more than five million Palestine refugees and their descendants (UNRWA n/a) originally came from what is today Israel, and not from the Gaza Strip or the West Bank. Moreover, many Palestinian migrants who left the country before the Israeli independence in 1948 came from villages in today's Israel or cities such as Haifa or Jaffa (Yaffa – today a part of Tel Aviv). That is, beyond a Palestinian state, a Palestinian imagined *nation* stretches from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to the state of Israel, especially among refugees and immigrants.

The overwhelming majority of Palestinian refugees, who for more than 70 years have not been able to return to their villages and cities of origin –

today within Israeli territory – live in the Mashreq (the Arabic name for a region roughly equivalent to the Near East). To be more precise: in 2010, 37.5% of Palestinians “resided in the Palestinian Territories (4,108,631 individuals), 12.4% in Israel (1,360,214 individuals), 44% in Arab countries (4,876,489 individuals) and only 5.7% in “foreign countries” (626,824 individuals) (Palestinian Bureau of Statistics 2010). That is, more than half of the entire Palestinian population lived outside of the geographical area of pre-1948 Palestine, while many of these living in the Palestinian Territories did so as refugees and, as non-refugees, lived (and still live) under Israeli occupation. In other words, in 2010, only about 50% of Palestinians lived within that which many Palestinians define as Palestinian territory, while 44% of them were displaced from it, but still lived physically around it, and only a fraction (5.7%) lived further away.<sup>6</sup>

Today, Lebanon harbours what until the Syrian war was considered the most vulnerable Palestinian population in the world, with about half of them still living in refugee camps and constituting one of the oldest ongoing and most protracted refugee situations in the world. Only once, immediately following the arrival of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, was Lebanese citizenship offered on a large scale to Palestinian Christians (and then only to them).<sup>7</sup> An overwhelming majority of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon do not have any kind of citizenship and do not have access to basic human rights, such as: to live free and in security; to not be discriminated; to not be subject to exile; to freedom of movement; to a nationality; to not be deprived of their own property; to work, and others (UN n/a; LPDC n/a). Due to their stateless conditions, the legal concept of reciprocity employed within Lebanese Law discriminates Palestinians even in relation to other refugees and migrants. They can only leave Lebanon upon Lebanese authorisation (decided ad hoc, on a case-by-case basis), which is difficult to obtain and is risky, given that there are many cases of those who left Lebanon then not being allowed to come back.

Despite this situation, many of the Palestinians registered in Al-Jalil – one of the camps in which I resided during my first fieldwork in Lebanon (2006-2009) and continue to visit up until the present day – had already managed to emigrate to Scandinavia in the 1980s. Most of those coming from this camp

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6 Unfortunately, I was not able to obtain more recent reliable data on this subject.

7 My fieldwork among Christian Palestinian refugees in Lebanon demonstrated that even among the less informed and less wealthy Christians acquiring Lebanese citizenship was not an easy or a straightforward process (Schiocchet 2011b).

settled in Aarhus, Denmark, where I did six months of fieldwork in 2013. Al-Jalil is known among other Palestinian refugees in Lebanon as “the Danish camp” (*al-mukhayyam al-denmarky*). Despite what the Danish government had imagined when conceding them immigrant status and subsequently citizenship, and despite what even many Palestinian refugees imagine (even in Al-Jalil), many of the Palestinians in Denmark do not feel content and satisfied to live in that country. The majority of them live in Gellerupparken, known in Aarhus as a “ghetto”, along with Kurds from Iraq and Syria, Somalis, and other Muslims. During my fieldwork in that setting, Islam predominated among the youth in vernacular expressions of belonging, much more so than among most other Palestinian-dominated settings I knew then. While expressions of Palestinianness still abounded, especially among the first generation of Palestinian migrants in Gellerupparken, they were less prevalent among the youth, frequently appearing among the latter group as a further indexation of their Muslim identity. There was only one Christian Palestinian family in that area, having originated from the Dbayeh refugee camp in Lebanon.<sup>8</sup>

A large shed in Gellerupparken, called *Bazar Vest*<sup>9</sup> (West Bazar, in Danish) supplied much of the community’s demand products, work, and community life, while two mosques served as religious centres. In Aarhus, Gellerupparken was not only shared by Palestinians with other Muslim minorities, but the Danish also tended to stereotype Muslims, belittling national and ethnic categories of belonging. In homogenizing Muslims, the Danish context pushed the imposition of Islam as the main category of identification for Palestinians and other minorities. In this way, local centres of sociability became more associated with religious and economic activities than with culture and nationhood, favouring the identification of the second generation of immigrants with transnational (many of which are neofundamentalist) Muslim movements, rather than national ones. As Islamic neofundamentalist movements I refer here to Olivier Roy’s (2004) concept characterizing relatively recent groups such as Al-Qaeda and Da’esh,<sup>10</sup> which seek the pu-

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8 Dbayeh was one of my primary fieldwork sites, along with Al-Jalil camp, between 2006 and 2009.

9 Although fewer Turks lived in Gellerupparken itself, many had shops in the Bazar. They migrated to Aarhus earlier, and most had moved to wealthier neighborhoods.

10 It can of course be claimed that this was not the case of Da’esh. Nonetheless, this objective was enshrined in the group’s discourses and much of their followers’ motivations to join the group.

rification of Islam via the purging of politics, which are considered dirty. In this way, Islamic neofundamentalist movements would essentially be different than Islamist movements, such as Hamas or Hezbollah, which are in turn characterized by formal political involvement in their countries of origin and beyond. Incidentally, this description of neofundamentalism resonates with Bruno Latour's (1993) conception of the purification process derived from the tentative secularisation of the world characteristic of the utopian project of modernity. Latour defines the project of "modernity" according to two mutually reinforcing practices: a) "translation", which separates nature and culture, creating hybrids; and b) "purification", which creates two ontological zones, that of human being and that of nonhumans. Separation between subject and object, and between religion and politics was also intrinsic to the modernist project. However, Latour cautions us that this project was never fully realized, since humans never really managed to maintain these separations in practice. Inspired by Latour, I suggest that what Roy describes and calls secularization thought religion is an important impulse echoing the encounter of Islam with the project of European modernity (Schiochet 2016).

This "Islamisation" process of Palestinians in Denmark did not occur with the same strength in Austria, where Palestinians first arrived, especially in the 1970s, as students (and not refugees) and then established themselves as liberal professionals, such as doctors, dentists and lawyers, engaging with local civil society politically, socially and culturally through the political left. Historically, this relationship had already started in the years of Chancellor Bruno Kreisky (1970s), who outside of the Arab world was directly responsible for the legitimization of the PLO as the only representative of Palestinians (as opposed, for example, to the Jordanian government). While he may never actually have intended it, his acknowledgement of the PLO – as he saw this group as his only chance for dialogue with the Palestinian side – ended up legitimising the group to the rest of the world. This, in turn, paved the way for the formulation of the so-called "Palestinian cause" as being universal, secular, and socialist to much of the European left. After 2015, however, the large number of refugees from the Afghan and Syrian conflicts (in the Syrian case, bringing to Austria and especially to Vienna, hundreds of Palestinians), started to change the Austrian context in ways that cannot yet be fully comprehended. From what I have been able to infer so far, the influence of Austrian activists and of established generations of Palestinians (and other Arabs) in Austria continues to reinforce a sense of Palestinianness that is less demarcated by Islam than seen in Denmark. Politically engaged Palestinians in Austria do not tend to

be mobilized in the direction of what Roy called Islamic neofundamentalist movements.

In Brazil likewise, neofundamentalism and religious orthodoxy did not attract much of a following, neither within the group initially comprising 114 Palestinian refugees resettled from Iraq in 2007, nor amongst the established generations of Palestinians and other Arabs who had arrived in Brazil especially in the first half of the Twentieth Century. Pan-Arabism, however, appears to have seduced them more so than in Denmark or Austria. Almost all Palestinian refugees from Iraq came from the Rwayshed refugee camp in Jordan, where they were sent after having been persecuted following the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 (Schiocchet 2019). Almost all of these refugees were Muslims, with the exception of one family. Moreover, almost all, including the Christian family, praised Saddam Hussein as a great popular secular leader, many of them having found employment in the Iraqi administrative machine governed by the Baath party. This connection happened especially because Saddam Hussein labelled the “Palestinian Cause” his own, politically mobilizing during the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) against Syria (one of the PLO’s main enemies then) and treating the few Palestinians in Iraq with positive distinction. This, in turn, reinforced a complementary sense of Palestinianness and Arabness over religion, especially given that many of the forces opposing Saddam Hussein mobilized an Islamic rhetoric as opposed to the Baath secular and anti-Imperialist rhetoric. Moreover, the group never really came together as a community while in Rwayshed. A common sense of social belonging within this group of Palestinian refugees was not mainly articulated in Rwayshed nor any other refugee camp setting (as it was in Lebanon) or within a Palestinian symbolic territory. Instead, it was mainly articulated in Iraq and then significantly rearticulated in Brazil. Arabness, as an iteration of Palestinianness, was maintained as a central element to the majority of the families composing the group as it had already been during the Iran-Iraq conflict (1980-1988).

As I have shown so far, not all Palestinians in the world are refugees or exiles, and the Latin-American case is emblematic for being shaped mainly by a pre-exile dispersion, and the experience of Palestinianness varies greatly according to context and subject. However, the force and appeal of the subjunctive space of Palestinianness, especially when institutionally supported by political parties, social movements and cultural and sport clubs, pushes Palestinians in the world at large to share idealized notions of Palestinianness connected to the tropes of refuge and exile that, in one way or another,

tend to influence social belonging processes and patterns of social organisation of Palestinians world-wide. These notions of Palestinianness, in turn, have been largely conceived and transformed in response to the Palestinian refugee plight and the refugee regimes imposed historically upon them. The very notion of “Palestinian cause”, in all the richness of its innumerable contextual iterations as this section demonstrates, can be interpreted as an attempt to regain agency and some measure of control over such regimes.

## Conceptualizing Diaspora

Based on what has been presented so far, to what extent can we speak of a Palestinian diaspora? To answer this question, we must turn to the term’s definition. According to Judith Shuval, the term diaspora comes from the Hebrew original *galut*, and initially referred to setting out colonies outside of Palestine after the Jewish Babylonian exile, which implied the meaning of settling away from the homeland (2000, 42). Near the middle of the third Century BC, the Greek translated Deuteronomy, 28:25, as “*esē diaspora en pasais basileias tēs gēs*”, [Thou shalt be a diaspora in all kingdoms of the Earth]. The term diaspora here comes from the Greek *diaspeirein* (disperse), formed by the junction of the preposition *dia* (across) and the verb *speirein* (to scatter) (Oxford Reference n/a), through which the Greek, as with the Hebrew, understood the term as meaning migration and colonisation; that is, a migration that takes root. Yet, the term only came into use in the social sciences in the 1980s, having been reappropriated from its Jewish origins in the Torah (or, as Christians would say, from the Old Testament). From its original meaning, implying settlement and not just temporary migration, a new meaning was attributed based on the Jewish mythology and experience of exile. Longing for the homeland, and ideas about a utopian return to it, became intrinsic to most definitions, albeit some authors today reason that this is not a necessary characteristic of a diaspora, so as to broaden the term to include virtually any kind of long-term migration. In *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*, Gabriel Sheffer (1986) argues, for example, that a diaspora implies simply: a) the maintenance and development of a collective identity; b) the existence of an internal organisation distinct from those of the country of origin and the host country; and c) significant contact with the “homeland”, whether “real” or “symbolic”. And according to Stanley Tambiah (2000) the popularity of the term diaspora “courts the danger of inordinately stretching it”, corroborating

James Clifford's branding of the diaspora as "a traveling term". According to Tambiah, "In the face of these multiple as well as fluid connotations it would be wise not to strive toward a tight, inclusive definition embracing general criteria" (2000, 169).

Clifford's classic *Diasporas* (1994) is among the most popular definitions of the term among contemporary anthropologists. This definition was based on that of William Safran (1991), which in turn was modified from the original definition by Walker Connor (1986). In *Diasporas in Modern Society* (1991), Safran suggested enlarging Connor's definition so that a diaspora is defined by a "minority community" sharing several of these characteristics:

1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original "center"; 2) they retain a collective memory (...) about their original homeland; 3) they believe that they are not (...) fully accepted by their host society; 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place (...) [of] return; 5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the (...) restoration of their original homeland; and 6) they continue to relate (...) to that homeland (...) and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship (Safran 1991: 83).

For Safran then, it would be legitimate to speak of "the Armenian, Maghrebi, Turkish, Palestinian, Cuban, Greek, and perhaps Chinese diasporas at present and of the Polish diaspora of the past, although none of them fully conforms to the 'ideal type' of the Jewish Diaspora" (Safran 1991, 84).

With the explosion of interest in the concept of diaspora by the end of the 1980s, there was what Roger Brubaker called "a diaspora of diasporas", that is, "a dispersal of the meaning of the term in the semantic, conceptual and disciplinary spaces" (2005, 1). And, as James Clifford suggests,

We should be wary of constructing our working definition of a term like diaspora by recourse to an "ideal type", with the consequence that groups become identified as more or less diasporic, having only two, or three, or four of the basic six features (...) we should be able to recognize the strong entailment of Jewish history on the language of diaspora without making that history a definitive model. Jewish (and Greek and Armenian) diasporas can be taken as nonnormative starting points for a discourse that is traveling or hybridizing in new world conditions (Clifford 1994, 306).

Although the classic definitions by Sheffer, Safran and Clifford are not identical, they share some of the same basic characteristics (Shuval 2000).

Somewhat similarly to Clifford in the above quotation, I suggest that it is constructive to identify that the concept of diaspora has two different basic strands, from which the multiple meanings derive: a normative and a descriptive strand. While the normative strand conditions all applications of the term to fulfilling objective criteria of the “must be/should be” sort, the descriptive strand makes no assumptions of what a description of diaspora “must be” in relation to an ideal type. Both strands derive from the Jewish<sup>11</sup> ideal type (Safran 1991, 83-84; Clifford 1994, 306; Cohen 1997; Brubaker 2005, 2), but while the normative strand is still intrinsically tied to it, the descriptive strand transformed the concept into a broad anthropological category. In practice, however, the myriad definitions of the concept of diaspora today may be found within these two basic strands, and identifying these strands is relevant insofar as it allows us to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of staying closer to or distant from each.

In its most extreme understanding, the normative strand is mostly not academic, and is characterized by Jewish exceptionalism, according to which the only case that can be called diaspora is that of the community formed by the world Jewry. This usage has not been common in the social sciences since the 1990s, having been relegated to one possible understanding of the concept among the Jewish community itself, rather than among scholars (Cohen 1997; Anteby-Yemini and Berthomière 2005). In turn, the extreme of the descriptive strand is utilised simply as a synonym for any community of immigrants – in this way, it is possible to hear about, for example, of the Filipino diaspora in Los Angeles, of the Brazilian diaspora in Massachusetts, or the French diaspora in Lebanon. In both extremes, the concept of diaspora loses its classificatory and explicatory power, particularly as the descriptive trend overlaps with the concept of transnationalism (Anteby-Yemini and Berthomière 2005, 265), as I will develop in what follows. Thus, any meaningful conceptualisation of the term must define a class of human mobility phenomena located between the particular and the general. To understand the extent to which it is productive to speak of a Palestinian diaspora, we must first redirect my initial question in the following sense: which class of phenomena can be defined as being characterized by a diaspora so that this concept can instrumentalise

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11 Deliberately following the Jewish case, at least in some of its empirical aspects, secondary ideal types have commonly included, for example, the Armenian, Greek, Chinese, Indian, and Lebanese (Brubaker 2005, 2).

us to speak of a specific form of human mobility not contemplated in other concepts?

Without limiting ourselves to the six characteristics enunciated by Safran and reiterated by Clifford and Brubaker, among the most basic characteristics associated with definitions of diaspora is a notion of less territorialized identities than those more generally associated to nation states. According to Safran (1991), Robin Cohen (1997), Shuval (2000) and others, diaspora typically involves an idea of homeland and an actual geographically inhabited nation state. However, I argue that this homeland can be only idealized (not empirical) and that it does not need to be at the centre of the given imagined diasporic community (see, for example, Balzani 2020). As Liisa Malkki argues (1992, 35), Homeland can sometimes be only a “moral destination”, marked by idealized images of a homeland, conveyed by a well-organized community with a strong sense of social belonging. Besides, a temporal dimension of a certain depth is also necessary, implying the existence of the imagined community (Anderson 2016) as historically established and as a lasting condition. Finally, even when only moral, this destination must evoke in one way or another an original existence before dispersion or displacement. That is, the dispersion itself tends to be the nexus of the shared, subjunctive, imaginary of the diasporic community. Thus, the diaspora in itself does not end in a pre-dispersion, or another post-dispersal moment, but reaffirms a transnational existence.

On the one hand, the concept of diaspora demonstrates that a homeland is not necessary to maintain a given imagined community, contrarily to what evokes the concept of nationalism. On the other hand, that which connects the diasporic community is exactly the longing caused by the lacuna left by the original territory from where the diaspora departed, or the symbolic place of a homeland that thus does not need to represent a national entity. According to Helena Lindholm Schulz (2003, 09), it is not territory that defines a diaspora, but its very absence. Going one step further, I propose to think, however, that it is not this absence of territory per se either that defines a diaspora, but the longing generated by its intangibility, its distance.

More normative conceptualisations of diaspora imply a more or less global dispersion, while more descriptive conceptualisations could potentially even be employed to define cases of an imagined community mostly inhabiting only two countries. Thus, one of the main challenges in considering a purposeful concept of diaspora is in determining where most of its explicatory potential resides: the importance not only of the form of dislocation, but also

of its scale, one weaved onto the other. Otherwise, one could characterize the Argentinian migration to the south of Brazil as a diaspora, or else speak of a Brazilian diaspora in Massachusetts/USA. And if this were the case, then what is unique about the Jewish, Palestinian, Lebanese or Armenian diasporas, for example, both in terms of scale and in terms of the organisation of social imaginaries, would be lost, and the concept of diaspora would lose its evocative and explicative power. Thus, by definition, I suggest that it is important that not any and all migration of a given ethnic or religious minority be considered as a diaspora; that is, the concept of diaspora should not be simply used as a rough synonym for migration. In practice, thus, in what way does a diaspora differ from other forms of human (im)mobility such as hybridisation, transnationalism, forced migration, or exile?

Diasporas tend to create social relations marked by the transnational flux of people, things, information, values, attitudes, conceptions, and behaviour. Thus, it is common to think that a diasporic condition necessarily encloses the traversing of borders characteristic of transnationalism. But diasporas are not defined solely by transnationalism and do not always involve transnational relations. It is evident that something can be transnational and not diasporic, for example, the flux of capital from an international bank or company. It is less evident that a diaspora may not be transnational, but this also occurs, especially in the context of violence. According to the normative strand of diaspora, the concept is often associated with a catastrophic dispersion, while according to the more descriptive strand, this notion is widened to encompass dispersions motivated by trade, work, or even culture (Lindholm Schulz 2003). While the normative strand contends that the violence-motivated diaspora is the ideal type, such cases are contemplated even among proponents of the descriptive strand.

Hybridisation evokes new forms of social belonging through the connection between an original social belonging to another/others. In the work of Homi Bhabha (1995) and Stuart Hall (1990), for example, forms of identification in the diaspora were taken as the epitome of hybridized identities (see, for example, Tambiah 2000, 178). One of the advantages of the concept is that it shows the plasticity of identification processes, while one of its most severe disadvantages is the over-valorisation of the hybrid as being new, to the detriment of the influence of national poles.<sup>12</sup> Once again, this becomes more

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12 It is possible to find traces of this false premise even in Clifford's concept of diaspora. See, for example, the excerpt cited on page 84 (Clifford, 1994, 306).

important in the cases of forced migrations, when belonging to an original community tends to be valorised while belonging to the host community may even be shunned, when not morally prohibitive, but then permeably absorbed in practice. Concomitantly, and paradoxically, this process of hybridisation, far from always being harmonious or a product of practical reason, can be the result of contestation and moral and existential imperatives connected to the impossibility of maintaining a now stigmatised original identity. The inverse of this limitation is also problematic: a hybrid identity often implies the existence of two independent and static terms to be mixed, that is the essentialisation of the pre-hybridisation units of belonging (Lindholm Schultz 2003, 14).

Transnationalism, in turn, has been intimately connected to diaspora almost since the re-emergence of the latter term in the social sciences. As early as in 1991, Khachig Tölölyan famously declared that “diasporas are the exemplary communities of the transnational moment” (1991, 5). This statement was published in the first issue of the journal he found and served as main editor, *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, which in turn served as one of the most important fora for the scholarly debate around the term diaspora. In the words of Steven Vertovec and Cohen (1999, XIII), transnationalism is “a social morphology wherein ethnic diasporas become what Tölölyan (1991, 5) has memorably called ‘the exemplary communities of the transnational moment’”. In *Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism*, these authors describe the three elements in the title as being intrinsically connected, and therefore place transnationalism as a “central concept” (Vertovec and Cohen 1999, XIII). “Diasporic strategies” are then “a positive means of bridging national and transnational economies, cultures and societies” (Vertovec and Cohen 1999, XIII). And ultimately, “‘Diaspora’ is the term often used today to describe practically any population which is considered ‘deterritorialized’ or ‘transnational’” And “the rebirth of the notion of diaspora has stemmed from academics using it to characterize transnational ethnic groups and from intellectuals and activists from these populations who have found in the expression a positive way of constituting a ‘hybrid’ cultural and political identity” (Vertovec and Cohen 1999, XVI-XVII). In the foreword of a long, recent edited volume, Cohen celebrated that the concept of diaspora as employed there described:

‘linear negotiations in costumes of culture’, Muslim burial funds, school alumni associations, nomadic cyberspace, intimate cross-cultural liaisons, architectural permissiveness, multiple religious affiliations, Pentecostal-

ism, Yiddish anarchism, job-seeking networks, polygamy, carnival, skilled entrepreneurship, floating roots, anti-politics, counter-insurgency, international relations, global ecumenes, pan-Somali unity, Palestinian statelessness, bodies in motion, and much else besides (Cohen 2015, XVI).

Or, as the editors of *Diasporas Reimagined* state, the broadest definitions of diaspora, which are very popular today, have only two core elements “the loss of ‘home’ and the ongoing link to some notion of it” (Sigona et al. 2015, XIX). These quotations illustrate that the more the concept of diaspora has developed over time in the social sciences, the less normative and, ironically, closer to the basic Hebrew and Greek definitions it has become. Today, definitions of diaspora can typically include virtually any case of settlement away from an original homeland, and contrary to Jewish mythology, experience and collective memory surrounding their original exile, for example, by requiring that a diaspora must include longing for a return to the original homeland (see also Tambiah 2000). And the more that diaspora has evolved that way, the closer it has become to transnationalism.

Concomitantly, the notion of transnationalism has been increasingly associated with migration broadly speaking. And while most definitions of diaspora tend to incorporate forced migration, after all, they did originate from the Jewish archetype; during the main phase of development of the concept of diaspora in the 1990s, transnationalism was closely associated with the debate on globalisation. In anthropology, one of the most influential publications on the topic, was *Nations Unbound*, by Linda Bash, Nina Glick-Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc (1994). In this book, the authors distance themselves from other popular conceptualisations of the term in the social sciences, especially those associated with the “postmodern” perspective of “transcultural cultural studies”, epitomized by the works of authors such as Arjun Appadurai (1991). According to Bash et al., transnationalism there was used to signal “fluidity with which ideas, objects, capital, and people now move across borders and boundaries”, making reference to “hybridity, hyperspace, displacement, disjuncture, decentring and diaspora” (1994, 27). Their main complaint, however, is that much of this work had “remained evocative, rather than analytical”, while theirs aimed at linking the definition of transnationalism “to migration” and rooting their analysis in social relations, though which they could focus on “the manner in which migrants, through their life ways and daily practices, reconfigure space so that their lives are lived simultaneously within two or more nation-states” (Bash et al. 1994, 28). This celebration of

mobility was a very important moment in the recent history of the social sciences, leading to the questioning of the boundedness of culture, social groups, identity, and ultimately nations to territory. Cuban and other Caribbean communities of migrants, along with Czechs, Irish, Slovaks, and others in the USA, transnationally participated in nation-building processes in their home countries, which in turn meant that these nations were unbound by territory.

However, Bash et al.'s strongly Marxist perspective emphasized social class and labour migration, thus underplaying forced migration. In their own words "the image of the 'uprooted' may be as questionable portrait of many earlier immigrant populations as it is of recent immigrants" (Bash et al. 1994, 24). According to them, "economic and political vulnerability, magnified by the factor of race, augment the likelihood that migrants will construct a transnational existence" (Bash et al. 1994, 27). Their work questioned, among other things, the popular genre on migration literature, largely written by migrants themselves, overemphasizing persecution rather than entrepreneurship in their voyages to the Americas. Inasmuch as I appreciate their point of departure and their contextual contribution at the time, especially by focusing back onto ethnography and social relations, one major limitation of their model is to have left forced migration cases largely out. And, in so doing, like with other concepts of transnationalism or the modernisation theory that they criticize, they have also overemphasized mobility to the detriment of experiences of immobility.

As I have illustrated, transnationalism tends to emphasize mobility, and when the concept of diaspora intersects with that of transnationalism, it inherits some of transnationalism's main problems, including the emphasis on geographical and symbolic mobility (despite a tendency toward class immobility, in the more Marxist strain of the concept). Overall, transnationalism evokes the idea of a fluid transit between at least two national poles, which is not necessarily the case when considering refugees and asylum seekers. Transnationalism, also, does not necessarily highlight the inherent asymmetry of forces involved in such a case, nor of the direction of displacement or all possible motivations. Refugees generally do not experience fluid transit from one place to another. In fact, by definition they cannot return to their original territory, or can do so only at the risk of violence, persecution or death. In other words, the literature on transnationalism, and by contagion much of that on diaspora, tend to emphasize mobility, even when the experience of immobility is what marks the (in this case, forced) displacement. Even if it is often hard to distinguish migration from forced migration (or exile)

in practice, these represent two different and opposed ideal types of human (im)mobility. My point is not that the concepts of diaspora and transnationalism cannot or have not been used to emphasize the experience of immobility. There is a good number of studies that do just this, particularly those dealing with the original ideal typical cases, such as the Jewish, the Greek and Armenian. My point here is also not that such concepts cannot or have not been used to characterize the Palestinian case with relative fidelity. Rather, the situation is the opposite, as exemplified by Lindholm-Schultz's groundbreaking book (2003), but also Dorai (2002), Shiblak (2005), Hanafi (2005, 2003), Khalidi (2010), Zaidan (2012), and Suleiman (2016).<sup>13</sup> Instead, I have been arguing that these kinds of studies have become few and far between when compared to the plethora of much wider contemporary usages and applications of the term. Most of these usages have become almost synonymous with migration at large to the point that the overall ideas of diaspora and transnationalism in the social sciences today tends to strongly evoke mobility (see, for example, Ember, Ember and Skoggard 2005), having dispersed much of the explicative power they could have if they were limited to explaining a more defined form of human (im)mobility.

As opposed to the concepts above, exile and forced migration directly evoke instability, insecurity, and ephemerality, while diaspora evokes flux, but not necessarily implies ephemerality, flight, or even instability. The social belonging experience of Italians in New York or Boston, for example, is not necessarily marked today by flight, instability, ephemerality or insecurity. Exile, flight, refuge, and forced migration on the other hand, imply removal, while the descriptive, much wider, concept of diaspora does not.<sup>14</sup> As such, Tutsi motivations to leave for Burundi following the genocide perpetrated by an extremist faction among the Hutu would be invisibilised if this displacement were to be called simply called "the Tutsi diaspora in Burundi". Therefore, the

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13 However, it must still be noted that, despite the many references I am citing, proponents of the term "Palestinian diaspora" today are much fewer than those who overtly criticise the term (as Peteet 2007) of simply prefer to employ other terms.

14 Here, I accept Brubaker's (2005, 2) suggestion that the concept of diaspora must extend beyond removal marked by violence, displacement or dislocation marked by other motivations, such as economic (often also involving physical or symbolic violence) and other factors. My motivation here, as before, is to circumscribe, as an anthropological category, the concept of diaspora to another form of human (im)mobility, that is simultaneously broader than just the Jewish ideal type and narrower than the inclusion of any form of migration.

concept of diaspora, even when utilized widely, may efface the emphasis on forced (im)mobility and on the dispossession highlighted by concepts such as exile, forced migration, flight and refuge. This effacement, in turn, exonerates the concept of diaspora of binding legal processes and mechanisms that aim to address the conditions of the displaced. As we have seen, refugee regimes have, in practice, been far from optimal solutions to forced displacement and dispossession, and the protraction of the Palestinian case, after more than 70 years, strongly attests to this. Their fundamental flaw can be said to be the – often-blatant – lack of acknowledgement of the displaced subject’s own subjunctive space and, with it, the interrelation of understandings of the past, present predicaments, and hopes and visions for the future. Simply put, refugee regimes tend to be imposed from the top downwards, severely limiting the scope of refugee agency, as the Palestinian cases I presented above illustrate. However, the complete obliteration of legal flight and refuge mechanisms would go even further in preventing refugee agency. Refugee regimes need fixing, but the right direction is acknowledgement of refugee predicaments and empowerment of their agency, rather than conceptual alienation and practical disregard.

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The concept of diaspora is seen today as challenging nation state normativity, since it affirms that state and nation need not to coincide. It is important to note, however, that diaspora does not preclude the idea of strong bonds between state and nation. In fact, it depends on it to the point that even in exile what connects the imagined community is a yearning for a common past centred around a common territory – a subjunctive articulation that often leads to a strong attachment to an envisioned reunion between nation and state, as for example among Kurds and Palestinians. If there was never a modern Kurdish nation state before, the imagined community was previously never so divided into sovereign territories as it is today. What stands between past and present is less about being spread across various states, and more about how the modern idea of sovereignty has created impenetrable frontiers where once, often, there had only stood porous borders, interjecting and interrupting ways of living. The Palestinian case is similar. Methodological nationalism assumes that the prior existence of a territory circumscribed to a state that governed the imagined nation is legitimising of a given nation state order. In fact, this presence or absence is irrelevant, given the relatively recent inven-

tion of the nation state model and the realisation that it was preceded by other forms of social communal belonging. In general terms then, what matters to diasporic communal experiences is the imagined territorial and/or symbolic contiguity of social relations in an idealized past, made somewhat intangible by present dispersal.

But the experience of flight and refuge is above all one of immobility. Even when forced migrants traverse continents and seas, engage with various languages and embody unique cultural competences, they cannot remain where they belong; that is, their moral but not geographical destination (Schicchet 2017). In addressing refugees and exiles in this way, the main limitation of the concept of diaspora is its focus on mobility, just as with the concepts of transnationalism and even hybridism. Its descriptive strand – the one that has been used as an anthropological category – much too often highlights geographic mobility to the detriment of experiences of immobility as lived and narrated by refugees and exiles. As Ismat Zaidan states:

The contemporary celebration of travel and mobility of transnational migrants with hybrid identities may be different for those stateless Palestinians who have terrifying experiences whenever they attempt to cross checkpoints in their country or try to enter another country at an airport. Such Palestinian Diaspora experience significant restrictions on their movements and, thus, limited mobility (Zaidan 2012, 92-93).

To reiterate: a constructive definition of diaspora must depart from its less normative strand yet restrict itself to human mobility phenomena of significant scale, as the existence of a significant part of a nation state's population being spread into other nation states, or the very inexistence of a nation state that corresponds to this population. Such a concept of diaspora would not need to be restricted to populations under forced displacement, but would be general to the point of including more specific forms of mobility such as refuge and exile. Finally, for a diaspora to exist, it must have a strong communitarian bond, reinforced by the appeal of an original community and its original territorial imagery, even when such a territory is but a moral destination. Given this definition, is it possible to speak of a Palestinian diaspora?

## A Palestinian Diaspora?

As I have argued, it is very well-established within the discussion on diaspora that exile could lead to the formation of a diasporic community, so long as the basic criteria are met and the willingness to apply the term exists. In *Problematizing a Palestinian Diaspora* (2007), Peteet brings to the forefront some important challenges in utilising the concept of diaspora in the Palestinian case. Perhaps the most important of these issues is the tension between transience and permanence, or between protraction and stability. This issue is particularly prominent in Avtar Brah's (1996) definition of diaspora, as noted by Peteet.

For Brah, a diaspora is “essentially about settling down, about putting roots ‘elsewhere’” (1996, 182); that is, there must be some permanence. And, as Peteet notes, “Refugee status is supposed to be temporary, and most host countries strive to prevent permanent integration” (2007, 636). Similarly, in his introduction to *Being Palestinian* (2016), Yasir Suleiman suggests that “liminality” is a key element in “Palestinian identity”, which then “exists in a state of constant alert, waiting to come to the fore at every pulling of a trigger” (Suleiman 2016, 4). Abbas Shibliak also notes that “some” Palestinian and Arab scholars contend that the term diaspora is problematic for the Palestinian case because “the Palestinian diaspora is a new and recent phenomenon”, and that these authors assumed that the use of the term would be “an implicit acceptance of the dispersal of the Palestinian community, assuming that they were no longer refugees uprooted from their country by force and unable to receive permission to return to their homes” (2005, 8); that is, diaspora would tacitly reiterate the permanence of the Palestinian exile for, as Lindholm Schulz testifies, “Exile is contrary to what is stable, secure, and static. It is not the equivalent of life after movement, but represents movement itself” (2003, 10). For this reason, Hanafi (2003) also claimed that Palestinians in Syria are “partially diasporized”, between an established diaspora like those in the Americas, and a protracted refugee community, like those in Lebanon.

Interestingly, inverting both Brah's and Hanafi's logic, Mohammed Kamel Doraï's quite unique argument contends that “from within the united Palestinian diaspora there is emerging a new transnational community” (2002, 88). That is, there is a Palestinian diaspora, albeit only partially transnationalised. Utilising a version of Gabriel Sheffer's definition of diaspora, for which the potential group requires a common ethnic identity, some internal organisation, and a significant level of contact with the homeland, Doraï claims that

the difference between diaspora and transnational community “lies in the nature of the relationship with the homeland (...) for the former, they are symbolic; for the latter, they are real” (2002, 88). However, one does not need to follow Dorai’s uncommon definition to be aware of the tension between protraction and stability and still support the use of the expression Palestinian diaspora. In fact, all of the authors cited in the previous paragraph do so. Shlak, for example, answers the predicament he enunciated by claiming that it “does not conceal the fact that the Palestinian Diaspora has been in formation over the past century (...) with the mass expulsion of Palestinians following the establishment of the State of Israel” (2005, 8). And Lindholm Schulz answers her own conundrum by claiming that the term diaspora itself, or “life away from one’s homeland, is life in flux; it implies an unstable and ephemeral, fugitive condition” (2003, 10). In addition, going beyond the Palestinian case and returning to more general definitions of diaspora, this tension between protraction and stability is not as decisive as in the other definitions that I have illustrated in more detail here, such as Safran’s or Cohen’s. Ultimately, the question of applying the definition of diaspora or not to the Palestinian case cannot be reduced to one of splitting hairs in trying to make the Palestinian case fit or not into one or another general definition of the term. As Brah herself affirms: “These journeys must be historicised if the concept of diaspora has to serve as a useful heuristic devise (...) What regimes of power inscribe the formation of a specific diaspora?” (Brah 1996, 182). And, “diaspora is a heterogeneous category. (...) The concept of intersectionality is critical in engaging with the complexity of such differentiations and divisions” (Brah, cited in Roman and Henry 2015, 252).

Overall, despite the world-wide vast literature on Palestinians and the numerous studies I cite in this chapter, studies on a “Palestinian diaspora” are relatively few. Given what was presented here, especially in the relation between diaspora and exile, the reasons for such relative absence are evident. In Zaidan’s words, “the terms exile and refugee are more prominent as these terms emphasise the forced nature of the dispersal and the necessity of returning home, regardless of how symbolic or realistic this return is” (Zaidan 2012, 26). So, “defining the Palestinian Diaspora is equally as problematic as defining Diaspora” (ibid.). The “dilemma” being, in his opinion, “political and moral”. Up until the last 10 years, 4,816,500 Palestinians lived in the Palestinian Occupied Territories (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 2016) and 5,149,742 were registered as refugees with UNRWA. Among the latter, around 2,032,000 resided outside of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

To these may be added around 500,000 Palestinians who lived in Latin America (Baeza 2014), around 1,500,000 in Israel (Palestinian Bureau of Statistics 2010) and others in other places, it is understood that only 37.5% of Palestinians resided in the Palestinian Territories (Palestinian Bureau of Statistics 2010) until relatively recently. That is, the Palestinian displacement certainly qualifies in comparison as a diaspora, even according to the normative strand of the concept.

Palestinians, today, have only a shrinking and increasingly disempowered proto-state, harbouring only a minority of the Palestinian population. With a few notable exceptions, this proto-state has been legally acknowledged by most nation states in the global south, and not recognised by global north nation states and the highly dependent global south nation states. The dispersal of most Palestinians, who departed from what was once the British Mandate of Palestine, was prompted by the violence engendered by the Zionist colonisation project and the Independence of Israel, and took the form of exile. Despite this dispersal, today there exists among Palestinians a strong feeling of social belonging and communitarian attachment to each other, reinforced by a powerful imagery of an original Palestine made tangible by the utopian collective return chased thorough the idea of “Palestinian cause”, which in turn marks Palestine as a moral destination. After 1948, it was initially from Jordan, then Lebanon, and then Tunisia that Palestinian nationalism, and along with it, a Palestinian nation was significantly rethought in a way that exile itself became a crux to the very idea of Palestinianness, transnationally negotiated in relation to the lost, intangible land.

In face of this, the major paradox of the concept of diaspora is perhaps the Jewish exceptionalism position, its extension to Israel, and the subsequent impediment to using the concept in relation to the Palestinian case, albeit this approach is typically not taken by academics, and was, instead, characteristic of part of the Jewish community’s own concerns with issues of cultural appropriation.<sup>15</sup> The creation of Israel occupies an important place in the Jewish narrative of diaspora, but it was the very creation of Israel that caused the Palestinian exile. Ironically, then, the Palestinian case checks absolutely all the boxes listed even by the Jewish exceptionalist narrative (the most radical form of the normative strand) to characterise the Jewish diaspora. So why,

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15 See, for example, Robin Cohen’s encounter with a Rabbi who accused him of having “stolen” the term diaspora from the Jews, in the Foreword to *Diasporas Reimagined* (2015, XV).

then, has the term diaspora not been accepted or utilised by more specialists on Palestinian dispersal and Palestinians themselves?

Apart from other possible general reasons, such as scholars avoiding polemic statements, or Palestinians avoiding being associated with the Jewish narrative, there is fact one major reason for why many Palestinians themselves avoid the usage of the term. Simply put, as I have highlighted throughout this chapter, the concept of diaspora when utilised in its more descriptive, sociological strand – thus far from being tied to the Jewish ideal type – conceals the “forced” aspect of their displacement. It turns displacement – a body moving to another place though the action of another body – into dispersal and mobility – bodies spreading to other locations or simply moving from one place to another. In other words, it conceals the agency responsible for the forced relocation.

The commonly used academic form of term for diaspora in Arabic is *shatāt*, literally meaning “dispersed”, “separated”, “dissolved”, “spread”. However, Arabs express their dispersal from a given original nation state diversely. For example, the Syrian and Lebanese dispersal to the Americas is known to Syrians and Lebanese (in Brazil, often Syrian-Lebanese) as *mahjar*, literally meaning “place of migration”, “refuge” and “sanctuary”. For them, however, the term also came to mean the community of immigrants itself and to evoke sensibilities, dispositions and affects connected both to the land of origin and that which was then a destination (Khater 2001; Mahdi 2013; Pastor 2017). Through my ethnographic experience among Palestinians in Latin America, the Middle East and Europe, I learned another term of high currency, less used among intellectuals and more so among poets and my refugee interlocutors: *ghurba*, meaning literally “absence of a homeland”, “separation from homeland”, “banishment”, “exile”, and broadly speaking, “life away from home”. This term is close to the German term *Heimweh*, (*Heim* = home; *weh* = pain), with the absence of home being implicit in the term and home referring to *Heimat*, meaning homeland. *Ghurba* also evokes sensibilities and affects similar to those evoked by the Portuguese term *saudade* (nostalgic melancholic longing for something or someone absent), but perhaps with more emphasis on the arbitrariness of the rupture, separation.

As we have seen, not all Palestinians dispersed thought the world are refugees or exiles, and the Latin American case is emblematic here, since it is mostly characterised by a pre-exile dispersal. However, as I have previously mentioned, the strength of the appeal of the subjunctive space of Palestinian-ness, especially when supported by institutions such as political parties, so-

cial movements, or civil society (for example, cultural and sports clubs), drives Palestinians around the world, regardless of their social statuses, is to share notions of Palestinianness which are intrinsically tied to the trope of exile. In Lebanon, most Palestinian refugees do not cross state boundaries, and in many cases have their whole existence geographically restricted to Lebanon, without necessarily feeling Lebanese. In some refugee camps, such as 'Ain el-Helweh, they need to cross Lebanese checkpoints even to leave or enter the camp. These Palestinians, therefore, do not live transnational – or at least not cosmopolitan – lives, even if they are inscribed into a foreign territory. In Europe likewise, their situation reflects immobility at least as much as mobility. The first significant flux of Palestinians into Europe took place only in the 1970s, first in Germany and Scandinavia, and then more intensively only in the 1980s (Lindholm-Shulz 2003). In the cases of Austria and Denmark, the majority came from Lebanon, at least before the influx of refugee from the Syrian conflict in 2015. Despite taking up European citizenship, many Palestinians, particularly in Denmark, locate themselves as being clearly distinct from a Danish nation, which entails a necessary reflection on transnationalism and its emphasis on the celebration of hybridism and/or mobility. To characterise these examples as diaspora and maintain the emphasis on forced displacement, it would be necessary to reform its descriptive strand and thereby avoid its general disregard for asymmetries and subjective dimensions of the experience of exile. But this effort is the exact opposite direction and reasoning that the current usage of the term has taken in the social sciences, which was exactly to make the term less normative so it could be applied to a highly diverse variety of cases. In lieu of this, the problem could be approached from the opposite angle, and the normative notion of diaspora broadened to make it less normatively tied to the ideal types from which it emerges. However, it is doubtful that, whichever the angle, such a notion of diaspora would concomitantly retain its power to characterise a specific form of human (im)mobility that is not simply a synonym to others such as exile. Such effort would be at least convoluted, and possibly pointless.

Alternatively, my Palestinian interlocutors – Muslim or Christian – sometimes referred to their displacement through the Arabic term “*hijra*”. However, this was not very common, given that in Latin America we mostly spoke in Portuguese with each other, and elsewhere I have mostly carried out research among refugees who tended to prefer the term *ghurba*. With regard to *hijra*, in a personal email exchange while I was writing this article, Rosemary Sayigh told me that she had sometimes heard this term used among Palestini-

ans “in the early days”, when Palestinians were expelled to Jordan. According to her, colleagues of her explained then that this was “a way of associating their experience with that of the Prophet Muhammad when he moved from Mecca to Medina” and that “Hijra also carried an optimistic note, since the Prophet Muhammad eventually was able to return to Mecca”. Of course, it is first necessary to understand that *hijra* can be used as a simple synonym for “migration”. But I agree with her that there may be more to this usage, especially when comparisons are actively pursued. After all, *Hijra* is also a cultural model available in the Palestinian repertoire, and is one that probably resonates more than diaspora, which in turn evokes the Jewish exile. Ironically, I found at least a couple of instances when academics working on the Palestinian displacement used the term “Exodus” (not exile) (see, for example, Dorai 2002, 92; Nazzal 1978). Inasmuch as these instances are rare, they were only used by academics who otherwise use the term diaspora themselves, which may reflect the effort of re-signifying the term from its Jewish ideal-type to use it in the Palestinian case. But such effort further strengthens the association of the term with the Jewish case, and distances from Palestinian experiences and expressions. In the same communication, Sayigh also told me that she sometimes heard Palestinians residing in refugee camps using the word “*iqtila’a*”, meaning “uprooting” for the events following 1948.

It seems very likely to me that Sayigh is right on all accounts, and my own ethnographic experience resonates with her insights. But whichever multiplicity of terms were used in the past, and may be still used today, *ghurba* has tended to gain more currency among Palestinians across the board, from the Middle East to Europe and Latin America. The main reason for this, I would suggest, is not a conscious semantic usage, or political positioning, but rather affective appeal. In the introduction to *Between the Old and New World*, I had translated *ghurba* as “diaspora”, which is not an uncommon translation (see Peteet 2007, 627), albeit according to what I have presented so far, it is somewhat imprecise. Yet, I had also pointed to the most important element about the definition of this concept: it is “not a technical synonym for the term diaspora. This Arabic concept is charged with sentimental elements”<sup>16</sup> (Schicchet 2015, 21, note 23). Elsewhere (Schicchet 2019), I have discussed how *ghurba* is also often mobilised in the context of mental health among refugees. In

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16 In the Portuguese original: “não é um sinônimo técnico para o termo diáspora. Este conceito árabe é carregado de elementos sentimentais. Tal como entendo, inclui alguns dos sentimentos evocados pelo conceito português de ‘saúde’”.

this present chapter, however, what is important to highlight is that *ghurba* is an affective complex at once expressing longing, loss, and desire to reconnect, while emphasizing exile. There are other (possibly more technical) terms for exile, such as “*manfa*” (from the root “*nafa*”, meaning among other things “negation” and “banishment”), but *ghurba* is the most widely used term among Palestinians, especially – but not only – among refugees, due to the twofold impact of its possible technical usage and its affective appeal.

Therefore, it seems logical to characterise the Palestinian dispersal not through the concept of diaspora, but through one that takes into consideration Palestinian – and especially Palestinian refugee – agency and colloquial expressions of their situation, such as *ghurba*. It could still be argued that the experience of Palestinians in Latin America is generally adequately expressed by the term diaspora, given that this dispersal is mostly characterized by pre-exile human fluxes, even if that would not account for the particular experience of the group of refugees resettled in Brazil that I presented previously. What brings further complexity to this characterisation, however, is the nature of the subjunctive space of the nation, by definition collective, shared and contested. Even among non-refugees, exile and longing for a return to Palestine as a moral destination is embedded in notions and feelings of Palestinianness, regardless of first-hand experiences of border-crossing. Thus, even if diaspora may retain some conceptual space, particularly among established generations of Palestinians in Latin America, it is not broad enough to define “the Palestinian diaspora” world-wide, and not as well-suited a term as exile. And even if exile must be used with caution for the Latin American case, it possesses fundamental value not only due to its legal and political dimension, but also because it is rooted in the shared experience of Palestinianness, given its proximity to the idea of *ghurba*.

In sum, *ghurba*, expresses what *shatāt* does not. While the latter is closely associated with the most commonly used anthropological usage of the term diaspora, and expressing mostly geographic human distribution, the first points to an affective experience of exile, acknowledging a subject’s own experiences and framing of this geographic distribution. Thus, I suggest that *ghurba*, or exile, is better suited to characterise the form of human (im)mobility experienced by Palestinians world-wide. Unlike diaspora, exile captures the relationship between the refugee regimes imposed on Palestinians well, and how Palestinians grapple with it – conceptually and practically – in their daily lives.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have considered “normative” and “descriptive” strands of the concept of diaspora, noting that while the normative strand has been increasingly falling in disuse in the social sciences, the descriptive strand has become as broad as to lose some of its *raison d'être*. While the concept of diaspora may still be usefully employed depending on the topic at hand, it is equally important to be aware of its limitations. As I have shown, on the one hand, the theoretical discussion on diaspora is intrinsically related to those on migration and transnationalism. On the other hand, my non-academic Palestinian interlocutors in the Middle East, Latin America and Europe typically related their experiences of displacement through Arabic terms for migration and exile, but not through diaspora and transnationalism. The most important reason for this is that the latter two terms were fairly recently popularised within the social sciences. The former was resignified from its Jewish ideal type to characterise other cases in the late 1980s and then, more strongly, in the 1990s, while the latter was already established in the realm of international relations before that. However, both terms were, until quite recently, somewhat tied to academic usage, and even today have much less currency outside of academia than other terms do. This lack of expression in common parlance in itself should not prevent us from utilizing these terms if they have heuristic value when applied to the contexts that we seek to describe and discuss. However, as I have also shown, these terms in their common academic form today are too wide to describe in detail the experiences of my Palestinian interlocutors, and to resonate with their expressions.

In retrospect, even though *Between the Old and the New World* was about Palestinians in Latin America at least as much as it was about Palestinians in the Middle East, utilising the term exile to characterise the general Palestinian displacement would have been more suitable than utilising the term diaspora. Like *shatat*, *ghurba* also expresses a general meaning. But unlike *shatat*, which expresses a general condition of geographic dispersal, in this context, *ghurba* primarily expresses feelings and emotions related to loss and longing for a homeland. In this chapter, in turn, in line with contemporary anthropological practice, I have suggested that focusing on the experiential dimension of the particular contexts we analyse is a suitable compass for conceptual usage. In the Palestinian case, this focus on context and experience reveals affective dimensions of displacement intrinsic to a subjunctive space that must be acknowledged in order for scholars to find effective ways to

characterise the Palestinian predicament, and for policy makers to address it. In English, the term diaspora has come to emphasise geographical dispersal and mobility to a greater extent than it does exile and the experience of being forced to leave a homeland, which Palestinians typically relate to experiences of immobility. Whenever my Palestinian interlocutors throughout the world had something to say about their own displacement, they usually turned to highlighting exile, even when celebrating their transnational communal existence. I do not often hear the term *shatat*, which most commonly translates as dispersal, or diaspora. Instead, I often heard the term *ghurba*, and people overwhelmingly expressed emotions associated with the term, even when not mentioning the term itself. *Ghurba* can also be translated as exile, although it encompasses a much denser affective complex. The more descriptive strand of the concept of diaspora, today dominant in the social sciences, traded this concept's earlier emphasis on exile for very wide, catch-all, definitions. Thus, in the Palestinian case, unlike diaspora, exile is firmly rooted to people's experiences and expressions.

The anthropological emphasis on experience and affect entails addressing the relation between refugee regimes and agency, both that of refugees themselves and that of us scholars, who often have an active role in creating, transforming and reproducing the terms of engagement. As I have shown, it could be easily argued that the Palestinian case checks of the boxes not only of basic requirements, even among of some of the most demanding definitions. Yet, concomitantly and contradictorily, the protracted Palestinian exile – one of the world's longest – has also led to the outmost refusal of the transnational character of a nation unbound by territory. The Palestinian subjunctive space is fuelled by an encompassing longing for being bound together again in its own national territory, as much as by utmost repudiation of the (trans)national refugee regimes that bound them to places where they are often not welcomed and feel they do not belong.

There seems to be no consensus among Palestinian scholars themselves regarding which is the most appropriate term to use. As such, we scholars can choose our angle: either privilege the celebration of the community's transnational existence and resilience despite all the odds, or else to highlight its predicament. While it is possible to do both concomitantly, I have justified that Palestinian experiences of displacement are highlighted and empowered by the concept of exile, while concealed and disempowered by the concept of diaspora. With relation to policy, neither maintaining humanitarian aid in or outside of refugee camps, nor resettlement in a third country addresses

the fundamental affective dimension of exile I have presented in this chapter. As a result, based on humanitarianism, a regime of knowledge that came to support the depoliticisation of the refugee condition in order to circumvent the principle of national sovereignty that characterises the current nation state-dominated order of the world (Fassin 2012; Agier 2008, 2012; Feldman and Ticktin 2010), the international refugee regime effectively imposed on Palestinian refugees is characterised by more than 70 years of protraction and it is no closer to a permanent solution today than it was at the outset of this displacement. The concept of diaspora, unlike those of forced migration and exile, does not evoke a legal binding nor does it effectively underline and challenge violence and dispossession. In speaking of a Palestinian diaspora, academicians may risk unwittingly concealing and preventing Palestinian agency, becoming themselves complicit to, and conceptually part of, the refugee regimes they are supposed to question.

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