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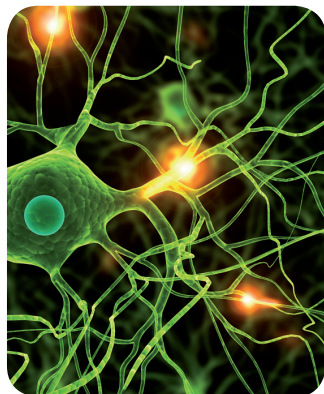
Facultad de Filosofía y
Letras /13-14

Máster en Estudios
Árabes e Islámicos
Contemporáneos



**Woman as
Motherland: Intersec-
tions of Nationalism
and Gender in Palesti-
nian Art**

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Woman as Motherland:

Intersections of Nationalism and Gender in Palestinian Art

Abstract. National narratives construct ideal images of the nation; in these narratives the nation is virtually always feminized. Moreover, the poetics of nationalism are infused with gendered and sexualized images, reassuring an image of the nation as mother, often in need of protection. In addition, women are usually assigned the role of bearers of cultural values and carriers of traditions. This paper explores the role of Palestinian art through the use of women as symbolic representation of the nation. It analyses how the signifier of the nation as a woman is used to construct a sense of a unified Palestine.

Keywords: Nation, Nationalism, Palestine, Gender, Art.

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Introduction

This paper will address how representations of women in Palestinian art assume political significance. The research question that guides this paper is: How the signifier of the nation as a woman in Palestinian art is used to construct a sense of a unified Palestine.

The structure of this paper intends to emphasize the understanding of the representation of women as the motherland in Palestinian art. The analysis will be done by defining nationalism, explaining the genderized discourse of the nation and by studying five artworks that express this idea of Palestinian nation as motherland. Palestinian art history is usually studied in three phases: the first phase from 1885 to 1955; the second phase from 1955-1965 and the third phase from 1965 until present day (Ankori, 2006: 18). This paper will study Palestinian art created during the third phase. Palestinian works of art studied in this paper were selected in an effort to characterize and exemplify the representation of the nation as a woman; regrettably there are many others works of art that could not be included in this paper, but hopefully this paper will pave the way for further investigations in the field. It is also worth noting that this paper is not focusing on a specific artist but rather on the artworks that best represent the objective of this study.

The theoretical approach of this paper will be based on Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1991), who defines nationalism as the ideology which members of a community share, both inherently limited and sovereign. It thereby follows that Palestinian art represents the nation as an imagined community whose nationalism is related to kinship and religion. Anderson's perspective is useful for the purpose of this study because it explains the process by which the nation came to be imagined, and then modelled, adapted and transformed. Based on his ideas on nationalism, it is possible to decipher the importance of the representation of the motherland in Palestinian art.

The paper is divided in three sections. In the first, the concept of nationalism will be analysed in order to understand its meaning in world societies, as well as in the specific Palestinian context. The second section will address the narratives of the feminization of the nation to analyse the intersection of gender and nation. And finally, the last section will analyse Palestinian art and the representations of the nation.

1. Nationalism and Nations: Imagined Communities

Although the influence of nationalism has been very significant in recent history, theories on nationalism, nation and nationality are more recent and have been particularly difficult to define (Anderson, 1991:3).

Benedict Anderson attempts to understand how nationalism has come into historical being, in what ways its meaning can change over time, and why there is a profound emotional legitimacy attached to it (Anderson, 1991: 4). The importance of his approach lies in how he relates nationalism with kinship and religion more than to ideology. It is important to emphasize the part of emotional legitimacy for its relevance to this study because the Palestinian works of art selected here clearly reflect the emotional part of nationalism by imagining motherland as a woman.

According to Anderson, "nation" can be defined as "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson, 1991: 7). It is imagined because the members will never know most of their members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in their minds they are a community; and it is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship. It is limited because even the largest of them have finite, and sometimes elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. And it is sovereign because the emblem of its freedom is the sovereign state. However, if one thinks about the Palestinian nation, sovereignty becomes an issue as well as the boundaries: The Palestinian territory and community are fragmented, Palestinians are in different territories and countries, and despite this the Palestinian nation exists.

Anderson explains that the concept of nationalism presents three paradoxes; the first one related to the objective modernity of nations to the historian's eye versus their subjective antiquity, in the eyes of nationalists. In other words, nation-states are thought of as "new" and "historical", but the nations to which they give a political expression always appear to come from an immemorial past (Anderson, 1991: 11). For the Palestinian nation this is indeed relevant because of the dilemma within the construction of the Palestinian national history: "a state, without a state, usurped land –memory is material, earthly and territorial" (Sánchez & Fernandez, 2006: 6).

The second paradox is the formal universality of nationality, as a sociocultural concept versus the particularity of its concrete manifestations. That is to say each

nationality is *sui generis* but the concept of nationality is accepted by everyone (Anderson, 1991). In the Palestinian context, nationality is in question, because of the unaccomplished existence of the Palestinian State. Generally, many of its nationals live within other nations and hold additional nationalities to the Palestinian.

Finally the third paradox is related to the theoretical problem mentioned previously: the political power of nationalisms versus their philosophical poverty¹ (Anderson: 1991:5). Although this paradox was true in 1983, when Anderson wrote the first edition of *Imagined Communities*, extensive literature related to nation and nationalism now exists².

Nationalism has to be understood by aligning it with two relevant cultural systems that precede it: the religious community and the dynastic realm. The possibility of imagining the nation arose historically when three cultural conceptions lost their axiomatic grip on human's minds. The first conception was the idea that a particular script language offered privileged access to ontological truth, which is related to the great sacral cultures (Islam, Christianity and Buddhism) that incorporated conceptions of immense communities through the medium of a sacred language and written script. As a consequence, the elevation of vernacular to the status of national languages was a decisive stage in the formation of national consciousness. The second cultural conception was the belief that society was naturally organized around and under high centres such as monarchs who were considered different from human beings and required loyalties. The third conception was the idea of temporality in which cosmology and history were indistinguishable (Anderson, 1991: 26-42). In order to understand the nation, it is necessary to remember that the community gathered around religion or a kingdom preceded national consciousness.

A nation has core elements that make it unique and common to the imagined community. One of these elements is related to memory and forgetting: "the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common; and also that they have forgotten many things" (Renan, 1882). This idea is fundamental in the conception of a nation because it develops a sense of cohesiveness within the imagined community. This element is important for this paper, because the sense of cohesiveness is fundamental to the idea of the Palestinian nation. As detailed in the next section, Palestinian artists express the memory and idea of a Palestinian homeland by referring to the Palestinian peasant figure.

Another key element in the existence of a nation is the symbolic representation of a territory, a signification of territorial kinship that makes involvement in common actions

¹ The first study on the topic was made by Ernest Renan¹ (1882) whose essay: "What is a nation?" influenced the ideas on the subject. Studies of nationalism until 1918 were linked to the formation of Nation States, it was not a distinct subject. There was little theorization around nationalism, the most sustained came from Karl Renner and Otto Bauer that treated nationalism as a form of false consciousness and studied nationalism and identity related to Jews (Breuilly, 2008). In the inter-war period, nationalism became subject of analysis by historians, one example of this is J. Hayes *Essays on Nationalism*. After defeating fascism in 1945 and the decolonization process in full flow, anti-colonial nationalism was studied. The most important study about nationalism afterwards was done by Gellner (1983) who considered that the idea of nationalism was product, not producer of modernity. Also, Hobsbawm (1990) in *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* pays particular attention to the changes and transformation of the concept of nation.

² Concerning studies of nationalism in Palestine, they have described the development of nationalist sentiments. These essays range from the political dimension of Palestinian nationalism, the military dimension of Palestinian nationalism, to the different manifestation of this ideology after 1948 (Quandt, 1973; Schulz, 1999; Baumbgarden, 2005).

possible (Grosby & Leoussi, 2007: 6). For Anderson, the territory is related to the pilgrimage, but he also states that there are other 'Machiavellian-legalistic' reasons for the attachment to antiquity and to maps that prefigure official nationalism (Anderson, 1991). In the Palestinian context, this takes on special significance, as there is symbolic representation of a territory fighting for its existence.

In addition to what has already been mentioned, there are some aspects from Anderson's nationalism and nation idea that are very meaningful for this study. The first one is the parallelism between the structure of the nation and the family. The family has habitually been conceived as a sphere of disinterested love and solidarity (Anderson, 1991: 144). Concerning the nation, it also takes on the role of a family; historians, diplomats, politicians and social scientists are quite at ease with the idea of national interest; the whole point of the nation is that it has no interest and just for that reason, it can ask for sacrifices. In addition to this parallelism, we must emphasize the importance of the family within the Palestinian nation. Three family types have emerged in the Palestinian society of the West Bank and Gaza Strip: the nuclear family, the transitional family comprised of the nuclear and extended family, and the "hamula" which includes all the sons descended from the grandfather and their wives and children with the eldest male as head (Manasra, 1993). However, this classification of family types is only applicable to the Palestinians living within these territories.

Related to the idea of family, sacrifices and solidarity, Anderson emphasize that nations inspire love, often profoundly self-sacrificing love. The cultural products of nationalism show this love very clearly in thousands of different forms and styles (Anderson, 1991: 141). These cultural products are the subject of the last part of this paper: art as a cultural product that represents the nation within the Palestinian context, and the female representation of this nation.

2. Gender and Nation: The Nationalist Gendered Discourse in Palestine

National discourses all over the world are replete with images where women represent the nation and its creation. Feminization of the nation had been studied in several countries, most of which have experienced a struggle for independence or creation of a state. In these cases, the representation of the nation has been primarily used as an ideology. It is also worth noting that these studies have been mostly carried out by women³.

³ A deep study of Egypt was done by Baron (2005) who explored the connections between gendered images of the nation and the politics of women nationalists. Also in the African continent, Moran (2000) studied the representation of civilized women, relating national identity and civilization in the pre-war Liberia. In Asia: Liu (1994) situated the problem of national identity in the intersecting area between the female body and nationalist discourse. Marecek (2000) analysed the case of Sri Lanka, focusing on the representations of women produced in the discourses and practices associated with Sinhala nationalism. Rao (1999) provides groundwork for the debate focused on how Nehru and Gandhi connected the religious and women's question to national politics.

In Europe, Martin (1997) analysed the case of Ireland; studying the relationship between the practice of identity understood as the embodiment of gendered and sexualized subjectivities within Irish nationalist sense of place. Bryant (2002) analysed Cypriot images of gender, nation, and the national family to argue that kinship within the nation depends upon notion of a common substance shared between land and people. Gapova (2002) focused on analysing the post 1991 discourses of nationhood in Belarus and how class and a gender order are incorporated into its rethinking. The Balkans, are discussed by Mostov (1995), she explored the role of traditional gender roles and patriarchal culture in the map making of ethno nationalism.

Just as nationalism, gender is also socially and culturally constructed (Mayer, 2000) and encompasses political, cultural, economic and social constructs. Nationalism studies generally did not have a gender perspective until Nira Yuval Davis (1997) addressed it in *Gender and Nation* (1997), becoming a pioneer reference in the study of nationalism and gender⁴. Important researchers such as Massad, Haj and Sherwell have tackled the gender perspective in Palestinian nationalism, including masculinity and patriarchy⁵.

Anderson's *Imagined Communities* does not analyse the categories of gender and nation, however the idea of nationalism akin to kinship and religion rather than ideology helps to explain the role of woman as carrier of political and cultural values.

Palestinian nationalism has generally capitalized on notions such as "the mother of the martyr" or "the fertile mother nation" on the one hand, and "Palestine as the Fatherland" on the other (Abdo, 1994: 151). Palestinian nationalist narratives include women as part of the relationships between people and the land, in clashes between modernizers and the so-called guardians of tradition, and in perceptions of difference and power between the Palestine people. This statement is also valid for the times of British colonialism and the establishment of Zionism, where "women were present in Zionist conceptions of Arab Palestinians, in images of the Jewish pioneer, in Arab defence of honour and land, in Arab rage at Jewish colonist, in dismissal and demonization of the "other" (Katz, 2003:XII).

Before the 1948 war, Palestinians began employing the female icon as a metaphor for the homeland; after its loss it gained popularity to imagine it in both literature and art. Palestine has frequently been represented as a woman in the roles of lover, virgin, and mother (Sherwell 2001: 166). Being represented as a woman like stated before implies also the idea of protection, the need to protect the motherland as the need to protect the virgin, the lover and the mother; this last one in nationalist discourse, translates in the call of the nation's sons to defend her. Understood in this context, women are both battleground and prey of attackers at the same time that they are glorified as producers and symbols of the nation (Ranchod-Nilsson, 2000: 15).

Women's importance in the national discourse is based on their reproductive roles, which include biological and ideological reproduction, reproduction of ethnic or national boundaries, and transmission of culture and participation in national struggles (Yuval-Davis, 1989). This discourse within Palestinian narratives includes two of the three aspects. Firstly, following Anderson's idea of comparing nationalism to kinship, "If the nation is an extended family writ large, then women's role is to carry out the tasks of nurturance and reproduction" (Moghdam, 1994: 4). Palestinian women are seen as biological reproducers of the nation. Also, it can be said that in this biological and ideological reproductive role that women are not only responsible for birthing the nation, they are also maintainers and reproducers of national soldiers, national heroes and manpower (Abdo, 1994: 150).

⁴ Nira explores - how national projects and ethnic processes reciprocally affect gender relations, over-viewing concepts like nation and state.

⁵ Massad (1995) explored masculinity as a colonial model in nationalist discourse, analysing the nationalist agency in masculine terms. Haj (1992) analysed patriarchal relations in Palestine, arguing that market economy is not uniformly a liberating force, giving an informed analysis of women's experiences outside the western context. Sherwell (1996) has conducted several studies on gender and national discourse focused on the Palestinian costume and the Intifada.

Secondly, as bearing the responsibility of raising children, women are in charge of transmitting national culture as mothers, producers and transmitters. Cultural authenticity in Palestine has been represented through women as an emblem. Through their clothing and cooking they are identified as guardians of tradition, making the representation of their surroundings and belongings also important (Sherwell, 2001: 163).

The third aspect of women's representation as nation was not relevant until their participation on the Intifada, where they become active actresses in the struggle for the Palestinian state⁶. But this participation in the national struggle does not mean that they participate in the construction of national narratives; women, in this discourse became passive symbols: within the tradition they become the symbol of "sacrifice" and a symbol of "progress". One signifies obedience and tradition, the other signifies liberation and modernity. They are passive symbols who remain voiceless, less involved in the discourse and excluded from the constitutive processes of the symbol-making (Rao, 1999: 319). This also implies that women, as figurative representations of the nation, symbolically define the limits of national difference and power between men (Ranchod-Nilsson, 2000: 6).

There is also another important aspect of the genderized nationalist discourse. Following Anderson's idea of studying nationalism, if the nation is defined as a religious entity, then the appropriate models of womanhood are to be found in scripture (Anderson, 1991: 4). The word scripture used by Anderson does not necessary have to mean the Christian Bible, it also can be interpreted as a moral code. The moral code has two different aspects, on one hand the nation is constructed to respect it and it is often based on masculinity and heterosexuality; on the other this basis implies that the leaders of the nation may try to represent their nation as "modest" in which they may try to establish the ideals of the nation by imposing a traditional moral code on women (Mayer, 2000: 12). This traditional moral code establishes men as defenders of the family and the nation, and women embody family and national honour: "women's shame is the family's shame, the nation's shame, the man's shame" (Nagel, 1998: 254).

Women's shame and honour related to the notion of the body has become an important boundary for the nation: "in the hierarchical relationship between masculinity and femininity, when men (and sometimes older women) control the "proper behaviour" of women, in effect they control women's bodies" (Mayer, 2000:17). Following this argument, if women's bodies represent the "purity" of the nation and are guarded by men, an attack on these bodies becomes an attack on the nation's men. This aspect is also true for Palestinian nationalist discourse where the spaces of women's bodies are constructed as boundaries of the community and are seen as vulnerable to attack (Sherwell, 2003: 129).⁷

There is also another façade of the representation of Palestine as a woman, and in these representations the woman is a peasant. The reason for this representation can be found in the feminization of agricultural labour in the occupied territories when women took over farming responsibilities once shrinking plots of land could no longer sustain households and men were forced to seek employment elsewhere. The idea

⁶ See: Abdo, N. (1994). Nationalism and Feminism: Palestinian women and me Intifada—No Going Back? And Hasso, F. S. (1998). THE "WOMEN'S FRONT" Nationalism, Feminism, and Modernity in Palestine. *Gender & Society*, 12(4), 441-465.

⁷ Men seen as responsible for protecting women from all dangers and particularly sexual impunity was seen in 1948 when many Palestinian families had to fly their homes out of the fear that women would be raped by Zionist soldiers (Sherwell, 2003: 129).

of women working the land reinforced the metaphoric association of women with the landscape and the land (Sherwell, 2001: 163).

Related to the land it is also important to explain that the “hamula” or extended family that was mentioned in the first part of this paper. It is a traditional cultural system that implies that through endogamous marriage and traditional exclusion from property women are expected to be the maintainers and reproducers of the social power and political position; it also means in the social norms of the peasantry, that many children mean more hands to work the land. Women live in this social construct and are defined as mothers, sisters, wives and daughters of the males (Abdo, 1994: 153).

3. Nationalism and art: Representation of the Motherland in Palestinian Art

*He recalled a land which has raised him and fed him generously from her breast since his infancy
(...) He feels passionately on his land, smelling the soil, kissing the trees and grasping the
precious pebbles. Like an infant, he pressed his cheek and mouth to the soil, shedding there the
pain he had borne for years. He listened to her heart whispering tender reproof
You have come back?
I have, here is my hand
Here I will remain, here I will die, so prepare my grave (Tuqan 1984: 124-125)*

National culture is not constrained to nationalism, it can have multiple representations and art is one of the most important of them. Culture is interwoven with all social practices and lived traditions (Hall, 1980). In the Palestinian context, there is an inherent and ongoing relationship between the political and the cultural. Any artistic creation expresses the identity of a person who is also a political being. In this sense, art becomes political (Sabry, 2012). As Edward Said states: “In the Arab and specifically the Palestinian case, aesthetics and politics are intertwined, for a number of reasons. One is the ever-present repression and blockage of life, on every level, by the Israeli occupation, by the dispossession of an entire nation, and the sense that we are a nation of exiles” (Barsamian, 2003: 164).

Development of Palestinian art studies is complicated by the current status of Palestine. The occupation has made art less of a priority for the Palestinians, and the lack of an official government institution for years meant there has not been space for Palestinian art to develop. Until last decade, there was not a single institution in the West Bank or Gaza devoted to the study of art; artists wishing to pursue a career were obligated to travel abroad for training (Sherwell, 2001: 166). In addition, before the early 1990s there was no permanent gallery or art centre in the West Bank, Gaza, or Jerusalem. Exhibitions were held in schools, universities, union halls, or other locations (Sherwell, 2001: 164).

Palestinian art as a field of study is relatively new. The category of Palestinian art was virtually non-existent in the historiography of art and relegated to the margins of the art globe, even though during the last decade there has been an increasing awareness of its existence⁸ (Ankori, 2006: 15). The first few existent texts about Palestinian art were written by the artists themselves, the first one published in 1970 by Kamal Boullata⁹. After Boullata, other artists came and studied Palestinian art (Anani, 1983; Sherwell 1996,

⁸ Ankori finds that one of the reasons of the inexistence of Palestinian art studies is that Palestinians are often conceived in the west in stereotypical terms that are shaded by homogenizing political biases.

⁹Boullata placed Palestinian art within two important contexts: as part of contemporary art culture and he placed Palestinian artists within a third world context, by basing himself on Franz Fanon theoretical construction (Ankori, 16).

2003; Shammouts, 1972, 1979; Abdi 1980). This is an important reminder of the implication of many Palestinian artists in the entire art field who write their own historiography and spread art by themselves. Although the public was largely unable to purchase original works of art, visual images were circulated and consumed by other means such as posters and postcards (Sherwell, 2001: 164). The use of this kind of artwork has also transformed traditional Palestinian artworks, given that “Western” art forms such as oil painting on canvas were not traditional to Palestine; they were imported from Europe as mediums of visual expression¹⁰ and then became one of the most popular forms of expressing art. Poster as a form of art in Palestine as an ingenious and anti-censorship art form began in the early 1960’s (Walsh, 2001: 15). Palestinian artists’ collectives, solidarity organizations, student unions, political fronts and professional associations, regardless of their political position, began printing and distributing posters, postcards and calendars. They were widely distributed in refugee camps and through the Arab world (Ankori, 2006: 55) which contributed to the construction of visual narratives in Palestinian artworks.

Visual narratives in Palestinian Art reflect the concepts analysed in the second part of this paper: nation and nationalism. Different cultural and intellectual artist articulate numerous and different fragments and compose the broken narratives of Palestinian Art (Ankori, 2006: 21).

Palestinian cultural works reflect the occupation coupled with Israeli policies that concentrate on disintegrating all cultural forms of Palestinian reality; the disposition of Palestinians on fighting against the notion that they do not exist and the fight against their real and symbolic erasure from the land. By providing iconic memory, Palestinian artists constructed a visual narrative of Palestinian nationalism.

Nationalism expressed through artworks can have different representations. There are some general statements that can be made about the representation of Palestine as motherland.

The first element is the relation of the nation with the land and the mother. Exile, estrangement, and loss of the homeland are expressed by some Palestinian artists as separation from the mother (Sherwell, 2001: 166). Palestinian artworks capture the essence of homeland by painting women in rural landscapes. As expressed by Ankori: images of homeland and indigenous rural beauty “transform the road to exile and the suffering in refugee camps into defining collective experiences of martyrdom” (2000: 54).

Interrelated with the land, the image of the Palestinian peasant women has been used by artists to express the idea of Palestinian homeland; in doing so they attribute a gender to the homeland (Sherwell, 2001: 163). As mentioned before, it is not only the figure of the woman that represents the nation, it is also their surroundings and belongings and her activities. Palestinian peasant woman is represented working on the land, often collecting fruits or olives; also engaged in domestic activities, making traditional bread, caring for children, etc. (Sherwell, 2003: 133). From the important belongings of women, it is important to mention the traditional peasant costume that has also become a representation of Palestinian identity. Palestinian women have continued

¹⁰ Before oil painting and other European art forms took hold in Palestine, Palestinian art was integral to everyday life murals, ceramics, glass, mother of pearl work, embroidery—what are known today as handicrafts. Before 1948, Palestinian artists, for the most part, painted either the portraits of prominent individuals or worked as icon painters for churches and the tourist trade (Sherwell 2001: 167).

over generations to find within this dress a meaningful space in which to represent their identity (Sherwell, 1996: 294)¹¹.

There is also the direct representation of Palestine as motherland with an image of a mother with a baby or a child in her arms. This visually narrates the representation of women as reproducers of the nation, also related to women's fertility and patriotic obligations. (Sherwell, 1996: 162). Also, by representing the mother, "women become a summarizing symbol of all the nurturing, protection, fertility, love, care, beauty, and purity of Palestine" (Semmerling, 2004: 75).

Representation of Palestine as a woman can be seen in the artwork "Folk Designs"/ untitled/ two girls¹² by Nabil Anani¹³ which became a postcard that was printed by Iben Rushd Publishing Establishment. In the centre of the artwork there is a mother with three girls. This is a direct allusion to the idea of the mother. There is a difference between the eyes of the mother and the girls eyes as well as the in the dresses, as Semmerling explains: "the girls are marked as unborn by the absence of life in their eyes (...) their clothes and faces have not gained the colourfulness of the mother, although they seem to be genetically prepared to do so by their embroidered dresses and sculpted faces" (2004: 77).

The artwork encompassed bright colours and the patterned representations of the embroidered dress. In the woman's dress there are three windows that could symbolize home. As mentioned before, women's dress is an important element that symbolises the Palestinian nation and culture; especially because each region has specific patterns and designs.

The embroidery on the Palestinian women dresses have designs that reproduce the everyday life and surroundings in Palestine such as including cypress trees, grape bunches, apple trees, rainbows, birds, and flowers. In order to continue with tradition and pass the embroidery designs for generations, women have invented creative names such as "foreign moon," "old man's teeth," and "old man upside down", in this way they ensure that traditions are maintained and the cultural memory survives in Palestine, in Israel, and in the diaspora communities (Gandolfo, 2010: 50).

The importance of costumes increases even more if we consider they have become a way of mapping the lost homeland onto the bodies of women "many Palestinians can identify the embroidery and its symbols by wearing the costumes, women re-configure places lost to Palestinians, places that only exist in memories of the past as they are now inhabited by another people" (Sherwell, 2003: 133).

From the same artist, Nabil Anani some different elements can be seen in his artwork "Mothers embrace". The central protagonist of this painting is a Palestinian

¹¹ Costume in traditional peasant society symbolised important facets of a woman's village, family and sexual identity. The first was symbolised through the reproduction of particular patterns and their organisation within the dress. Every woman would produce such a dress for her wedding trousseau displaying her pride in being a member of the community. Her family identity, in particular her father's status was displayed through lavish fabrics and the density of the embroidery which indicated the amount of money that had been invested in the production of the dress and the value placed on the woman (Sherwell, 1996: 294).

¹² Most of Nabil Anani's artwork can be consulted at: <http://nabilanani.net/>

¹³ Nabil Anani, born in 1943 in Latroun, Palestine is one of the most prominent Palestinian artists working today. On graduating in Fine Art from Alexandria University, Anani returned to Palestine and began a fruitful career as an artist and a teacher trainer at the UN training college in Ramallah. For more information on his artwork see: <http://nabilanani.net/>.

women whose features are based in Egyptian and Canaanite sources linking Palestinians with glorious epochs of the region's history (Ankori, 2006: 63). It is important to notice in the first place that the main image is the woman in giant proportions, blending with the landscape. She is "embracing" the Dome of the Rock; which has the symbolism of representing homeland; it acquired this status after the Israeli conquest of Jerusalem, becoming a symbol of occupied Palestine (Ankori, 2006: 72). Images of Jerusalem, became ubiquitous in Palestinian art since then. It is also worth noting that the artist plays with the colours and in the woman's top of her figure there is the white in her head, the black in her arm and the red in her dress, all of them colours of the Palestinian flag. The representation of Palestine as motherland provides the nation with maternal symbolism and a space of nurturing and sustenance (Sherwell, 2003: 132).

The mother represents in her figure the Palestinian land; the position the woman has in the artwork shows most of her figure blended with the landscape and under the city of Jerusalem. In her dress, it is possible to see different allusions to values that are important to the nation. There are representations of the family, of brotherhood, of youth. There are some peasant women collecting fruit, one of them is clearly a mother, which implies the responsibility of transmitting culture. Also there is one woman with a clay bowl over her head and the one in the centre with a bowl with water, this can be an allusion to the lack of water and the fight for it. Bottom right of the woman's dress there is an olive tree and a man picking the olives. Olive tree is a remarkable symbol of rootedness, it symbolises the ancient bond of the Palestinians with their homeland (Gandolfo, 2010: 64).

It can be spot at the middle of the artwork, on the strip that lies under the city of Jerusalem that there is a small door that looks like a lock. Locks and keys have been used by several Palestinian artists to represent the Palestinian demand of the right to return to their land (González, 2009: 216).

Also the image of mother is used to articulate the importance of the reproduction of the nation and its boundaries; as mentioned before, and also as a symbol of cultural authenticity and the preserver of traditions. Reproduction of the nation, can be seen in Sliman Mansour¹⁴, "The Village Awakens" / "The Intifada"¹⁵. This image was reproduced widely and this poster could be found hanging in many Palestinian homes (Kanaaneh, 2002: 65).

This image is a direct allusion to the mother nation. As in Anani's artwork the woman has giant proportions and she also blends with the landscape in this case hillside and village architecture. From her clothes it can be inferred that she is a peasant, she is wearing the traditional outfit. Behind her there is a "tabaq qashsh" which is a traditional tray or plate used by Palestinian peasant women to bake bread (Semmerling, 2004: 86). This tray is not only a tool it also has a symbolism for Palestinian nationalism. It is displayed in Palestinian homes as a reminder of the bond of the peasants and the land, it symbolises the nourishment of the family and it is also traditionally made. In this particular image, the "tabaq qashsh" is replacing the sun, so it appears to be rising from behind the motherland. The woman is also holding a jar that remind us the importance

¹⁴ Sliman Mansour is one of the most prominent Palestinian artist of the post Nakba generation. He was born in Bir Zeit, a village near Ramallah, in 1947. He played a pivotal role in the Palestinian art movement. (Ankori, 2006: 60).

¹⁵ Sliman Mansour artworks can be seen in <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/artist/sliman-mansour>.

of Palestinian clay traditional pottery¹⁶; the jar has also served as sign and symbol of the human figure and also as a symbol of lack of water (Kenaan-Kedar, 2007). The jar the woman is holding also remind us the Canaanite and the Egyptian style of jars. The pose of the woman, in this case she is squat, gives the idea of giving birth to the nation with the villagers that are coming out of her body, marching; these villagers symbolise the work of the nation, they are all holding different tools, and it is also remarkable that all of them are men. This can relate to the preference of giving birth to boys and the nationalism's political arithmetic that translates in the belief that giving birth to a boy is an important contribution to the nation (Kanaaneh, 2002: 74). It is also important to consider the idea of reproducing the nation considering that this responsibility does not fall equally upon all women: "the poorer sectors of the community, in the Palestinian case—villagers and refugees—tend to have larger families. It is more often the sons of these families who comprise the fighters and casualties of the national struggle" (Sherwell, 2002: 166).

The motherland is the central element of the artwork while she occupies a passive role in comparison to the other figures in the artwork that are doing different forms of productive activities. As mentioned before, women as being imagined as mothers of the nation they remain a passive actor in the national discourse, and this can be seen in this example.

Around the figure of motherland the artist represent the Palestinian nation with different characters. On the bottom right next to the sea, a Palestinian fisherman is fishing within a small boat¹⁷. Next to this fisherman, there is a cactus plant that has a very important symbolism for Palestinians. Cactus is an indigenous plant from Palestine, and it symbolises homeland, even though Israel has tried to use it as a national symbol too. It's also relevant because the word "sabr" means cactus but it also means patience and perseverance (Boullata, 2001:71). The image of a horse is also present, which can be interpreted as a symbol of revolution (Liberation Graphics, 2003). Bottom left there is a stone carver, in one of the stones Allah is written in Arabic, there is also the moon and the star symbolizing the presence of Islam; these can also be an allusion to the construction of the Palestinian nation related to religion. Bottom left there are some women picking oranges, which symbolises the bond of Palestinians with the land by representing the fruits of the earth. Next to them, there are some peasants, one of them is holding wheat, and this could be the representation of a more modern peasant, due to the fact that this is not an indigenous crop and does not bring the idea of an ancient nation. Finally on the top of the artwork, there is an allusion to music and tradition; there is a man playing a "shibbabe", that is a traditional Palestinian flute¹⁸.

In Sliman Mansour's "Salma" the central figure is a Palestinian woman dressed in an embroidered dress holding a bowl piled high with oranges. Oranges represent abundance and as a fruit they strength the bond with the land. The wall behind the woman is decorated with colourful, whimsical shapes and features an arc of tiles in a continuous floral motif. Her large brown eyes painted by the artist as an emulation of

¹⁶ There are photographs from the British mandate period, taken by professional photographers – Palestinian, British, Israeli and others of Palestinian women with water jars made from an anthropological viewpoint showing women carrying very large and heavy water jars whereas the staged photographs show them dressed in traditional costume and holding smaller and more elegant jars (Kenaan-Kedar, 2007).

¹⁷ Fisherman in Palestine have terrible conditions for fishing and are constantly in danger of being shot by the Israeli army, see: Omer, M. (2007). Gone Fishing. *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, 26(5), 10.

¹⁸ For more details about the shibbabe see: <http://www.docjazz.com/index.php/blog/145-preserving-palestinian-tradition-shibbabe>.

ancient Middle Eastern figurines, by doing this, he is linking the ancient inhabitants of the region to his personal genealogical matrix (Ankori, 2006: 62).

The inspiration behind this artwork was Mansour's maternal grandmother¹⁹. Salma was her name and the artist remembers her as "a mud artist, always making beautiful things (...) she made earthenware jarrahs, moulded chicken coops and beehives, and even constructed walls of mud and straw" (as cited in Ankori, 2006: 61). The artist named the work and its protagonist Salma transforming the vision of his youthful grandmother in a personification of Palestine.

This artwork, originally painted as oil on canvas was published as a poster shortly after the outbreak of the first Intifada on 1987 (Liberation Graphics, 2003). When the artwork became a poster, a caption was added, an excerpt from *The Poem of the Land*, by the renowned Palestinian poet, Mahmoud Darwish:

*Those who go forth into life ask not about their lives,
they ask about the land: did she arise?*

The image is a clear representation of the Palestinian nation, the woman is wearing a traditional embroidered dress and she is holding the fruit in a welcoming gesture. The arch can indicate that she is inside of her home, decorations of the wall include green, white and red, colours of the Palestinian flag.

Another representation of Palestine as a woman can be seen in Abdul Rahman al Muzayen, "Palestine" (1978)²⁰. In huge proportions the artwork displays a Palestinian woman representing the nation in the centre of the artwork. With her extended arms she is holding the Palestinian nation, represented by men that appear to be workers as they are holding tools, some allude to the manual workers and others to the farmers, both builders of the nation. The dress is not a traditional peasant dress as it has been seen in the artworks that were previously analysed, this dress appears to be more modern. Also, her headdress is an emulation of the Canaanite figurine of the goddess Ishtar²¹, on the top of her head the Dome of the Rock shines, giving the idea of the fusion of the Canaanite past and the present of Islam, and also as it has been previously mentioned, the Dome of the Rock symbolises the loss of home. As explained by Ankori "Al muzayen creates a hybrid visual image that buttresses his political claim that contemporary Palestinians are the descendants of the ancient inhabitants of the region, and that a new nation, Palestine, will be created from these cultural sources" (Ankori, 2006: 72).

In this image, motherland, appears as a utopia and it underlines the associations between the body of the woman and the land. This suggests that the motherland is a place of protection, warmth, and emotional security (Sherwell, 2003: 135).

Conclusions

The signifier of the nation as a woman in Palestinian art, constructs a sense of a unified Palestine through the narratives constructed by the artworks of Palestinian artist that have been widely distributed in the form of a postcard or a poster.

¹⁹ Mansour decided to stay in Palestine, which dramatically shaped the course of his life impacted his development as an artist. Since no art schools existed in the west bank, Mansour's only opportunity to study art without travelling abroad was to enrol in an Israeli art school (Ankori, 2006: 65).

²⁰ This artwork is online on <http://www.palestineposterproject.org/taxonomy/term/81/poster-imaged-full>.

²¹ Ishtar is the East Semitic Akkadian, Assyrian and Babylonian goddess of fertility, love, war, and sex.

Nationalism can be explained if we consider it not as an ideology but as kinship and religion; it has a profound emotional legitimacy attached. Concerning the Palestinian nation, nationalism has some specificities that have to be considered when defining it. Firstly, sovereignty which is in jeopardy in Palestine. Secondly the boundaries which cannot be applied to the Palestinian nation, because it is fragmented and displaced which also affects a third aspect, the definition of a symbolic territory of the nation.

Anderson's ideas on nationalism are relevant for the analysis of nations, however he has some critics that say that focusing on the adjective when defining the imagined community rather than the noun he gives romantic connotations to the use of the word community (Leoussi, 121).

Cohesiveness and internal unity, can also be questioned in Anderson's theory, especially if gender and nation are studied together because it is difficult to imagine the community as a "horizontal comradeship" if one thinks about the differences in the nations that involve gender.

About Anderson's paradoxes of nationalism, it is important to consider that nationalism in the last decades has change as being perceived differently, is no longer assumed to be a progressive force for change. On the contrary, in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, "nationalism is a retrogressive and disturbing phenomenon in which various national groups and ethnic communities are pitted against each other" (Moghadam, 1994: 3).

Narratives of the feminization of the nation exist all over the world, there is a genderized discourse that represents women as motherland with specific roles to accomplish. First their reproductive roles; which includes biological and ideological reproduction as well as the reproduction of national boundaries. Second the transmission of culture, holding women as an emblem of cultural authenticity. And third the participation in national struggles where they as a passive symbol, remain voiceless.

Women are subject of a moral code, which establishes men as defenders of the family and the nation and women to embody family and national honour in the call of the nation's sons to defend her. In this code, women's bodies have also become an important boundary of the nation, vulnerable to attack.

Palestinian nationalist narratives have women as a centre as a representation of the motherland. Palestine as a woman is often represented as a peasant, reflecting the relationships between people and the land and also as a consequence of the feminization of agricultural labour in the occupied territories.

Representation of the nation as a woman peasant has also have unintended effects that could be considered negatives, as Ankori points: "the emphasis on rural Palestine, which accentuated the Palestinians physical bond with the land, may have been partially responsible for the marginalization of Palestinian urban culture which had thrived in cities such as Jaffa, Haifa and Jerusalem and was to a large extent (...) representation of Palestinians in stereotypical roles may have inadvertently contributed to the construction of prevailing (often negative) views of Palestinians in the west" (2006: 55).

From the artworks analysis there are also important conclusions. The first one is that artworks had an important role in nationalism and nation construction through their use as a symbol when distributed as postcards and posters. This was especially relevant in the years where under Israel's law there was a ban on printed materials, and the poster

become an ingenious and anti-censorship art form. This cultural products of nationalism made it to the public, constructing national narratives.

Artist also had an important role in this construction (even though they were not the central object of this analysis) on the one hand by writing themselves history of Palestinian art, and on the other by printing themselves some of their artworks for distribution.

Palestinian artworks, show exile, estrangement, and loss of the homeland as separation from the mother. The mother, generally represented as a peasant women represents the nation in her figure, in her surroundings, belongings and activities. In many of the artworks women's figure has big proportions and it is often blended with the landscape, this relates to the idea of mother as being the land. Motherland is also represent with images of a baby or child, alluding to women's fertility and patriotic obligations, reminding the biological role of women. This role can also be spotted with the poses of women on the artworks, in squad position as giving birth and with a maternal posture, holding the land. The landscape is also important, where there is a constant appearance of the Dome of the Rock in the artworks, representing occupied Palestine.

From the belongings is important to mention the dress which is a space where women represent their identity and an important tradition that has been passed over generations and reconfigure places lost to Palestinians with the embroidery of each region. Clay pottery is also present in the artworks, emphasizing the Palestinian tradition of this art and at the same time as a symbolism for water. Another traditional element is the "tabaq qashsh", a traditional tray used to bake bread that appears in the artworks also presented as the sun in some artworks. There are also Palestinian symbolism present on the artworks, such as the lock as the right of return, oranges for abundance, horses for revolution, cactus as patience, the Islam, fishermen, traditional music instruments and of course peasants.

Motherland in artworks is personified with features that remind Egyptian and Canaanite sources linking Palestinians with glorious epochs of the region's history. In many of the artworks is possible to see the colours of the Palestinian flag hiding in the background or printed in the women's traditional costumes, with white over their heads, black in the sleeves and red in the dress.

The artworks analysed show the representation of the Palestinian nation as a woman, which has had an important role in constructing a sense of a unified Palestine. Finally it is important to note that the appearance of the Palestinian nation as a woman in the artworks has continued until today with the same features as it was painted when it began in the sixties, as it was possible to see through one of the artworks analysed which was done in 2013.

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