Symbolic Distinctions in Traditional Palestinian Toponymy

Class, Gender, and Village Prestige in Palestinian Space in Israel

> Hūdaj al-ʿArūs [Bridal Canopy] is a plot of land west of the village of Rīena, used for meetings between its villagers and their neighbors from Ṣaffūryya. In the old days, the villagers would exchange brides: a man from Ṣaffūryya would marry a bride from Rīena, and, in exchange, a man from Rīena would wed a Ṣaffūryya maiden. The two groups of relatives would form marriage processions and head toward each other. The first to arrive at this plot [. . .] would make the bride's camel kneel and she would remain on the camel's back until the exchange bride arrived [. . .]. This was passed down to us by the generations and to this day, they say Hūdaj al-ʿArūs, although we all know that we now have the brides flown in by a plane![1]

This story, one of hundreds collected for this study, illustrates how Palestinians' spatial practices have informed the identity embodied in names given to natural features and places. In more recent times, however, not only has the airplane replaced the camel. Palestinian space has been transformed, disrupted, and destroyed, and Ṣaffūryya no longer exists. Internally displaced people from that ancient village and their descendants still live in Nazareth and nearby villages, such as Rīena, where

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they found refuge in 1948. They are not allowed to return to their lands, which were appropriated by the Jewish settlement Zippori.

Linguistic representations of the landscape play a key role in structuring reality because they articulate power relations (Bourdieu, "The Social Space"). Place and landscape are ideological constructions that carry symbolic cultural meanings, which are conveyed through stories, rituals, names, and other communicative means (Azaryahu, *Tel Aviv*; Basso; Dodge; Lutwack). In the process, space becomes central to shaping complex practices and interrelations between humans and the environment, thereby affecting the way they perceive reality (Soja 129). Indigenous cultures, such as the Apache people, maintain mutual and intimate ongoing relations with their environment, and place names operate as mnemonics in the traditional process of acquiring wisdom (Basso 76).

Cultural-political approaches to the landscape have recognized its invisible layers, averring that the landscape is a cultural site. As such, it is shaped not only by bottom-up indigenous traditions but also—as in the present case—by hegemonic groups, whether within the indigenous society or outside it. These groups use the landscape as an arena for inscribing their ideology from the top down. Following Edward Said, W. J. T. Mitchell, and Chris Philo, I describe this shaping of the landscape as an arena of power struggles between groups, values, and images within Palestinian society over the past few centuries.

Language and its uses structure and reproduce beliefs, social power relations, values, and control mechanisms (Cameron and Markus 2–3; Muchnik). Linguistic-ethnographic research also views social linguistic activity as an element that facilitates the constitution of individual and collective identity and shapes social reality in a broader sense (Katriel). Complementarily, the geographic literature emphasizes the link between language and social processes. For example, geographer Yi-Fu Tuan suggests that language is also central to the shaping of a given place's identity: it grants it a tangible presence in various ways, the most fundamental of which is naming.

This article analyzes the Arabic toponymy of Palestine, based on folktales and memories of Palestinians living in Israel. The discussion that follows is interpretive and has a dual purpose. First, it aims to shed light on class and gender power relations and the issue of the village's image.[2] Second, it examines the differential relation of Palestinian society to the landscape, as reflected in names of places versus natural features. My starting point is the assumption that toponymy is the result of parallel processes: names articulate reality and identity, but at the same

time, they are profoundly influenced by the approach of the naming culture to its space (Bar-Gal; Pinchevski and Torgovnik).

The following discussion fills an obvious lacuna in the literature. As opposed to their Israeli-Hebrew counterparts, Palestinian-Arabic place names have not been documented systematically and have certainly not been discussed in cultural research literature. Beyond reasons related to the power relations in this particular space, this neglect is also due to the tendency to ignore traditional, informal names. However, as shown by Alessandro Portelli and Paul Thompson, oral history and individual and collective memories are a major source of meaning for subaltern populations. Thus, my reading of Palestinian names is a tactic that gives space to popular and peripheral knowledge categories. It also exposes the limitations of toponymical research in Israel that has tended to focus on the names recently imposed by Zionism, to the neglect of Palestinian spatial constructions. Finally, it empowers the indigenous population by giving voice to their perception of space.

The names evoking this perception testify to the ideological and cultural uses of place names, as opposed to the names of natural features used by Palestinian society. The system for naming was complex and full of spatial distinctions and classifications that privileged hegemonic class and gender values by marginalizing feminine or lower-class images. To illustrate this, I deconstruct the concept of "Arabic toponymy" to highlight the analytic and critical potential of comparing the ideological bases of place names, as opposed to names of natural features that are uninhabited and relegated to the perceived periphery of human space. Importantly, local inhabitants know these names, but strangers and visitors do not, as opposed to the better-known place names that are more visible in space. The two main axes of the comparison are the construction of extralinguistic reality by spatial naming and the justification given to this construction within the naming culture.

Palestinian Society in Israel: Historical Background and Traditional Toponymy

Up until the 1948 war that saw the State of Israel established, the Palestinians were a majority in the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. That war—the *nakba*—was a national catastrophe for the Palestinian people: they lost most of their lands and more than half of the Palestinians were deported by Jewish troops. There are a number of outcomes of the *nakba* particularly relevant for this

study. These include the appropriation of the huge majority of Palestinian lands by the new state and its allocation to Jewish settlements (Kadman); the cutting off of the Palestinian population, now a minority (20 percent) in the State of Israel, from the rest of the Arab world; the population's growing exposure to influence by the majority's education and culture; and its exposure to economic forces that led to a sharp decline in agricultural activity (Ozacky-Lazar).

In terms of statistics, most Palestinians in Israel are Muslim, and the rest are Christian and Druze. Today they are concentrated in three areas: Galilee in the north, the so-called triangle northeast of Tel Aviv, and the Negev desert in the south.

During the Ottoman era (1517–1918), and decreasingly during the British rule of Palestine (1918–1948), the local population was mostly rural and agrarian. Villages tended to be small and were located on hilltops near water sources. Social organization and consciousness were mainly local, and the fundamental unit of reference was the extended family or clan. Palestinians were deeply attached to the land. Farming and grazing, by both men and women, were more than sources of livelihood—they were a way of life, a collective heritage, and a source of local pride and patriotism. Moreover, land ownership and tenancy was the main basis of social stratification, determining the status of the individual and community, which was differentiated along gender lines (Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscape*; Grossman; Rosenfeld; Tamari).

This attachment was manifested in the place names that were used continuously for hundreds of years, since the early Ottoman period and even earlier. These names have been conveyed informally across the generations and only recently were documented and mapped, albeit to a limited extent.[3] The list of names locals gave their environment is extremely detailed—a small stretch of land with some unique geomorphological or topographical features could be given several names, one for each feature. The number of informal names is estimated as being in the tens of thousands. These served the functional needs of an agrarian society, with many names steeped in a traditional historical narrative that commemorated local and national leaders and events, Muslim generals, and other historical figures, including many from Christian and to a lesser extent Jewish traditions. They also commemorated peasants and events of importance to the small community. As discussed shortly, this toponymy is clearly divided into names given to human settlements and those given to natural features (Dahamshe, *Local Habitation*).

Recently, many of these names have been relegated to oblivion because of internal Palestinian processes, such as urbanization and acculturation into the majority society and more directly by marginalization and erasure, first by the

Zionist movement and later by the Israeli state. Since the beginning of Jewish immigration to Palestine in the late nineteenth century, the Jewish leadership has been active in Hebraizing and de-Palestinianizing place names; they erased hundreds from the map. The unmapped ones were largely forgotten. Although this process culminated in the *nakba* and its immediate aftermath, it continues to this day (Dahamshe, *Local Habitation*).[4]

Review of the Literature and Methodology

The literature on traditional place names throughout the world is sorely lacking.[5] It tends to distinguish between place or habitation names and geographical or natural feature names (Kadmon). The focus has usually been on the former, with a recent growing interest in urban street names (Azaryahu, *Namesakes*), whereas the latter is still largely ignored. Even when studied, the toponymy in Israel/Palestine and around the world does not usually address social status and gender relations as articulated in the linguistic landscape. In particular, there is an underrepresentation of women, and their absence in formal names is well established.

This study is grounded in the assumption that since Palestinian names are derived from popular traditions, this can explain the relatively high representation of women and lower-class men in the naming, compared with names determined formally by Israeli authorities.[6] The polyphonic nature of folklore allows hidden voices and intragroup representations, as well as voices shared by communities, to find their expression in a society's literary genres (Hasan-Rokem) and, as I argue, in its toponymy—an aspect rarely addressed in the literature. I also assert that the relationship between humans and their natural environment is reciprocal, with society shaping the landscape, physically and symbolically, to suit its values and purposes, while the landscape shapes society (Boal 99). This is an assumption that will be supported by the traditional narratives provided herein.

Since these narratives have rarely been documented, this study is based on fieldwork in Palestinian localities in the Galilee region. The folk stories and memories sampled here were collected in hundreds of interviews held in the homes of Muslim, Christian, Bedouin, and Druze Palestinian citizens of Israel, between 2001 and 2015.[7] I used open-ended questions to elicit reasons for the particular names. The examples provided in this article were selected based on their relevance, quality, and clarity of the narrative.

Like the case of Ṣaffūryya, some of the natural features whose names are explained below were expropriated from their Palestinian owners and annexed to the municipal jurisdiction of a Jewish settlement or became state land. The places have been renamed and given new purposes (for example, national parks). The remaining Palestinian villages in the Galilee are home to the descendants of those villages and home to the internally displaced persons from depopulated others—altogether about half of the Palestinian population in Israel. Because these villages are rich in Muslim, Christian, and Jewish traditions, they are ideal for demonstrating the cultural polyphony of the Palestinian toponymy, in general.

In selecting the examples from my sample for discussion, I have emphasized stories that represent issues related to class and gender and the linguistic image of the Palestinian village. The names and the stories behind them are highly illustrative of the linguistic structuring of the landscape. It is important to note that the stories I present have undergone only minor revisions/editing that have not affected the explanation of each place name.[8] Furthermore, the study does not deal with historical developments in this toponymy—an important issue for future study. Nevertheless, my analysis does not necessarily separate history from space but connects space, time, and society, or what Edward Soja refers to as "human geography"—one of the emphases of the "spatial turn" (44).

In this critical analysis, names are seen as texts that convey not only an explicit meaning but also deep-seated ideologies related to sociopolitical relations (Berg and Vuolteenaho; Mayers 237). Recent geographical studies of urban space (Lefebvre) and place names (Azaryahu, *Namesakes*) highlight the "production of space" by constructing certain categories and blurring others to produce the landscape as a fabric woven from physical and cultural strands. The cultural meaning turns the landscape into a resource that is not only economic but also ideological and symbolic—a text of multiple sociocultural subjective meanings (Cosgrove; Tilley). Thus, place names provide insights into how people experience and interpret the world. Understanding the names will be complete once their historical, political, and cultural background have been taken into consideration (Berg and Kearns; Cohen and Kliot; Pinchevski and Torgovnik; Thornton).[9]

This article adopts this general approach but is unique in two major respects. First, as suggested already, it differentiates between two name categories: populated localities and natural features.[10] Second, it examines the names as ethnolinguistic products of long-standing social perceptions, which are not the by-products of short-term developments in political history.[11]

In analytical terms, the following discussion is informed by Claude *Lévi*-Strauss, who studied human and place names in tribal cultures as codes that shape and are shaped by social beliefs (*Lévi*-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*; Levy) and considered binary cultural contradictions fundamental to language and hence to eliciting hidden cultural meanings. Using this notion as my framework, this article highlights spatial binary contradictions, such as inside-outside, central-peripheral, public-private, and overt-covert. Comparing the names of places and natural features using these terms can help reveal the ideological meanings they embody and the power relation they impose on space. However, as opposed to *Lévi*-Strauss's approach (*The Savage Mind*), the categories will not be considered of equal status but as affected by practices of control. Moreover, the distinction between them is not pure, and they may overlap in some cases (Fraser).[12]

As revealed in this study, the Palestinian-Arab toponymy of the Galilee is divided into two distinct linguistic systems of different and even contradictory themes and motifs—names of villages and names of natural features. These constitute two separate landscapes—a thematic distinction reflected on the level of the single village and across the entire area. This distinction is not only the result of objective spatial features but, more important, of subjective cultural meanings associated with the landscape (see Bachealard 14–5; Lefebvre 54, 217), as well as the everyday conduct in space referred to by Michel de Certeau (Dorfman). Together they form individual or collective mental maps that constitute the cultural perception of space (Gould and White) and "sense of place" (Yacobi).

The two following sections present stories or traditional explanations for the etymology of place names, followed by names of natural features.

Stories behind Place Names

Place names in the Galilee commemorate military commanders or major political-historical events, conflicts, and figures, such as founding fathers or tribe chieftains; collective virtues, such as hospitality; and religious figures or leaders of various ethnic groups, including Jews.

ʿĪn Māhil.[13] According to the village elders, in preparation for the Battle of Ḥittin that would spell the doom of the first Crusader kingdom in 1187, the victorious Muslim general Saladin erected a small garrison near the spring located up on the

mountain north of the village. Desperate for water in the summer heat, Crusader forces arrived there and fought the soldiers in the garrison. Its commander, Māhil, died in the battle and his troops fled to the mountains and hid in the caves.

Dayr Ḥannā[14] is associated even more directly with the Crusaders, who ruled the Galilee in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries. Yohanna (John), the Crusader commander who occupied the village, was also the head of the local monastery. In transliteration to Arabic, the name became Ḥannā. According to the story, one of Ḍahir al-ʿUmar's advisers, the Bedouin [Muslim] warlord who ruled the Galilee in the eighteenth century, advised him to change the name Dayr Ḥanā to Dayr Saʿed after the warlord's brother, or Dayr Saʿūd, after one of his ancestors. Ḍahir al-ʿUmar, however, decided not to change the name.

Dayr al-Asad as I heard from our ancestors, the first name of the village was Dayr al-Ruhāb (Monastary of Monks). Hundreds of years ago, a *wali* (patron saint) arrived at the place riding a lion called Sheikh Muḥammad al-Asad (Muḥammad the Lion). He asked about the village and its inhabitants and was told that it was called Dayr al-Ruhāb. He demanded that the place name be changed to Dayr al-Asad, despite the monks' opposition. When the latter saw him riding a lion they became afraid and moved to the nearby village. Ever since then, our village is called Dayr al-Asad.

Other names commemorate conflicts between communities and villages. The next story typifies this category.

Wādī Salāma.[15] The place bearing that name used to be a Druze village that dominated the entire area and was home to Sheikh Salāma. One day the sheikh passed by ʿArāba, a village populated by Sunni Muslims, saw a young woman, and asked for her hand in marriage. The people of ʿArāba were opposed to the marriage but were afraid to refuse him. By the grace of God, a stranger arrived at the village, a Bedouin leader called ʿUmar al-Zīdānī. When he saw their perplexity, he asked the village elders what was troubling the people. They said: "We have a problem; the Druze Sheikh Salāma asked for a maiden's hand in marriage and we cannot refuse him." He said, "Give me a day to reflect on it."

Al-Zīdānī then went to confer with the Bedouins of ʿA-Saker [who used to live near Beisan, today Beit She'an]. They told him: go back to ʿArāba and tell the

elders: "Tell Salāma the Druze that you agree, on condition that the elders from his village come to ʿArāba, where they will be received in the utmost respect and enjoy a feast and stay the night." And so it was; the Druze from [what is now called] Salāma came to ʿArāba with their Sheikh and spent the night singing, dancing, and dining. Each inhabitant of ʿArāba hosted a person from Salāma, while the groom-to-be was hosted by the leader al-Zīdānī. The plan was for him to shoot the sheikh, and upon hearing the shots, everyone in the village would kill their guests. And that is how it was. After the people of ʿArāba murdered their guests, they attacked the village and killed all its remaining inhabitants. This happened no more than 300 years ago.

A third category includes place names that commemorate collective characteristics. In spite of the previous story of Wādī Salāma contradicting the value of hospitality in traditional Arab society, in the following story, this commandment is beautifully illustrated and understood to be important enough to be commemorated by a village's name.

Ṭayyiba's name was given by the guests who used to come there. They used to say, "The people of this village are *ṭayyibūn* (good, virtuous), because when a person would pass by their village and a villager would be sitting on his doorstep, the latter would let the guest in and treat him kindly. He would pour the guest coffee, and if it were time for breakfast, lunch or dinner, they would eat together."

The fourth category is religious leaders. Interestingly, this category includes a few cases in which a place is named after a Jewish rabbi. Note that in traditional Arab folklore, rabbis were highly regarded, and in fact one of the Arabic words for rabbi is *hakham*, which is Hebrew for "wise man."

ʿArāba. A very famous rabbi was called Ḥanīnā Bin Dosā [he lived in the first century CE in ʿArāba]. Whenever two people had a quarrel in ʿArāba, they would come to him and seek his advice. People would go to the rabbi so often, that the expression, "to the Rabbi" [*ʿa-Rāb*], turned into the place's name.

Stories behind Names of Natural Features

Unlike place names, the names of natural features are inspired by ordinary people well known to the local community. Frequent categories include highway robbers and their victims, peasants, shepherds, women, Gypsies, and servants at work and in marital relations.

Maqtal Shākir.[16] Shākir was a peasant from the village of al-Rīena, who cultivated his land in Dabbūrya. He would harvest the wheat and carry it back home at night. In that place, there used to be a cherub tree and robbers ambushed him behind it, dealing him a lethal blow. His family members then came from Rīena and placed a cairn made of three stones over his blood.

Maghārat al-Mashtā (Cave that Provides Shelter from the Rain). Located in Wādi al-Mashtā, northeast of ʿĪn Māhil, is a cave where shepherds and their flock would find shelter during sudden rainfalls.

ʿĪn al-Ḥājj Qāsim in the northeastern part of ʿĪn Māhil is named after Qāsim, the owner of the plot where the spring is located. Qāsim was a peasant who lived off the land and used to maintain the spring and use it to water the vegetables and livestock he cultivated.

Khalat al-Ṭaḥanāṭ (The Wheat-grinders' Path). There used to be a path that connected ʿĪl and Ṣaffūryya, called Khalat al-Ṭaḥanāṭ. Women who had wheat or other grains would ride pack animals to the mill. Since the path was not a main thoroughfare, and therefore relatively safe from male gazes and harassments, these women could travel it with their small children.

ʿĪn al-ʿArūs (Spring of the Bride) was located far from human residences. The people of Ḥurfīsh and the surrounding area used to come here to bathe brides-to-be and prepare them for their wedding day.

Maghārat al-Maʾthūma (Cave of the Accused) is a name rooted in a legend passed from generation to generation in Iksāl. It tells of a young woman born in an abandoned village. When her mother passed away, her father remarried. When

the woman grew older, her stepmother became envious of the attention she received from her father, and wanted to get rid of her. To do so, she accused the woman of violating the family honor [by having extramarital intercourse]. Fearful for his honor, the father immediately took her to a distant cave, where he killed her and stained the cave opening with her blood—a stain that can be seen to this very day. After avenging his honor, he found out that his daughter had been wrongly accused.

Qabr al-ʿAbd< (The Slave's Tomb) is named after an Egyptian who was married to a woman called Turfande. He arrived in our country almost 200 years ago and became a servant to the family of Qāsim Muḥammad Badarne, who was well off. In time, the family's economic situation worsened, and his masters asked him to find a different livelihood. Distressed by the idea of parting from them, he took his wife and headed to Wādi Salāma in search for employment. However, because of his sorrow and anxiety about his future, he fell ill and died.

Manzil al-Nawar (Gypsy Camp) is an area southeast of Yāfat al-Nāṣira, where a group of Gypsies would come every year to sell their handiwork: a pole for picking cactus fruit, clothespins, and the like. Since they would camp in this area, the local villagers used to call it Manzil al-Nawar.

Given these examples, what is the spatial text that the names create? The names presented here testify to how social forces make ideological use of these markers. The extralinguistic reality they evoke is one of boundaries, which mark/differentiate natural spaces and social strata. Using Arabic and the concepts of local culture, the named landscape mirrors class and gender differences through the social image of each place name. This conceptualization is articulated on two levels: (1) the content world of the signifier, and (2) the spatial location, size, and importance of the signified. These levels are interrelated and more or less consistent with the distinction made between place names and names of natural features. The former are associated with heroic figures or major historical events (such as the Christian general in Dīr Ḥannā or the Muslim general in the pivotal historical battle of Ḥiṭṭīn [ʿĪn Māhil]); virtues such as hospitality (al-Ṭayyiba); and internecine strife where the victorious party names the place (Wādī Salāma). These inspirational names were used to mark large, central, public, and visible spaces. Names of natural

features, on the other hand, are associated with marginal figures (Qabr al-ʿAbd), highly localized events (Maqtal Shākir), or women (Maghārat al-Maʾthūma). These are not only smaller but also peripheral, private, and invisible.

As illustrated by these examples, in indigenous Palestinian society, place names and names of natural features are two binary categories. To borrow Maurice Halbwachs's distinction, the former are related to the collective memory that is usually perceived as socially structured through political and sociocultural actions and associated with a historical narrative of armed struggles and a national Arab identity; whereas the latter are related to autobiographical memory associated with highly localized identity, daily events, and herstory (Ohana and Wistrich). This toponymic differentiation that runs through the materials presented here suggests a sociocultural consensus regarding the value hierarchy it captures. The shape, location, nature, and size of the place/feature named are consistent with its sociocultural significance, in particular with identity formation and the distinction between right and wrong.

Spatial, Social, and Gender Status in Place Names

In traditional societies, a person's socioeconomic status has a decisive effect on his or her territorial location: people of high standing who hold important social roles are located in a central and highly visible territorial position. Similarly, members of the upper classes are usually located higher topographically (Altman; Ley).[17] Accordingly, the location of the name is just as important as its linguistic sense. To illustrate, broad and long streets in major urban centers in Israel are reserved for the names of city founders and other important figures, and alleys are named after lesser figures (Bar-Gal).

This is also true of gender identity. In Western urban centers, areas associated with feminine activities are located in the margins and are distinct from the "male" areas in the business, political, and administrative center (Saegret). Laws, customs, cultural values, and social power relations affect people's mobility in space and their spatial experiences (Hägerstrand; Giddens), creating disciplinary spaces (Gregory 1989). For example, in her study of the mobility patterns of Palestinian Bedouin women in the Negev, Fenster showed how patriarchal power relations exclude women and restrict their mobility.

As seen in the Palestinian folklore stories, this conceptual framework is relevant for the analysis of the relative spatial positioning of both genders and classes in traditional Arab society. The linguistic-spatial practices of this society have ensured ideological and cultural visibility for male and other hegemonic images. This hierarchic shaping of space through traditional nomenclature is a key dimension of the formalization and enshrining of values in this society—a semiotic expression of cultural constraints that dictate the use of space, mobility in space, and the names of spaces. In what follows, three aspects of this hierarchy are discussed: social class, gender, and village status.

Social Stratification

In traditional patriarchal Arab society, the individual's roles and social standing are dictated by such factors as age, gender (more on that below), and clan affiliation.[18] In the past, and to a certain extent and in certain areas today, the nuclear and extended family were subordinate to the sheikh, who led the tribe or community and represented their values. Accordingly, the sheikh's tent or *shig* was the place where guests were entertained. Its location was prominent, its size was bigger than the other tents of the tribe, and it was located at some distance from the rest—usually at the northern edge of the encampment near a riverbed or stream. This location was designed to facilitate visitors' access and prevent them from seeing the other tents of the sheikh's family, thereby violating the women's modesty (Al-Krenawi; Ben-David; Slyomovics). In terms of semiotics, Palestinian-Arab society's toponymy is consistent with this stratification in that it highlights the roles of male national leaders and relegates women and people from the lower socioeconomic class to physically marginal places on the edges of natural and public space. Out of respect for the leader, and thereby the history of the community or nation, and as befitting and reflecting a member of the higher class, his name is used for a large and prominent locality such as ʿĪn Māhil or Wādi Salāma. Conversely, the lower classes are represented in the names of remote and hidden natural features, such as Maghārat al-Mashtah. Like the women of the tribe, they are consigned to small, rear, and inner spaces that are irrelevant or forbidden to foreign visitors. Thus, this linguistic encryption consigns Gypsies, slaves, robbers, and murderers to the margins of sociogeographic space, away from the eyes of foreigners, as in the case of Manzal al-Nawar.

Gender Relations

Traditional gender relations in Palestinian society are articulated in the numerous names related to women given to geographic features and their nearly complete absence from village place names. This mirrors a more general tendency in human society of using towers and vertical buildings visible from afar to represent phallic urban images (Lefebvre) while inner, round spaces in buildings and natural features, such as hills and valleys, tend to be associated with women (Rendell).

As discussed already, in patriarchal societies gender dictates not only a different social status but a different spatial mobility. Specifically, the code of female modesty defines men's honor, on one hand, and marginalizes women, on the other (Abu-Lughod). In the rural Middle East and North Africa, these norms have dictated the creation of distinct and physically separated geographic spaces for women, which are charged with deep symbolic meaning (Mernissi). This gendered architecture has restricted women's range of activity and limited them to the private domestic space dedicated to reproduction and nurturing (Steinman). As opposed to these approaches, feminist research explores the conduct of women in space and their participation in producing the geography while being subjected to masculine supervision (Lubin).

In traditional Arab society, the living space is divided in two. Whether in a tent, a shack, or a stone house, there are usually two separate sections or rooms—one for men and one for women, who often use separate entrances as well. Erving Goffman termed those two sections "front" and "rear": the rear section is dedicated to routine and instrumental activities, whereas the front section is dedicated to public activities, including the presentation and serving of the products of the rear section's activities (Goffman). Access to the rear section is restricted to prevent strangers from seeing activities of the womenfolk and family. Accordingly, it is usually less tidy and presentable than the front section, which is used for hospitality.

For example, in his study of the Kabyle Muslim people of Algeria, Pierre Bourdieu (*Algeria 1960*) found that this domestic architecture is symbolic of the gendered stratification of society. Moreover, it is manifested in space, even beyond the immediate residential area: the women's path to the spring is different than the men's, enabling them to go there without fear of having another man see them. Where no such spatial separation is possible, the women go to the spring at designated hours—at dusk, for example (Bourdieu, *Algeria 1960* 121). This is echoed in the folklore collected for this study by the story about ʿĪn al-ʿArūs.

In keeping with this spatial hierarchy, the Palestinian toponymy privileges the village as a geographic entity: it is accessible, large, and prominent, and visitors and other foreigners need to know its name, which is therefore male or male-related. Conversely, natural features are smaller and known mainly to locals, as they are located "in the back" and are relevant only to insiders, with others having no reason to visit them or learn their names. Many of these names emphasize the woman–nature nexus by including the word *umm* (mother) in features' names, such as reeds in the riverbed in Wādi Umm al-Qaṣab or poplars around the spring in ʿĪn Umm Ṣufṣāfa. In these two cases, as in many others, the names refer to places that are not only inward facing, small, and concealed but also physically lower than where a village would be located.

From a feminist perspective, a militaristic society generates socialization processes that cultivate a view of masculinity in terms of superiority and power (Allen). Writing gender relations into the spatial text is not just a passive mirroring of an unfortunate social reality but a coercive act by the patriarchy to reinforce the hegemony for the local villagers and neighboring communities, as in the story of Wādī Salāma. The narratives woven in this way are grounded in male social authority and the memories of wars and conflicts, designed to give the village a semiotic edge, so to speak. In other words, the male-oriented toponymy of place names articulates a local Palestinian discourse in which each village stakes its claim to power and leadership.

The converse identification of the female gender with natural features may be explained in their relative distance from populated areas and their ability to provide protection, privacy, physicality, and intimate social interactions (Grosz). Trees, shrubs, and narrow footpaths provided Palestinian women with a space for activities and encounters, enabling them to free themselves temporarily from the physical and normative restrictions of the rear section of the house. This notion is supported by studies (e.g., Baker) that show how a distinctly feminine space allows women to express themselves more freely and talk about their lives. To borrow from de Certeau's (Dorfman) concept of "everyday space," perhaps the feminine space created in the landscape by Palestinian women represents an everyday application of a tactic used by the weak. They take advantage of fleeting opportunities to exploit the space used by the hegemony to attain limited freedom of action—to escape the masculine gaze, form a space of their own, and claim space for their bodies (Dorfman). Thus, while the linguistic mechanism names villages after fearsome warlords, it names natural features after women to protect

their privacy, supervise their modesty, and make sure their movements remain hidden.

Another, more general cultural explanation for the frequent use of female names in the natural toponymy of Palestine is the tendency to identify nature or land with women, as both are associated with reproduction and nurturing. As demonstrated in the following stories, places associated with women are rhetorical performances. That is, the rhetoric of the place is created by its specificity, which calls for a certain/specific type of discourse, rather than by any discourse imposed on it by its female visitors (Endres and Senda-Cook). These stories tell us of caves, springs, and gorges named after women or feminine activities and habits. Relatedly, their concealed nature and shapes, which are reminiscent of female organs—physically associated with reproduction and nurturing—may have played a part in this toponymic connection.

The converse of this intuitive association, although less frequent in these stories, is also true. One example is Jabal al-Shaykh—or the Sheikh's Mountain (in Hebrew, Mt. Hermon)—named this way because of its snowy cap, which looks like a white beard. This mountain, which towers over the entire northern region of Israel, is visible on a clear day from many parts of the Galilee.[19]

The mother–nature nexus relates not only to the spatial marginalization of women and the physical similarity of natural objects to female organs but also to the traditional division of labor. Palestinian woman played a major role in agricultural activities, and many of the names reflect this fact by referring to an event that occurred in a specific space and time that reproduced her domestic and farming roles in the village geography. Although limited, this role may have gained paradoxical prominence after the *nakba* and the ensuing destruction of the Palestinian village as a physical and cultural entity (Tamari). Once relegated to the margins, Palestinian identity has sought to reestablish itself through that which is more difficult to destroy—the land and its natural features. Women could/might play a more central role here; Hagar Salamon, for example, showed how women preserve and revive the motherland by weaving geographical maps hung in the front section of Palestinian homes.

Theoretically, the discourse about natural features can be better understood through Homi Bhabha's third space. A third space is a symbolic and tangible space that challenges various types of hierarchic binaries, affording an intermingling of figures, motifs, interactions, and identities. Following Bhabha, spaces located beyond the control of the monolithic imagery of place names can be seen as third

spaces, despite the constant striving of traditional society to extend its segregationist control to these spaces as well. Thus, the linguistic construction of natural space challenges the division into front (male) and rear (female) and subverts the boundaries of the hegemonic practice that organizes the toponymy according to male interests. The result has been a nonbinary division of roles in Palestinian space: men without women in place names, and women beside men in the names of natural features.

Glorifying the Village

As suggested, village names are often used to glorify their identity in the image of Palestinian society. In general, names provide answers to questions: How do we want others to see us? How do we define ourselves? As we shall see, the toponymic stories not only glorify the village in relation to others but do so at the expense of the natural features in its surroundings, thereby articulating the fundamental assumption shared by both modern and traditional societies, that (masculine) human culture is superior to (feminine) nature.

The location of a human settlement is representative of its relationships with its environment. These determine its status among all other settlements in the area, the entire country, or even the world (Ben-Artzi). In literary texts and cultural practices, we find that it acts as the "display window" of its self-image. In turn, it becomes associated with situations, meanings, or symbols that express its history and collective identity. Some examples include Chicago, the Gangster City, or Paris, the City of Lights.

In Palestinian society, the image of the village is even more central than in other cultures, since many Palestinians still identify themselves by naming their place of origin first. For example, many from Al-Khalīl (Hebron) first define themselves as "Khalīle" (Khalidi). Relatedly, despite its small size, Palestine can still be mapped according to its many Arabic dialects, with the regional dialect being a marker of identity and status. Due to its importance for its inhabitants and those of neighboring villages, the village name is iconic and central to social discourse, more so than the names of natural features, neighborhoods ,or streets, with many Palestinian localities still lacking formal street names (Dahamshe, "Names under Supervision").

As in the construction of individual, national, and other identities, however, the image the villagers seek to project is also designed to conceal certain layers of reality.

The indigenous authors of name stories have associated their etymology with values or events that speak of power and glory and are a source of pride for tribes and villagers. A typical example is the village Majd al-Kurūm, whose name—meaning "Glory of the Vines"—was given to it, according to a local tradition, because of its wealth of fine vines and olive and fig plantations. Other place names glorify the whole Arab nation, as in the case of ʿĪn Māhil.

By using such a strategy to give names, in conjunction with highlighting the "feminine" narrative, harsh daily realities and internal conflicts that can tarnish the village's reputation are sidelined. Routine themes, such as farming or family life, and negative ones, such as crime, are thus displaced to the "back yard" of nature. Similar to the innocent girl from the cave story, negative themes are pushed away to maintain the village's good name.

This linguistic-cultural mechanism provides a selective view of reality as positive and heroic, opposed to the negativity and banality of the villagers' lived experience. This is related to the fact that village names are official and used mainly in the "front section" of intervillage communication. This is because the villagers themselves have little need for them. Conversely, names of natural features are used mainly in intravillage communication and are therefore of little use for glorifying the village.

This inverse relationship is supported by studies on the sociology of space. The description of a certain space as a "real chronotope," to use Mikhail Bakhtin's terminology (Bakhtin 1981), indicates that a place associated with a certain sociohistorical reality may dictate the activities of its inhabitants and the nature of their social contacts. Places dictate different manners of speech and behavior, and along with the nature of social contacts, these are actualized, according to real chronotopes. A person's behavior in a natural environment is different from that on the city streets (Rimon). As shown by Azaryahu (*Tel Aviv*), the beach is an example of a "liminal territory" because it allows the reversal of social norms, as in clothing or gender relations.

These theoretical approaches provide another explanation for the fact that local and personal matters have inspired the naming of natural features as entities hidden from public view. These include recurring meetings of village women under the tree or on the path to the spring, as well as negative events and daily hardships. Thus, the names on the Palestinian map of peripheral or liminal territories straddling the boundary between culture and nature echo the freedom and intimacy provided by the distance from the masculine disciplinary gaze.

Conclusion

Palestinian-Arab toponymy is much more than the sum total of places and natural features it names. The distinction made by Palestinian society between names of villages and those of natural features symbolizes and shapes the culture's differential approach to nature. This distinction is translated into social boundaries and patterns of exclusion and selection of people, practices, values, space, and time. The terms Palestinian society has used to identify its environment indicate how space is used as a platform for the (re)production of social values and their spatial locations. Palestinian space is a mnemonic—an instrument of cultural power that imposes and reproduces hierarchic distinctions and discriminations based on class, gender, and geographic differences and, in the process, mediates them for the users of space. Finally, this distinction may also be designed to create an internal Palestinian discourse about the perceptions and memories evoked by the two types of space and the need to express the complexities of Palestinian identity through the mechanisms used for the differential naming of places.

According to this distinction, settlements are marked as a special space that gives publicity to collective memory, important and "official" events, class and masculine hegemonies, and the values the patriarchy is interested in promulgating. Conversely, natural features are seen as private spaces for personal memories and ordinary people, everyday conduct in space, women, and other issues, which are seen as secondary in importance. Despite this difference, both kinds of naming are more than part of the constitution of "identity" or "society," and articulate the spatial inspiration for highly site-specific social practices and interactions. Thus, the cultural production of space and its relations with human society as conveyed by this rich fabric of name stories draws a kind of "map of the soul" (Cajete 186–7).

Furthermore, this toponymy is a spatial projection: the meanings Palestinian society attributes to names are irreducible to etymological aspects alone; they belong to a broader discourse related to the marking of the boundaries of public space, ideological, class and gender mediation, desirable images, semiotic perspectives, spatial memories, and beliefs.

This article examined Palestinian oral toponymic constructions as a discourse dependent on a geocultural context that has mostly disappeared due to and since the *nakba* and subsequent modernization. Given its exploratory nature, it should be considered a point of departure for future studies. For example, it would be interesting to examine if and how formal and informal naming in traditional and

nontraditional cultures create class/gender/image differentiation in the intrasocial context. It would also be interesting to examine whether these constructions differ between formal and informal naming.

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■ NOTES

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1. I thank Mohamed Bsoul for telling me this story and the following informants for the stories quoted below: Saleh Abu Leil, Abas Saied, Ahmad Abu-Zeid, Muhamad Mriesat, Ahmad Zoibi, Ali Knanh, Abas Dahoud, Faleh Abas, Khaled Ghanayem, Nemer Nemer, Krayem Mohamed, Zarefa Shalabna, and Ebrahim Abu-Ras.
2. The term *village* is used to refer to towns and all types of settlements.
3. In 2004, the first atlas of Palestinian names was published by Salman Abu-Sitta.
4. As recently as February 2017, Israeli police used disproportionate force to evacuate Palestinian Bedouins from the unrecognized village of *Umm al-Ḥīrān* in the Negev, resulting in the death of one Palestinian and one police officer. According to state planning, the village and its lands are to be settled by Jews and renamed Khirān.
5. The few exceptions include Basso on North American natives; Bar-Itzhak on Jewish legends about place names in Poland; and Dahamshe (*Local Habitation*) on Palestinian legends.
6. This extends beyond the naming of former or current Palestinian locales. A case in point is that very few Jewish women are commemorated in street names in Jerusalem (Spanier).
7. Apart from two interviewees, all were male. It is very difficult to interview women in Arab society because of its emphasis on the physical separation of genders,

particularly in cases such as this, where the encounter involved a stranger from outside the village.

8. See Dahamshe (*Names for a Place*) for the complete versions of some of the stories.
9. Studies informed by this approach include McCarthy's study of internecine struggles as reflected in street names in Beirut; Bar-Gal's study of political status differentials in Israeli Hebrew street names; Pinchevski and Torgovnik's study on the differentiation of neighborhoods of native Israelis and new immigrants in Israeli street names; and Mayers's study on the class differentiation of names given by British colonialists to quarters in Zanzibar.
10. This study differs from Benvenisti's study on the Hebraization of Palestinian names (Benvenisti 1997); Cohen and Kliot's study that focused on the Zionist ideology informing the naming of localities in the territories, which were occupied in 1967; and Berleant-Shiller's study of the names of land plots in the Lesser Antilles—all of which focused exclusively or largely on one of the categories.
11. As contrasted, for example, to Suleiman's study of the Hebraization of street names in the Old City of Jerusalem.
12. See Blumen for a critique of the binary approach.
13. The Arabic term *ʿĪn* means "spring."
14. The Arabic term *Dayr* means "monastery."
15. The Arabic terem *Wādī* designates a riverbed that is dry except in the short rainy season.
16. "Place where somebody was killed."
17. For example, the town of Nazareth ʿIllit (Upper Nazareth) was founded in 1957 on expropriated Palestinian lands in an area overlooking the Arab city of Nazareth. The fact that its name is designed to convey ethnoclass superiority is indicated by the deliberate choice of the adjective.
18. The mores and customs of traditional Arab society are very similar to those of the Bedouin society in the present, as in the leader's status and the organization of the encampment and its individual tents. See Barakat.
19. Etymological legends told by Bedouins in the south of the country provide additional evidence for the converse case, as they tend to explain vertical and protruding natural objects, such as steep mountains or rock formations, using stories centered on phallic images (see Levi 179–80).

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