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News, Memory and Identity

The Palestinians in Britain and Social Uses of News

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Abstract

This thesis is about diasporic audiences and their experiences of news. The main concern throughout is the under-researched question of how members of a diasporic audience, such as the Palestinians in Britain, use news, what they do with it and what it means for their social action and interaction. Taking into account the diverse news media the Palestinians in Britain engage with, this thesis investigates what news means for diasporas like the Palestinians - what it means for identity, belonging and community and what it means for their participation in societal action — by exploring the meanings surrounding the act of engagement with news narratives, rather than by examining the moment of consumption per se. Using a synthesis of original empirical work and an inter-disciplinary theoretical inquiry into political communication, nationalism, identity, news and collective memory, this thesis shows that news, particularly television news, emerges as a significant resource in the informants' lives, around whose consumption the informants' discourses of identity, of belonging and community and of citizenship are fraught with tensions between the personal and the political and between the national and cosmopolitan. In paying attention to the processes the informants use to make sense of news, it shows how the informants discourses about themselves and their community alternate between dogmatic and closed discourses of thinking and arguing, reflecting tension between the self and the other and between the cosmopolitan and the national. In exploring the social uses of news, the thesis addresses the contexts within which news can enable or disable participation and social action, therefore drawing attention to the need for a differentiated understanding of the relationship between news and its audience, and between news and possibilities of citizenship.

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Chapter One

Introduction

As I started pulling this study together in November 2004, a critical event in the continuous narrative of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict hit the news headlines — the death of Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat on November 11. Journalists and politicians vied to find different interpretations to explain what was going on; to discuss the burning question of succession and hypothesise about the impact of Arafat's death on the intractable peace process between Israel and the Palestinians.

The political, national and international ramifications of this event are beyond the remit of this study, but the implications of this latest 'news event' for the Palestinians in Britain (the subjects of this study) and elsewhere are central to this inquiry, an exploration of the relationship between news narratives and discourses of identity. Just like the second Palestinian *intifada* (uprising) of September 2000 and the ensuing violence between Israel and the Palestinians; the September 11, 2001, attacks in the US; the 'war against terror' and the war in Iraq; the death of Arafat and the uncertainty it created served to bring the Palestinians in Britain and elsewhere into the public gaze while raising fresh questions about Palestinian-ness, what it means to be Palestinian.

Up until the second *intifada*, talk among the Palestinians in Britain about Palestinian-ness and its twin narrative Palestinian-ism (Palestinian national consciousness or nationalism) had been confined to their private, subjective sphere. This is a space where the Palestinians, much like other diasporic and migrant groups, talk and argue among

themselves about questions related to themselves, to their homeland and to the host country. However, this news event and others related to the ongoing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians opened questions about the relationship between this private space and the wider British space, where Palestinians in Britain have been expected to give considered arguments about issues of global concerns, about their affiliations and about their *points of reference* amid concerns about their loyalties and their political affiliations. What was significant in this context was how mainstream (mainly Western) news discourses and the meanings and representations generated and circulated by the local (British) media were perceived among the members of this diaspora to sustain relationships of domination and questions of othering.

Amid heightened tension and worries about the repercussions of terrorism, discourses about Israel's and the US's wars against 'terror' and the relationship between the Middle East, Islam and the West, the questions in the public domain were concerned with whether the pluralisation of 'publics', the public 'sphericules' that embody the particular interests of different social and cultural groups, may challenge the overall collective interests (cf. Gitlin 1998) of the nation-state. Such questions relating to Habermas' normative ideal of the public sphere have been central to contemporary debates on globalising and globalised media industries and on their real and perceived challenges to the old, taken-for-granted ways in which people thought of cultural and political spaces.

The narrative that unfolds in the following chapters does not specifically address the possibility of the existence of different 'publics', nor does it analyse the representations in news texts, concerns that have engaged media and cultural critics for the past few decades. Rather, it is concerned with an exploration of the social role of news and the

relationship between news and identity work. Yet, it was within contexts such as those mentioned above that I found myself addressing the central questions of this study: How do the Palestinians in Britain make sense of news? How do they appropriate the meanings of news in their daily lives? And, what are the implications of this appropriation to questions of inclusion and exclusion, recognition and invisibility in the wider social space they inhabit as well as to the understanding of power processes in societies?

1.1 Why News

The focus on news, rather than on media in general, is intentional. At the simplest level, news presents us with an ongoing narrative about the world beyond our immediate experience and from which we could draw our own cognitive maps of reality. Beyond this basic function, it is argued, one of the key tasks of journalism is to make information publicly available as this is one 'basic ingredient of the public sphere [...] required for public participation in discussion and decisions' (Jensen 1986:31).

However, a comprehensive, though by no means exhaustive, survey of the range of interdisciplinary literature on news, particularly political news, suggests that understanding the task of journalism in contemporary societies remains a 'grey' area, not the least because of the general confusion about the basic epistemological questions concerning how best to open up the debate over the meaning of news in societies. In political science scholarship, where inquiry into journalism is considered relevant to understanding the workings of the state and the functioning of political systems, inquiry has tended to address news as providing information and as serving a democratic function

(cf. Schudson 1995), and by implication, as a precondition for the political, economic and cultural participation of individuals at the local, national and global levels.

Given these normative assumptions, much of the literature discusses news in terms of its relationship to public opinion; to how and whether it makes people interested in politics and/or helps them make decisions as 'rational' (cf. Habermas 1989) citizens; what or who governs news values; the nature of news work and the dynamics of political information inherent in the texts, among other issues related to elections and voter interest. Most of these discussions are, to a certain extent, concerned with the question of effect, which remains one of the most outstanding conundrums in contemporary societies.

Of the main theoretical paradigms suggesting that media's and news' role in societies is essentially benevolent, i.e. having little social impact, is the 'uses and gratifications' approach, which, in simple terms, asserts that people use media to gratify their needs. Adopting a functional approach to how people use media, it shifted the question of media power from the media to the audience, overturning thinking of the much maligned effects model of media power, while raising a number of questions regarding human agency, and, more precisely, how people make sense of meaning in different ways. This functionalist approach contrasts with the 'agenda-setting' perspective of the relationship between media and the audience, which sees a '… causal relationship between the [journalistic] content of the media agenda and subsequent public perception of what important issues…are' (McCombs 1981: 211).

Critical theorists, building on Marxist and analytical frameworks of political economy have also challenged 'benign' views of news' influence, pointing out that journalism's function is essentially one of social reproduction that mostly caters for the dominant

groups and classes, while structuralists, such as van Dijk (1988), have argued that the linguistic structure of news puts the audience in a subordinate position vis-à-vis the dominant class of capitalist — these arguments regard ideology as produced in language. Critics of these latter positions (e.g. Scannell 1989), however, counter that such a framework is not only simplistic, but also repeats the early assumptions of the media effects tradition, which assumed a 'hypodermic needle' effect. Others, like Stuart Hall and Umberto Eco, point out that though dominant ideological messages are possible, there can be oppositional decodings by the audience members of the text.

1.2 Exploring the Audience for News

Drawing on these latter perspectives, audience and reception studies have provided crucial insights into how people, in their making sense of news, are involved in processes and patterns that have a bearing on their behaviour. However, the outcome has often been contradictory, confirming that trying to find a direct causal relationship between news and its audience remains a difficult, if not a contentious project. For example, while Cumberbatch et al.'s (1986) study of audience perceptions of the UK 1984-5 miners' strike showed that viewers were resistant to the dominant messages of the news, Philo's (1990) work claimed the opposite, seeing media as providing information that relates to people's beliefs, and Hall et al.'s *Policing the Crisis* (1978) showed that news organisations do not only report events, but are active agents in constructing the socio-political environment which frames these events in the public imagination. Furthermore, it has been difficult to

reach conclusive evidence over media's effect on people, particularly because, as several studies have shown, it is difficult to isolate media use from other social actions.

Broadly speaking, within cultural studies, a discipline that broadly informs this work, inquiry into news has moved in tandem with, but also in opposition to the pronounced and conventional understanding of how journalism works. Research has often focused on the meanings, symbols and symbolic systems, rituals and conventions by which journalists maintain their authority, moving beyond presumptions that journalism plays a "role everyone knows" of "afflicting the powerful...while comforting the afflicted" because it "severely limits ...what sorts of questions can be asked about the news media in our society" (Allan 1999: 2-3).

While early work within British cultural studies, such as the scholarship at the Centre for Contemporary and Cultural Studies in Birmingham, broadly based its groundwork on political news, producing a rich corpus of work, there has been a shift in recent inquiry to different dimensions of contemporary journalism, such as the tabloids, infotainment, the alternative media and the online format (e.g. Langer 1998; Sparks and Tulloch 2000), therefore providing a vision of journalism that is more focused on entertainment and personalisation of news, the human interest and the pleasurable, than on political news, while emphasising alternative lines of explanation that tend to eschew the mainstream dimensions of news that remain paramount in political and social life.

Indeed, the general bias in research that begins with the assumption that entertainment does not equate with information, though broadening the understanding of journalism beyond the particular loci in which it has traditionally been examined, has not helped offer answers about the potential social role of news, rather keeping the inquiry within what

Dahlgren (1992) has called a narrow 'metonymic' conception of journalism and of politics. What has added to the problem is the tendency within much of the literature to incorporate news in a taken-for-granted way in discussions of media in the broad sense, which Carey (cited in Zelizer 2004: 186) has taken issue with because "to confuse journalism with media or communication is to confuse the fish story with the fish."

Divisions over how to address journalism are not confined to the academy, but stretch across to debates within the profession itself. Here, however, the debates are of a different and more simplistic nature — many journalists and practitioners continue to resist introspection and reflexivity about their profession, remaining staunchly wedded to idealist notions that what they report on is the reality out there; to notions of objectivity and balance while opposing suggestions that they can serve the interests of the elite or powerful. These divisions have raised fresh questions over how to engage the epistemological uneasiness at the core of journalism and cultural studies in a way that maintains the integrity of both.

Though inquiries into this epistemological quandary, drawing on the methodological techniques of content and textual analysis and the parameters of production and constraints, have been made and used to good effect, I argue that a bottom-up approach, i.e. an audience study, can, too, provide a fresh understanding of the social meanings of news; why it remains central to some people's everyday lives and how they use it as a resource in their everyday social and cultural experiences and as a resource for identity and memory work.

Meaning-making takes on additional urgency because the proliferation of, and easy access, to transnational media, particularly news-focused satellite television targeting diasporic as well as national audiences, has not only challenged the dominance of the mainstream news media (such as the public service model in Europe), but also conventional

models about the power of news, such as the transmission model of communication. Indeed, it is the availability of different and often competing news narratives that call into question the prevalent understanding of news as providing and reproducing information, a function that has been seen as vital for the smooth running of democratic societies. And, it is both individual agency and cultural constraints that make it relevant to understand news, this thesis argues, as *cultural discourse* (cf. Dahlgren 1992*)*.

Understanding news as cultural discourse allows us to see - to borrow from Schudson (1995) – how news is related to, but is not the same as, ideology; is related to, but not the same as, information; and it is potentially, though only indirectly, a social force. Crucially, it draws attention to the ways in which the daily recurrence and the culturally recognisable features in news programmes can "link the viewer and his/her everyday life to the larger world in a manner which is ritualistic, symbolic and ultimately mythic" (Dahlgren 1992: 205). Significantly, such an understanding addresses how news is legitimised in people's lives through its use as ritual while allowing for an examination of its *potential* as a catalyst that may help shift people's thinking and talk about themselves and their communities.

These arguments necessitate an empirical investigation into how people talk of news and what this telling tells us about belonging and boundary-drawing and about the contemporary diasporic condition at a time of heightened physical and symbolic interaction. It is through such an exploration that we can address the implications for identity and citizenship of the complex processes of negotiating positions in the private and public spheres that 'transnational' communities, such as the Palestinians concerned in this study, are continuously engaging in.

1.3 Identity; why it matters

Academic concern with the concept of identity has a long history, which I will not detail here. Briefly, this concern derives from the exceptional plurality of the meanings of identity, meanings that are condensed and interwoven as the term circulates in everyday speech (Woodward 1997), and from its centrality in contemporary debates in cultural studies and social theory. Interest in de-constructing the term itself grew as scholarship began to associate the ways in which identities are constructed in response to, along with social, cultural and socio-economic factors, systems of representation. As defined by Hall (1997), representation refers to the signifying practices and symbolic systems through which meanings are produced and which position people as subjects. Thus, it seems logical to suggest that representation can have an impact on how people construct their identities and that symbolic products, including news, can help people find answers to the questions: 'Who am I? What could I be? And who do I want to be' (Woodward 1997:14).

As recent scholarship has attested, these questions are particularly poignant for diasporas, which, this thesis argues, are cultural, economic, political and social formations in the *process of becoming*, not being, which means they are responsive to 'media' representations and to local, global and international crises. By definition (see, e.g., Cohen 1997), diasporas are the product of economic, historical and political globalising conditions in the contemporary world, the result of power contestations and organisations of spatial and economic configurations. Because these conditions are mostly irreversible[1], diasporas are often taken to suggest a condition of permanence.

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[1] This, however, does not mean that diasporas cannot reverse the process, as has been the case, to some degree, with the Jewish and Armenian diasporas.

However, this does not mean they are stable, arrived at, cultures.Indeed, the opening paragraphs in this chapter show how diasporic groups, such as the Palestinians', can be subjected to ruptures caused by real political and social events that are mediated by a wide array of news media and how these mediated events can serve to jolt memories.

Writing in the journal *Diaspora* on the historical rise and fall of Armenian diaspora centres, Tolyalan (2000), points to these very ruptures in noting how this particular history has been marked by expulsions, on the one hand, and by periodic consolidations of new diasporic centres, on the other, therefore contributing to what he calls a transition in the understanding of this culture from an exilic to diasporic transnationalism. Seen differently, one can view this history as one marked by movements or alternations between alienation and consolidation, exile and peaceful sojourning (Werbner 2002). She writes:

> During periods of consolidation, diasporas not only prosper, but establish powerful transnational organisations and community institutions. This long and complex history means that at any one time, dominant, emergent and dying diaspora communities co-exist simultaneously in different parts of the world, some in a state of ascendancy and some in decline. (Werbner 2002: 9-10)

In fact, as she points out, members of a 'self-defined' diasporic community may be so assimilated into the host country that they retain mere vestiges of difference, in the form of a totem identity — like a flag or a picture of the homeland — put in a special place to maintain the 'national imagery' or to flag it when support of the country of origin or the collective cause is mobilised. Yet, at the same time, they are materially embodied social

formations, requiring an enormous investment of time, money and labour if they are to be effective as political and cultural actors in societies.

Exploring the relationship between media, in their broad sense, and identity is not a new question. Indeed, an examination of the relevant literature shows that such inquiries had been at the centre of debates within the media effects tradition, in feminist literature and in critical cultural studies, since before Benedict Anderson's (1983) widely acclaimed seminal work *Imagined Communities* drew attention to the role of print capitalism in the emergence of the modern nation state, and on which much subsequent work on the nature of the relationship between media and the ways in which people may imagine themselves as members of a national community has been modelled. In his alluring intellectualisation of the meaning of nations and national identities, Anderson writes:

> [A nation is] an imagined political community — and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of the fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communication (Anderson 1983:6).

Though Anderson's theorisation has been the subject of much critique, it remains central to debates on media and identity if only because it serves to highlight the relevance of symbolic products, including media's, in a world in which communities are increasingly becoming, if not wholly de-territorialised, at least differently territorialised, and where both communities and communications are no longer bounded in singular places or spaces and distinct cultures. In fact, although the movement of people and dispersal of

populations are not new phenomena — people have been on the go for centuries — the

increasing fluidity of borders and the widespread production and consumption of

different symbolic products, including media products, have allowed the local/the

national and transnational/global to actively interweave in emerging multi- and de-

centred cultural spaces (cf. Morley and Robins 1995), processes that have preoccupied

recent scholarship concerned with belonging, identity and community.

Nowhere have these concerns been more pressing to address than in scholarship on

migrant and diasporic groups, where the flurry of academic work reflects, on the one

hand, the growing significance of global and transnational processes in the post-modern

world and, on the other hand, the profound sense in which the acceleration of

globalisation processes, and improvements in communication technologies, have

challenged fundamental assumptions about space, culture and identity.

Broadly speaking, scholarship has looked into the ways in which the production, use

and readings of 'media' representations can play a role in constructing and defining,

contesting and reconstituting national, 'ethnic' and other cultural identities (Gillespie

1995) as well as into how media[2] can affirm social and cultural diversity while providing

cultural spaces in and through which 'imposed' identities or interests of others can be

contested and challenged (Cottle 2000). Such challenges and contestations have been

addressed in recent, mostly ethnographic reception studies on diasporic communities,

where the focus has centred on diasporic (ethnic) or transnational media because, as

Riggins (1992) and Husband (1994) propose, these can become powerful mouthpieces of

the communities they represent, create powerful images of self-representation for the

group and in their communal consumption can sustain a sense of 'ethnic' commonality

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[2] I use the word media in their broader sense, i.e. one that encompasses different forms of communications.

(Georgiou 2001). There has also been a growing body of work on transnational communications within diasporic and cultural studies where arguments abound on how new technologies can make possible connections that transcend distance and space as developments in media minimise the relevance of geo-political borders and of spatial and temporal boundaries.

The consensus within academia about the significance of these new connections has spurred fresh inquiry into movements across space and time, Appadurai's ethnoscapes (1991), as well as into novel hybrid, complex 'third spaces' of cultural practice and identifications, or what Annabelle Srebreny (2000) calls a significant third space of globalised diasporic connections and global diasporic consciousness, or transnationalism. Much like the concept of globalisation, the term transnationalism has become a buzzword in public and academic discourses. Like globalisation, it remains poorly defined, variously evaluated and debated, which partly reflects a lack of consensus on what it actually means. However, some of its core characteristics, which are of interest to this study, can be identified; these are the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and their places of settlement.

Since the 1980s, much of the inter-disciplinary literature on the relationship between globalisation processes and, in particular, national identities, has drawn on two diametrically situated theoretical perspectives, at the heart of which has been the debate about the integrity of the nation-state and the continued relevance of nationalism. The first is the 'hegemony approach' which sees globalisation as predominant and homogenising in its effect, therefore reducing national influences (e.g. Hall 1991;

Herman and McChessney 1997); and the second is the 'heterogeneity approach' which maintains that national dimensions remain paramount and that nations remain central to media cultures and policies (e.g. Curran and Park 2000).

Though there has been a tendency in scholarship on different media cultures and diasporas, whom Dayan (1998) has called the 'imagined communities par excellence', to focus on nation-centric explanations, there is a growing recognition that new forms of affiliations that transcend the nation and yet do not threaten the nation are contributing to the emergence of intersecting affiliations and loyalties, local, global, regional and religious. What this means – and this is the approach followed in this study — is that we need to integrate the above-mentioned two paradigms and discuss them as overlapping, particularly because the contemporary media ecology means that people are subjected to a two-way process, from within the nation and from without the nation.

Generally speaking, within the cultural studies agenda, inquiry into the relationship between the nation and media has been concerned with the text and image, focusing on how the nation is narrated in texts, particularly television texts, because they are seen as containers of meanings, symbols, images, landscapes and rituals which give meaning to the nation (Hall 1992). Reception studies, often drawing on Hall's encoding/decoding model of communication (1980), have complemented these approaches, contributing to a differentiated understanding of the audience as active and critical (e.g. Morley 1980; Ang 1996; Livingstone 1998).

Various empirical and theoretical studies have evolved over the past three decades in which the audience has been addressed in different, and more positive, terms, not only as active, but also as creative and oppositional. Some of these studies have examined the

reception of media texts within national contexts and across borders (e.g. Miller 1992), arguing that the impact of media messages on audiences depends on reception contexts and the different resources of the receivers, while others have examined media production processes, drawing on the theoretical assumptions of the political economy tradition (e.g. Herman and McChessney 1997; Thussu 2000) as well as social organisational approaches to media production. The ever growing debate over approaches to the audience underscores that the audience is, explicitly or latently, the linchpin for research on media influence.

1.4 The proposal

It was within these broad intellectual frameworks that this research was born and grew — an exploration into the ways in which members of the Palestinian diasporic community in Britain make sense of the different representations and meanings of varied news narrations in their everyday lives and what this means for their negotiation of identity, belonging and participation in public life. What intrigued me from the start were questions related to social processes in societies in the broad sense and the power of news in the narrow sense — I was chiefly interested in how and whether news media can empower communities by creating powerful representations of the group (Riggins 1992; Husband 1994; Dayan 1998), therefore playing a role in maintaining cultural and political particularity, and whether it could be a catalyst for participation in or withdrawal from public life.

My original intention was to address these concerns by exploring the relationship

between 'transnational'[3] news media and people's talk and perceptions of identity,

expanding on the work of, among others, Marie Gillespie (1995), Hamid Naficy (1999)

and Myria Georgiou (2001) within the strand of ethno-cultural studies. However, the

more I probed these questions, the more aware I became that focusing on one aspect of

the globalisation process, such as transnational news media, was not enough to address

the main concern of this research, particularly as the informants, members of the

Palestinian diasporic community in Britain, had access to and engaged with different and

diverse news media, including mainstream media, such as the BBC and CNN, and

transntional news media, such as *al-Jazeera*. Indeed, it is precisely in discussing the

tensions that arise around the informants' engagement with diverse news narratives, both

local and transnational, that my own concerns are situated: What are the implications of

these negotiations for questions of community and belonging? And what are their

implications for notions of Palestinian-ness (Palestinian identity) and Palestinian-ism

(national consciousness)? How do Palestinians in Britain use these different and polarised

cultural references and positionings in their daily lives and social encounters? In other

words, how does this 'transnational' news audience take positions through its

engagement with national, transnational/global and host country news narratives and

what are the consequences of this negotiation for social action and interaction and for

understanding the power of news in societies? My inquiry hence shifted from a focus on

ethnic and/or diasporic news-producing media and its potential role in the emergence of a

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[3] Apart from *al-Quds* newspaper, a London-based Arabic-language daily, the Palestinians in Britain do not
have their own diasporic media, i.e. media produced in the diasporic space.

'diasporic consciousness' to an inquiry into the informants' social uses of news, irrespective of which news media they consume.

The case study (the Palestinians in Britain) was selected out of a set of personal and theoretical perspectives. As an 'exemplary community of the transnational moment' (cf. Toloyan 1996:4), the Palestinians in Britain are an ideal subject of a research study of this kind; first, the (at the time of writing) unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to attract worldwide political attention as well as media coverage; second, the Palestinians in Britain have remained largely excluded from this drama[4]; and third, because the reach and immediacy of the global and transnational news media means that the Palestinians in Britain are largely focused around this drama, whether out of choice or not.. It is precisely the informants' intense focus on the continuous news drama and their constant contrasting between diverse news narrations framed according to different cultural perspectives that bring to the open tensions of belonging and community.

In the interviews carried out as part of the fieldwork for this study, hardly a conversation with the informants was started without some reference to the unfolding events from the 'homeland' and their repercussions at home and elsewhere. The implications of this intense focus on news to questions of belonging, identity and nation are not difficult to assess, but, as this thesis will argue, these implications go further than notions suggesting the emergence of 'an imagined community', and its implied arrived-at ending point and its implied homogeneity. Indeed, as this thesis will show, the informants' discourses suggest they are involved in continuous negotiations of

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[4] There is very little mention of the Palestinians in Britain in the host country media. Furthermore, they remain neglected in the Palestinian national discourse about dispossession and exile.

positionings between what it means to be Palestinian and what it means to be cosmopolitan in the diasporic space.

In designing the parameters for this study, I was conscious that the theoretical and methodological arguments used in framing of this research had to be reflexive enough to assess what is interesting and unique about the Palestinians, about their engagement with news and about their experiences as members of a 'complex'[5] diaspora in the era of expanded communication networks and possibilities. It was with these considerations in mind that I set forth to explore these notions by investigating, through an audience study as well as a critical engagement with the relevant literature (on news, identity, diaspora, collective memory and nationalism within and across disciplines) the implications for identity, for belonging and for community of the Palestinians' interaction with the continuous news events, the news events that have *engaged most* [6] Palestinians since the second *intifada* in September 2000.

The fieldwork comprised semi-structured interviews with a diverse sample of Palestinian individuals, households and groups in greater London and Manchester. The arguments presented in this thesis are a result of a synthesis of the empirical work and existing theorisation around the key concepts proposed, an approach that is essential in a thesis of this kind, where the aim is not to supplant old or 'inadequate' concepts with new ones, but rather at thinking with and through them.

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[5] Chapter Four will explain show that the Palestinians are not only a victim diaspora (see Cohen 1997) as the reasons for migration include trade and education.

[6] It would be presumptuous to assume that all Palestinians are engaged with the news story. Working from a perspective that all do implies a homogeneity and a uniform identity that runs counter to the fundamental questions related to the negotiation of identity in diaspora.

The rationale behind the methodological impetus relates to the investigation of the social uses of news, particularly in the contemporary media environment characterised by 24-hour live coverage of events and by competing narratives and representations of the same event. By addressing these concerns, I will show how we can understand news, not only as information or as a forum for discussions about the public good, but also as *cultural discourse* that serves to confirm people's beliefs about themselves through its appropriation as ritual, through its narrative structures and through its mediation of the past in the present, all of which are important for identity work.

The analysis of the interview material will show that the discursive taking up of different positionings relates to how the informants' uses of news draws on their 'worldview', which, according to Wallace (as cited in M. Ayish 2003), refers to the fundamental and subjective assumptions of a people about the nature of the world, as expressed in their philosophy, ethics, ritual and scientific belief. In similar vein, Peter Dahlgren (2003) uses the notion of 'civic culture' to refer to the "dispositions, practices and processes that constitute pre-conditions for people's actual participation in the civil and political society" (2003: 154), while noting that such dimensions as meaning, identity and subjectivity are important elements that remain relevant to explaining how people participate in public life. These two concepts - worldview and civic culture - serve to define peoples' dispositions and practices from inside rather than outside culture.

The analysis of the fieldwork explores how and whether the informants' engagement with the news narrative related to the conflict with Israel enables them to be reflexive about their worldviews and ideologies and about their identity beyond the constraints of Palestinian-ness (what it means to be Palestinian) and Palestinian-ism (Palestinian national

consciousness). Most of the informants describe themselves as British, Moslem Palestinians/Palestinian Moslems, Arab Palestinians/Palestinian Arabs, British Palestinians, or just Palestinians, but almost all say they *feel* Palestinian. Furthermore, theirs is by no means a homogeneous community.[7] Cross-cutting differences reflected in the gender, generational and religious diversity of the sample, variations in the patterns of migration and socio-economic status (some are economic migrants while others are recent political asylum seekers), differences in their place of residence in the UK, their status in the host country, their level of integration and their mastery of the English language, mean we cannot assume that there is a neat equation between identity and community.

The analysis will also show how the informants' uses of news provides them with the possibilities of acting and/or imagining situations where they can act mostly because of a sense of co-responsibility to similar others, but also as citizens of the wider social space they inhabit, bringing into attention conflicts of identification in an increasingly mediated world and the continued interplay between the personal and the political, between individual and collective memory and between Palestinian-ism and cosmopolitanism. I will show how the informants' discourses alternate between particularistic imaginings of what it means to be Palestinian and what it means to be cosmopolitan[8] as they negotiate diverse foci of identifications, negotiations that reflect the co-existence in tension of open and closed discourses about themselves and others. I will also show that their discourses about what it means to be Palestinian and what it means to feel Palestinian do not suggest a homogeneous

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[7] I will validate these points in the analysis of the fieldwork.
[8] Hannerz (1990) defines a cosmopolitan as someone open to divergent cultures and tolerant of diversity, making a useful distinction between cosmopolitan and transnational, where the latter refers to people who sustain their home culture away from home.

'we' – this comes across in the different ways in which the informants talk about and imagine themselves to be Palestinian.

In exploring their social uses of news, I will reflect on the need for a differentiated understanding of the news audience and of the understanding of news as a resource for the 'rational' citizen. Crucially for this investigation, I will show that access to diverse mediated information can enable participation in social life, though this may fall short of an active polity necessary for full citizenship and political engagement.

At this point, it is necessary to re-focus attention on the central question of this research study: the relationship between news narrations and identity construction. In doing so, I set out several starting points that frame and come out of this research. First; that identity is not a thing, but a short-hand description for ways of talking about the self and community, which means it is socially constructed. The second starting point draws on the theoretical framework of mediation to contextualise the relevance of news in people's lives, both as ritual that orders their activities and connects their world and as narrative that mediates the past in the present. Situating news as part of the overall processes of mediation[9] moves attention from the transmission to the ritual model of communication and, as I will argue, provides the context towards understanding news as *cultural discourse.*

These notions provide the theoretical framework for the analysis of the Palestinians' daily reality in Britain, a framework that emphasises that social terms we use and take for granted — identity, diaspora, community, memory and tradition — are the products of ongoing debates or political struggles or alliances. Such social terms have been difficult for the Palestinians under study to come to terms with not only because of the lack of a

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[9] This is extensively discussed and examined in Chapter Three where various frames traditionally used to explain news are examined and contested.

homeland political structure and its mediating frameworks that normally allow people to reinforce, inspire and build on their individual and collective memories, but also because these memories have for long been overshadowed by a powerful counter-narrative[10] that had, until recently, a wide and receptive international audience. These arguments are developed in several subsequent chapters, but particularly in Chapters Seven and Eight, in which I present the analysis of the informants' attitudes to news, to identity and community that unravels broader processes of contestation and power struggles in their discourses about themselves and their community. The analysis shows how the personal becomes political and how the divide between the intimate and public spaces can become blurred.

The narrative that unfolds in subsequent chapters is a compilation of two narratives; the first is the story of the Palestinian diaspora in Britain as represented in their own talk about themselves, their community and their lives; and the second is my own interrogation of the literature on news, nationalism, diaspora, identity, globalisation and collective memory. Chapter Two argues for a differentiated understanding of the relationship between media and identity that draws on the conceptual framework of 'identification as discourse'; Chapter Three situates the proposed understanding of news as cultural discourse within the theoretical framework of mediation that emphasises news' centrality in people's lives; Chapter Four tells the story of the Palestinian diaspora and the significance of 'news' events to Palestinian collective memory, identity and national consciousness; Chapter Five presents the methodological impetus for this research while critically engaging with audience reception research and its developments.

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[10] Until recently, the Israeli government, with the support of some scholars, claimed that Palestinian refugees left their homes as a result of orders given by Arab and Palestinian leaders.

Chapter Six provides a demographic breakdown of the informants and a description of

the groups, households and individuals that took part in the research. Chapters Seven and

Eight present the analysis of the interview material and Chapter Nine details this research

study's arguments, summing up the debates and ideas forwarded in this thesis and

emphasising its contribution to the field of cultural studies.

Chapter Two

Identification: Between the Personal and Political

This chapter draws on relevant scholarship in arguing for a differentiated understanding

of the theorisation of the relationship between media and identity that can help account

for the role of news in the negotiation of identities. The proposed understanding draws on

Hall's (1996) theoretical framework of 'identification as discourse', which sees identity

construction as a process and identity as 'becoming', not 'being' and as constructed

across different intersection and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions.

In this sense, what matters is not who we are or where we came from but what we

might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might

represent ourselves, therefore drawing attention to the continuous negotiations of tensions

between the self and the other and between personal and collective identity. These

tensions are crucially related to notions of recognition/non-recognition and

belonging/non-belonging, which have been rendered problematic by the social changes of

globalisation processes and the increasing mediation of everyday life. Central to such an

understanding is the conceptualisation of identity as a discursive social construction,

therefore acknowledging the multiple meanings and continuous contestation in its

negotiation. What this means is that people's reflections on and talk about their identities

can oscillate between open discourses about oneself or the group to ones that are more

closed and essentialising.

Talking of identities as constructed is not original; neither is the notion of identity construction and negotiation as a process, of becoming, not being. However, the significance of this conceptual framework for this study and similar others, is that it pushes onto the agenda the tense and dialectical relationship between the personal and the collective. Though it has not been fashionable to talk of the 'politics of the collective' or 'identity politics' in post-modern scholarship — this is often associated with ideas of particularistic (ethno) nationalisms and with essentialist views of identity or because it denies personal or individual agency — this study argues that it merits attention.

Attention is merited because identities are not only constructed by individuals' agency, as understood in the Western perspective, but are also formed through interactive relations among actors within historically and symbolically constituted contexts and social structures, including global media. The idea here is not to deny individual agency and reflexivity, nor is it to argue for rigid and static identities. Rather, the intention is to take into consideration the specific historical and cultural contexts that may impinge on or constrain the ways in which individuals and groups construct their identities. This understanding is particularly relevant in theorising diasporas, such as the Palestinians, for whom the global and the national are constantly interacting and interweaving through movement and through the consumption of various symbolic material, including news (which itself is both a product and agent of globalisation) and for whom the diasporic condition means a continuous negotiation of parameters of belonging and citizenship.

The proposed direction is a result of a synthesis of existing theorisation on identity and the relationship between media and identity and, importantly, the empirical work undertaken for this project. The chapter begins by placing the overall thesis in the context

of similar academic inquiry, then goes on to discuss the key theories concerned with the relationship between media and identity.

2.1 The Context

Much of the scholarship on the relationship between media and identity stems from the widely held, but contested, beliefs that media systems perform a crucial role in the public representation of unequal social relations and the play of cultural power. And much of the debate concerning these questions has focused on the ways in which media could influence the ways in which identities are constructed and contested, with empirical inquiry taking a top-down or bottom-up approach, or a combination of the two.

Indeed, it has been argued that media's role in the negotiation of identity is related to the ways in which the production, reading and use of media representations plays a key role in constructing and defining, contesting and reconstituting national, 'ethnic' and other cultural identities (Gillespie 1995) as well as to the ways in which media can serve to affirm social and cultural diversity and provide cultural spaces in and through which imposed identities or interests of others can be resisted and challenged (Cottle 2000).

Representation, as defined most clearly by Hall (1997), refers to the signifying practices and symbolic systems through which meanings are produced and which provide people with a sense of who they and some significance to their experiences. In other words, representations refer to the signs and symbols that are claimed to represent some aspect of reality, such as objects, people, groups, places, events, social norms, cultural identities and so on. For Hall, "representation is an essential part of the process by which

meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture" (1997: 15).

Therefore, representations are significant in understanding the ways in which discourse,

which refers to a "set of statements or beliefs which produce knowledge..." (Hall

1992:292) and through which a society makes sense of its own structures and processes,

can operate through them, thus linking issues of the social and the material with the

different forms of representation: the narratives, images and forms which render the

world meaningful.

This conceptualisation of the relationship between discourse and representation makes

it easy to see why representation has assumed such importance in the field of media and

cultural studies, where, broadly speaking, two main contrasting approaches to its role in

people's lives and cultures have taken central stage. The first approach argues that

meaning is always inherent in objects themselves, as naturally given, and that "language

functions like a mirror, to reflect the true meaning as it already exists in the world" (Hall

1997: 24), and the second constructivist approach stresses that meaning is always socially

constructed, thereby enabling communication, as it works according to a common

socially constructed meaning. Hence, "meaning is the result, not of something fixed out

there, in nature, but of our social, cultural and linguistic conventions, [...] meaning can

never be finally fixed. (ibid: 23) What this latter approach suggests is that the processes

through which meanings are created and appropriated are changeable, continuous, and

contested (my emphasis).

Nowhere are these contestations more urgent to deal with than in discussions of

migrant and diasporic groups, whose everyday experiences are becoming more complex

as developments in new communication technologies, from and of their putative

homelands, are blurring once familiar lines between 'here' and 'there', creating what Robin Cohen (1994) describes as 'diasporic allegiances' — a proliferation of transnational identities which cannot be easily contained in the nation-state system. At the same time, these developments are accelerating processes of cultural change, allowing for the construction of boundaries that may exclude others.

Although people, including diasporic and migrant communities, have always relied on some form of cross-border networking to maintain systems of ties among their various members and with the homeland, the speeding up of time-space compressions (Harvey 1989) has had profound effects on how these connections are maintained. Indeed, there is a sense that migrants are developing 'transcultural' characteristics that confound the old models of belonging and loyalty (which are built around ideas of homeland and space), opening the door for contested loyalties and interpretations and posing questions about the homogenising role of globalisation processes. While the lamentation about the loss of cultural distinctiveness and the possibility that people may have contested loyalties, where media have been largely put to task, is pervasive in the literature, there are some within the academy who credit new 'media' technologies with the creation of infinite possibilities for people's identities (see, for example, Turkle 1996) or with enhancing 'national unity' at a symbolic level (Morley and Robins 1995).

The examination of the role of media and new technologies in enhancing this 'symbolic' unity within national and global contexts has been a popular field of study, often building on Anderson's (1983) notion of the nation as an 'imagined community'. Rath (1988), for instance, has argued that audience engagement with radio or television offers the sense of participation in a (domesticated) national community, while Scannell

has proposed that the British public service broadcasting model has created the space for a contemporary public sphere, contributing to the democratisation of everyday life (1989). Ang (1990), too, has noted that the "transnational communication system...offers opportunities of new forms of bonding and solidarity, new ways of forging cultural communities" (1990:252) and Martin-Barbero (1993) has stressed the role of media in the emergence of collective identities and a sense of the nation in Latin America.

Recent scholarship on diasporic and ethnic media[1] draws on these arguments to advance views that transnational communications and diasporic media could help create new communities, or reconstruct and maintain already established but somehow fragile or imperiled communities — such as minority groups, exilic groups and diasporas (see Dayan 1998). In fact, a growing body of work on transnational communications has shown how new media technologies make possible new connections among dispersed communities as such developments (Clifford 1997) reduce the importance of geo-political borders and spatial and temporal boundaries, sometimes threatening the vitality and significance of national cultures, while at the same time highlighting the complexity of diaspora cultures.[2]

This understanding has spurred a growing interest in diasporic media which have been seen as enabling new means of bonding among dispersed people, therefore contributing to notions suggesting the emergence of a consciousness of community, which typically refers to the belief or feeling that members of the same communities

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[1] The exploration of the relationship between media and identity is not exclusive to diasporic and migrant studies. In fact, feminist scholarship — along with cultural studies particularly concerning race — has been central to the highlighting of the importance of examining the interaction between a text and its consumption (for example, see Radway's 1984 seminal work on the reading practices of women consumers of romantic fiction)

[2] Some other arguments have highlighted the challenges the Internet has posed to traditional constructs such as voice, community and identity (Mitra 2001).

living across nations belong to one community and to the real or 'imagined' homeland. These media (Riggins 1992; Husband 1994) can become powerful mouthpieces of the communities they represent and can create powerful images of self-representation for the group and in their communal consumption can sustain a sense of ethnic commonality (Georgiou 2001).

Dayan (1998), in particular, has emphasised the importance of analysing the role of these media as instruments of survival for endangered cultures and for ensuring the maintenance of links within geographically dispersed groups. It is in such contexts, he argues, that minority media can become symbols of empowerment because they communicate symbols of community and mediate a group's participation in the host country's public sphere, in the public sphere of the country of origin as well as in 'transnational' public spheres.

Though studies of diasporic and minority media are relatively new, interrogation of media's impact on societies and people's behaviour began in earnest in the second half of the 20th century at a time when the 'effects' tradition and its sweeping assumptions about media's powerful and direct effects on societies and audiences dominated the research agenda. Though largely discredited because of its neglect of audiences and its support for the hypodermic 'transmission' model of media, this tradition continues to provide a compelling framework for much work in the field, and largely informs one of the two major competing paradigms that have dominated the literature on the relationship between media and identity, and in particular, national identity.

This paradigm sees national media as forging national culture and contributing to the formation of national identities, thus posing itself as diametrically opposed to the second

paradigm, which suggests that the diversity of media and the increased access to foreign sources of information weaken or threaten national identity[3]. It would be simplistic to suggest that work within these traditions is uniform. Research is varied[4] and results are not homogeneous. What inform both paradigms, however, are the 'powerful' discourses of globalisation (cf. Tomlinson 1999), and the ways in which globalisation processes have challenged and contested the ways in which nations are imagined and constructed. Before I turn to the key debates on globalisation, I first examine the relevant scholarship on the relationship between media and mostly national identity.

2.2 Media and National Identity

Although German scholar Karl W. Deutsch advanced a theoretical link between media and (national) identity as early as 1966, the literature on this relationship is relatively new. In his theoretical work *Nationalism and Social Communication* (1966), Deutsch made a critical observation about the interplay between national identity and mass communication systems, arguing that communication should be understood as an increasingly sustained mode of being that integrates a given people and provides it with singularity. His argument suggests that national communities are strongly bounded by their socially communicative structures of information and that members of a nation are united by more intensive social communications and are linked to centres by an unbroken chain of connections in communications.

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[3] These paradigms have also been explained as strong media/weak audiences and weak media/strong audiences, but these explanations are too simplistic.

[4] Some theorists (for example McLuhan 1964) have focused on media as technologies to explore their role in nation building, while others have stressed the relevance of media for the maintenance and reproduction of the nation (Billig 1995; Morley and Brundson 1999).

In most of the nationalism literatures, culture has been, until recently, seen as the most relevant 'variable' that may influence the emergence of nationalistic feelings within the nation-state context. Ernest Gellner, for example, saw state and culture as linked (1983) and understood culture, used in an anthropological rather than a normative sense, to mean 'the distinctive style of conduct and communication of a given community' (1983:92). This notion is clear in his work on nationalism, where he proposes that culture is a distinctive style of conduct and *communication* (my emphasis) of a given community. Culture, for those participating in modern nation-states, is 'the necessary shared medium' (Gellner 1983:37-8). However, in his account of the rise of nations and nationalism, Gellner also credits the mass media for the spread of nationalist ideas:

> The media do not transmit an idea that happens to have been fed into them. It matters precious little what has been fed into them; it is the media themselves, the pervasiveness and the importance of abstract, centralized one-to-many communication, which itself automatically engenders the core idea of nationalism quite irrespective of what in particular is being put into the specific messages transmitted. The most important and persistent message is generated by the medium itself, by the role which such media have acquired in modern life. The core message is that the language and the style of the transmissions is important [...] what is actually said matters little (Gellner 1983:127).

This account of the role of the media in the rise of nations and nationalism seems to echo McLuhan's notion of the media as the message, and has been attacked for being too deterministic because as Schlesinger (1991) argues, Gellner's theorisation of national identity and the media does not contain an account of the active construction of collective identity or the processes involved in that construction.

In recent years, the conceptualisation of the nation as a social construction of meanings has become more common as scholars of ethnicity and nationalism began to deconstruct the concepts of nation and national identity through the study of shared symbols, values, discourses and memories that appear to link people within a 'national' community together (see for e.g. Anderson 1983, Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Billig 1995). However, it was not until Anderson's influential work *'Imagined Communities'* (1983) that academic interest in the role of media in the formation of national identities took off in a serious way, though he also focused on the medium itself rather than the message.

Using a historical perspective, Anderson argued that print capitalism was instrumental in forging the 'imagined community' of the nation while noting that the changed relations of time and space brought about by the Industrial Revolution, especially by print media, contributed to a heightened awareness of 'the steady, anonymous, simultaneous' experience of communities of readers. He wrote:

> The convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human
> language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its
> basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation …(Anderson 1991:46)

However, his crucial contribution to contemporary thinking about the rise of nationalism was his notion of 'community' as a state of mind, or an imagination. "All communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are not to be distinguished by their falsity/genuineness, but by

the style in which they are imagined." (Anderson 1983: 5-7) Though notions of a

community as being not a 'thing' in itself, but a way of speaking, and thinking about

others who are the same, has been a characteristic of oral and literate societies,

Anderson's work shifted the focus to how particular systems of communication that

characterise societies with popular literacy enable the 'imagined' population of the

'imagined' community to be extended far beyond the boundaries of the knowable or face-

to-face community of societies where oral communication is the norm.

Anderson's work has inspired much research on the ways in which nations and

communities are imagined. For example, Scannel and Cardiff (1987) extended this

argument to address the ways in which broadcast news can bring about simultaneous

national experiences, while Morley and Brundson in their *Nationwide* television study

(1978; 1999) argued that such programmes can contribute to the daily construction and

reconstitution of nationalism and national identities[5]. Dayan and Katz (1992), in their

seminal work on 'media events' examined how such mediated events can enhance the

sense of belonging to a wider community. In *"Media Events: the Live Broadcasting of*

History", they emphasise the ways in which these events integrate society, affirm its

common values, legitimate its institutions and reconcile different sectional elements.

Many of the special media events[6] they mention evoke a liminal sense of togetherness as

well as the celebration of a shared sense of purpose and value, thus serving as episodes in

the history of the nation state and in the relations between states, nations and people.

Media events, therefore, can provide the cultural grounds for attachment to the 'imagined

[5] Chapter Four details various academic discourses on national identity.
[6] These include the Olympic Games, Queen Elizabeth II's coronation and the assassination of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat.

communities' and update the 'invented traditions' proposed by British nationalism and history scholar Eric Hobsbawn (1983).

Despite its popularity, Anderson's theory has been criticised for being materially and technologically deterministic, particularly for his assumption that the text as a technological commodity helps the construction of the nation and for his assuming a common end product, a common national identity for the people under investigation. Other criticisms were voiced against his giving too much weight to the power of nationally structured communications systems. Schlesinger, for example, says one shortcoming that Anderson's theory shares with Gellner's model "is conflated with the analytically separate question of how a national culture is continually redeveloped and how the contours of national identity are ... drawn" (1991:165).

That said, Anderson's theorisation is more than trivial as it draws attention to the ways in which people can constitute their own subjectivities through identification with different scenarios set out in the text. By projecting that constituted subjectivity onto others also believed to be engaging with the text, the reader can imagine a collectivity of persons with positions like himself/herself in relation to the concerns set out in the text. In other words, the reader does not 'find' a national or collective identity through imagining thousands or millions of others doing the same thing; rather, this identity is constituted by discovering a set of concerns he or she recognises as his or her own within a text or texts.[7]

Scholarship within the globalisation literature, too, has built on the Andersonian approach. Using the same theoretical premises, some scholars have argued that global or transnational means of communication, such as satellite television and the Internet, are

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[7] This understanding is relevant for understanding the cognitive processes through which people make sense of media.

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helping migrant and diasporic communities feel a sense of belonging to one or more than one imagined community at the same time. For example, in tracing 'new patterns' in global media, John Sinclair and his co-authors note the emergence of what they call imagined diasporic communities which point to the re-stratification of audiences into imagined communities beyond national boundaries (Sinclair et al. 1996), while Portes et al. (1999) argue that migrants and diasporic groups, through a thick web of regular instantaneous communication and easy personal travel, are now routinely able to establish transnational communities that exist across two, or more, cultural spaces.

These studies, too, have come under fire for not grounding their assumptions in empirical evidence, for being too speculative and for implying that media are all-powerful, therefore re-affirming arguments espoused by the much-maligned tradition of the hypodermic model of media effects. The main criticism, however, was reserved for their assumptions that cultures and identities are complete and homogeneous and for ignoring the tensions between identity as singular, unitary and integral and identities as plural, cross-cutting and divided, which as Calhoun (1994) points out, is inescapable at both personal and collective levels. To better understand the relationship between globalisation processes, in which media are key institutions, and identity, I turn to the relevant literature on globalisation.

2.3 Globalisation and Identity

The term globalisation has been extensively employed in social sciences, economics and humanities to convey a growing sense of interconnectedness between different parts of

the world or a condition that describes the rapidly changing world. While processes of globalisation are diverse, there is a consensus that they have radically changed social interaction and relations, contributing to the distantiation of 'our experiences of time and space', as Giddens (1990) puts it, or the compression of spatial and temporal differences (Harvey 1989). In broad terms, globalisation concerns every aspect of life (Robertson 1992): at the level of 'national societies', individuals or selves, relations between national societies or the world system of societies and humankind.

However, the concept remains differently understood and hotly debated. While there is agreement that such a process is taking place, there is less agreement about what it actually is. This is largely because though one can see the changes the globalisation processes have brought to the operations of industry, finance, economy, policy, culture and media, globalisation processes are clearly are not only a material or tangible reality, but, as Silverstone (1999:144) argues, a 'state of mind'. In other words, we know we live in a global age and we know we have our own ideas of the world and our place in it. This psychological awareness of the world is enhanced by the dynamic flows of images, texts, sounds and graphics, via film and news, among other things, means that globalisation entails both an increased psychological awareness of other cultures as well as a much more immediate experience of the world.

Roughly speaking, two different historical perspectives are posed squarely against each other in the globalisation literature. The first perspective sees globalisation as representing a qualitatively new phase, while the second sticks to notions that the globalised world essentially reproduces the conditions that have been with us for centuries, though in a modernised form. Held (1998) has conveniently identified these

perspectives as two schools; the first is the hyper-globalisation school which sees

globalisation as fundamentally new; and the second is the sceptical school which sees

that there is nothing unprecedented about contemporary levels of international economic

and social interactions. These two schools are rooted in different definitions of modernity

and globalisation, both of which are seen as complex, multi-dimensional phenomena that

are inter-related in some ways, therefore making it reasonable to see globalisation as an

outcome of the universal logic of modernity (Featherstone 1995), a view more or less

shared by eminent sociologists such as Anthony Giddens. This view of globalisation as

an outcome of modernity, though implying historicity, plays down historical

communication and cultural exchanges before the technological revolutions of the 20th

century.[8]

The above discussion, though by no means inclusive or exhaustive, serves to highlight

the broad range of perspectives on globalisation processes. While it is difficult to agree

on a concrete meaning for globalisation, some of its aspects, particularly the 'dialectical'

processes' that characterise it, can be explored, therefore providing some direction about

the consequences of this phenomenon. Giddens (1990) sees these dialectical processes as

the "intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a

way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring miles away and vice versa [...]

this is a dialectical process because such local happenings may move in an obverse

direction from the very distantiated relations that shape them. Local transformation is as

much a part of globalisation as the lateral extension of social connections across space

and time"(Giddens 1990:64). 'Time-space distantiation' thus involves the disengagement

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[8] However, seen differently, history can offer us an insight of the relationship between modernity and globalisation. For instance, we can argue that colonialism and imperialism existed long before modern media of communication through the interaction with the early forms of media such as the telegraph.

of certain dimensions of experience from presence and place. "The sense of the familiar is often mediated by time-space distantiation. This is less a phenomenon of estrangement from the local than one of integration within globalised communities of shared experience...The newspaper and the sequence of TV programmes over the day are the most obvious concrete examples of this phenomenon" (ibid: 140).

Most modernisation and cultural globalisation theorists suggest that the 'globalisation of media' is a key dimension and factor in the globalisation process (e.g. Robertson 1992; Lash and Urry 1994). Since new and "intricate relations between global or multi-national space and local (national) space" (Morley and Robins 1995) seem to constantly grow, new information and communication technologies are said to play a powerful role in the emergence of new spatial structures, relations and orientations and the diminishing power of nation-states and consequently national identities.

While the communication of symbolic material in general, and news in particular, may include homogenising elements, such as for example the organisational aspects of news gathering and news values (see Chapter Three for details), this thesis argues that news events are framed according to different national, cultural and organisational strategies as news, though a global product, is produced within culture and nations, rather than beyond them[9]. What this suggests is that audiences, though receiving the same information, do not necessarily build up an identical stock of knowledge, confirming Thompson's (1995) view that although images of certain events may be presented worldwide, there is similarly a process in which "international images are interpreted differently in different social and cultural contexts" (1995:11) by the audiences as well as by media producers.

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[9] There are many studies that have examined the cultural differences that influence, in particular, production strategies. Among these is a recent study by Lisbeth Clausen (2003) on the domestication which builds on the notion of frame to describe how various news media frame their narrations of events.

Thompson's argument means there are different ways in which we (as people) can understand and see ourselves and the world, a view taken to the extreme by many post-modernist commentators (e.g. Hebdige 1989), who emphasise the pluralisation of sources of identity and imagined communities.

Arguments about how globalising and globalised media technologies are influencing the ways in which identities are constructed and contested in the post-modern world command the debates on the relationship between globalisation processes and societies, taking as a starting point the perceived shift and fragmentation of identities in modernity. As Stuart Hall notes:

> The old identities which established the social world for so long are in decline, giving rise to new identities and fragmenting the modern individual as a unified subject. This so-called crisis is seen as part of a wider process of change which is dislocating the central structures and processes of modern societies and undermining the frameworks which gave individuals stable anchorage in the social world. (Hall 1992:274)

For Hall, the changes in 'time-space' relationships within different systems of representations are having profound effects on how identities are located and represented (1992), resulting in the erosion, strengthening and the emergence of new identities or what he terms new ethnicities. Hall uses the term 'global-post-modern' to refer to a perceived breakdown of all established cultural identities, the fragmentation of styles, and to emphasise the fleeting aspects of contemporary culture, thus arguing: "The more social life becomes mediated by the global marketing of styles, images and places by globally networked media, the more identities become detached...from specific times, places, histories, traditions..." (Hall 1992:303)

This intellectualisation is replicated by others, though in different ways. Harvey (1989), for instance, notes that the time-space compression provoked by new media technologies has influenced the transmission of social values, meanings and identities, while Thompson (1992) argues that one of the characteristics of the post-modern era is the fragmentation, multiplicity, plurality and indeterminacy of social identities, processes that de Mercer (1990) explains as characteristic of what he calls the post-modern predicament of contemporary politics, whose key characteristics are "displacement, de-centring and disenchantment...the fragmentation of traditional sources of authority and identity, the displacement of collective sources of membership and belonging ..." (1990: 43). Somewhat echoing the Giddensian approach, he argues that one of the consequences of modernity is the separation of time and space from place that creates what he calls 'disembedded' social systems and the 'lifting out' of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space (ibid: 21).

Robins (1991), too, sees globalisation as involving what he calls an extraordinary transformation, where the old structures of national states and communities are breaking up and where there is an increasing "transnationalisation of economic and cultural life", therefore suggesting that globalisation involves the interaction between economic and cultural factors whereby changes in production and consumption patterns can produce shared identities. However, at the same time, the "... continuity and historicity of identity are challenged by the immediacy and intensity of global cultural confrontations. The comforts of tradition are fundamentally challenged by the imperatives to form a new self-interpretation based upon the responsibilities of cultural translation." (Robins 1991:41)

These challenges are felt most powerfully by diasporic groups, who, as Hall

(1992:308) argues, may make a strategic retreat to more defensive identities "[...] in

response to the experience of cultural racism". What this means is that identities can be

constructed in relation or reaction to various and different appropriations of meanings

within the local, global and transnational contexts, a process that Ronald Robertson

(1992) has called 'glocalisation'. This proposal transcends the rigid binary analyses of

globalisation which has obscured the actual interdependent of the majority and the

minority and of the local and the global for the construction of their meanings.

The proliferation of transnational symbolic material through a variety of communication

systems has provoked fresh inquiry into the perceived real and/or 'imagined' attachments by

migrants and diasporic groups to their homeland cultures, attachments that are seen as

denting their loyalty to host nations[10] while raising questions about normative assumptions

about multi-cultural citizenship in countries such as Britain. These concerns have been of

concern in the burgeoning diaspora scholarship, where such attachments have been

sometimes described as forms of transnationalism (Basch et al. 1992), a concept that broadly

referring to processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations

that link together their societies of origin and their place of settlement.

That said, reception studies have produced empirically-grounded evidence showing that

the general impact of globalisation processes, manifest in the increasing availability of

transnational media, and in particular satellite television, is highly contradictory, as different

groups respond in different ways to the opening up of new possibilities and positions of

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[10] This type of discourse was particularly prominent after the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United
States, which were seen as a good example of the dominant discourses of transnationalism. Here, the term
transnationalism (referring to the global reach of militant Islam) was seen to have extended nationalism in
new ways, producing exclusionist discourses.

identification. It is with these notions in mind that I turn to the key theoretical paradigms on

the relationship between media and identity in the globalisation literature.

2.4 The Local and the Global

Scholarship about the relationship between the globalisation of media, and particularly

television, on societies and identities can be divided into two broad camps. Proponents of

the first camp, the media imperialism theory (e.g. Herman and McChesney 1997), argue

that the global flow of electronic media outputs leads to increased uniformity and the

demise of cultural diversity. Put differently, this view sees television as destroying

people's sense of locality, contributing to a cultural detachment from community and

place and the homegenisation[11] of cultures (see Meyrowitz 1985).

Countering this view is the cultural globalisation position that sees television as a

device to resist globalisation, paying particular attention to the manner in which this

medium may uphold national cultures (e.g. Curran and Park 2000). Both approaches

provide reasonable evidence to support their claims about the effects of the processes of

globalisation on societies and on identities. However, the technological advances

achieved in the latter part of the 20th century, and in particular, the emergence of satellite

television, have raised a host of questions about both these assumptions and opened fresh

lines of inquiry into the continuities and interdependencies between national, global and

transnational media cultures.

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[11] Meyrowitz (1985) has argued that electronic media, particularly television, have led to a radical
restructuring of social life by disrupting the traditional link between culture and geography. In this sense,
he assumes media have uniform effects.

The starting point to answer these fresh questions Appadurai (1990) argues is to

acknowledge the tension between homogenisation and heterogenisation, or the processes

of 'disjunctures and conjunctures between ethnoscapes (the landscapes of living people)

and 'mediascapes' (image-centred, narrative-based accounts of strips of reality) which:

> ..offer to those who experience and transform them [...] a series of
> elements (such as characters, plots and textual forms) out of which scripts
> can be formed of imagined lives, their own as well as those of others in living
> in other places. These scripts can and do get disaggregated into complex sets
> of metaphors by which people live [...] as they help to constitute narratives of
> the 'other' and proto-narratives of possible lives, fantasies which could become
> prologemena to the desire for acquisition and movement (Appadurai 1990: 299)

What this means is that we need to examine which sets of communicative genres can be

valued in which ways and what sorts of "pragmatic genre conventions govern the

collective readings of different kinds of text" (ibid: 300). This is an inquiry that is all the

more urgent to address because the social and political implications of such processes,

what Appadurai (1990) has termed 'de-territorialisation', are crucial for understanding

the daily experiences and interactions of diasporic members.

Indeed, I argue that in examining how diasporic groups use media, we need to

integrate the media imperialism and the cultural globalisation approaches in such a way

as to address the dialectical relationship between the global and the local without

privileging either one. This is a major concern for this present study as its central

question is concerned with the ways in which news, which is affected by the globalisation

trends and is in itself an agent of these trends, may uphold or change the ways in which

people think and talk about their identities. As news is both global and local, in terms of production, reach and content, it is not possible to address this central question while continuing to privilege a binary analysis.

This is by no means a new direction. Roberston (1992), for example, has argued for the continued dialectic interconnection between what he terms universalism and particularism, while Ulrich Beck, in *the Cosmopolitan and its Enemies* (2002), has underlined the need to employ a 'logic of opposition' rather than determinism in understanding globalisation processes and their impact. For Robertson, globalisation involves the 'attempt to preserve direct attention both to particularity and difference and to universality and homogeneity. It rests largely on the thesis that we are, in the late twentieth century, witnesses to- and participants in- a massive twofold process involving *the interpenetration of the universalization of particularism and the particularization of universalism...*' (1992:100). Beck, too, sees globalisation as a non-linear, dialectical process in which the local and the global do not exist as cultural polarities but as combined and mutually implicating principles (2002: 17).

These arguments are critical for my investigation of the relationship between news and identity among the Palestinians in Britain as they shift attention from spatial considerations which have occupied much scholarship to date (e.g. Meyrowitz 1985) to addressing the instances when the divide between the subjective and intimate (private) spheres of ordinary people and the public sphere becomes blurred. As recent studies on media and diasporic groups have shown, (see for example, Naficy 1992; Gillespie 1995; Srebreny 2000; Georgiou 2001, Aksoy and Robins 2000), it is the increasing porousness of the private and the public that makes it necessary to address the complex and dynamic

processes that people use to make sense of media representations and what this means for their perceptions of identity. To understand this dynamism, the next section addresses relevant scholarship on identity and my own arguments regarding its construction.

2.5 Discourses of Identity

The concept of identity remains a contradictory term of contested meanings and relations relative to other discursive formations, such as culture, community and ethnicity. As a concept, identity remains relevant to our understanding of modern societies and cultural trends because of its perceived and real power to mobilise people. As Woodward (1997) writes in the introduction to the book Identity and Difference, identity *matters (my emphasis)*

> .... both in terms of social and political concerns within the contemporary world and within academic discourses where identity has been seen as conceptually important in offering explanations of social and cultural changes....Identity can be seen as the interface between subjective positions and social and cultural situations...Identity gives us an idea of who we are and of how we relate to others and to the world in which we live. Identity marks the ways in which we are the same as others who share that position, and the ways in which we are different from those who do not (Woodward 1997:1-2).

In some scholarship, the term identity has often been used interchangeably with other concepts such as 'culture,' 'community', 'nation' and 'ethnicity', thus adding to the confusion surrounding the term and which aspect of identity is being referred to, whether this is cultural, national, ethnic, religious, diasporic, individual or collective. This

confusion has to a certain extent been informed by the discipline from within which the term has been conceptualised. Political scientist and nationalism scholar Ernest Gellner (1995), for example, sees culture as a genetic mode of transmission, located in an on-going community and a community as a population that shares a culture. Thus, for him "culture and community are defined in terms of each other…the circularity of these definitions, their interdependence, does not matter" (Gellner 1995:45-46).

Anthropologist Anthony Cohen (1985) argues that culture implies a feeling among its members that they have something in common which distinguishes (members of a community) in a significant way from the members of other putative groups, which means that consciousness of community is related to the boundaries it draws between itself and others. And American political scientist Susan Herbst (1994) notes that one of the most meaningful functions of community is the way it strengthens one's sense of identity. "We know who we are, in part, because of the groups to which we 'belong'." (1994: 23) In nationalism scholarship, the protagonists are divided between two main camps — the primordialist and modernist camps, the former focusing on assumed givens of culture, identity and ethnicity, and the latter emphasising the fact that nations are modern, political entities. Anthony Smith, one of the most prominent scholars who subscribes to the first view, stresses in *the Ethnic Origins of Nations* (1986) the primordial links and symbols that define ethnic groups, and which he uses to explain the willingness of people to sacrifice their lives in the name of the nation (1986: 11), while Gellner, who belongs to the latter camp, places more emphasis on the modernity of

nations, linking this evolution to other factors, including economic ones, or most famously to political factors (Gellner 1983).[12]

In the literature on cultural identity, 'ethnicity' has often been seen as a crucial marker of difference, though there is a general consensus that it does not constitute the whole of cultural identity because other markers, such as gender, sex, class, religion and socio-economics, are equally relevant. As Hall (1996) argues, it therefore makes sense to talk of identity as a 'field of antagonisms' where the pluralisation of difference undermines suggestions of cultural and ethnic determinism and essentialism. Within psychoanalysis, the definitions of identity[13] have often been derived from the analyses of personal development among small children — referred to as processes of individuation and integration — as well as personality disturbances. And in social interactionism scholarship, Herbert Mead (1934), for example, has put forward the notion of identity as derived from the relation between the self and society, or the self and the other. Mead's work is important in understanding identity as experienced because though his notion sees identity as an unfinished project, the individual can maintain a sense of identity, based on self-reflection (interpretation), a process most people are involved with continuously as they try to adapt to the various social situations they encounter.

The cultural turn within social science, in general, and audience studies, in particular, has broadly adopted a revised ontological perspective on the notion of identity that stresses the incompleteness, fragmentation and contradictions of both collective and individual identities, challenging essentialist categories and rhetoric surrounding the

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[12] This is a simplistic account of a very complex and valuable literature, which I will revisit, albeit briefly, in Chapter Four.
[13] This is mostly related to self or personal identity, which is how a person regards him/her self and how he/she relate to others. The self therefore is a centre of awareness, emotional needs and desires, in terms of which an individual reflects and acts upon his or her social circumstances (Layder 2004).

term. While the notion of social construction of identities has gained avid followers, a number of different, overlapping intersecting and sometimes competing concepts (of identity) continue to define the space within which cultural studies has theorised the problem of identity (Grossberg 1996: 90). These are difference, fragmentation, hybridity and diaspora[14] — all of which are mutually interdependent as the discussions below will show.

The idea of identity as difference is prevalent in the literature, deriving from notions that relate difference to a particular constitutive relation of negativity in which the subordinate term (the marginalised other or subaltern) is necessary for and constitutive of the dominant term. Woodward, one of the key scholars engaged in this debate, emphasises the ways in which identities are forged through the marking of difference, a process that takes place both "through the *symbolic* systems of representations and through forms of *social* exclusion. Identity, then is not the opposite of, but *depends on* difference" (emphasis in original 1997: 29).

The second idea explains identity as fragmentation, underlining the multiplicity of identities and of multiple positions within any apparent identity. This view which sees identity as a 'kind of diassembled and reassembled unity' (for example, Haraway 1991) is popular in post-modern literature, where commentators, such as Hebdige (1989), underscore the plurality of sources of identity, emphasising their different fragments and their 'cut-and-mix' characteristics and their indeterminacy (Thompson 1992). The third notion sees identities as a form of hybridity, a popular term in public and academic discourse, and particularly in the literature on cultural globalisation, national and diasporic identities (Bhabha 1990: Hall 1992; Hannerz 1996) because processes of

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[14] I will provide a detailed discussion around the concept of diaspora in Chapter Four.

globalisation, including the increased mobility of peoples, capital and goods are believed to have contributed to the mixing of different cultures and the emergence of hybrid forms of culture and/or/identity.

Bhabha (1990), for example, describes hybridity as the "third space...which enables other positions to emerge [...] a space [that] displaces the histories that constitutes it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom....The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognisable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (1990:211). The hybridisation thesis has gained momentum because of its empowering potential and its success in shifting attention from essentialist and homegenisation arguments that are concurrent with crude versions of media power. However, as many scholars have pointed out, the term is ambiguous and has the potential of domination as well as empowerment (see, for example Pieterse 1995 for a critique).

Diaspora, according to Grossberg's categorisation, is the fourth term that has been used to convey different meanings of identity. For example, Clifford (1994) describes it as the signifier not simply of transnationality and movement, but of political struggles to define the local as a distinctive community in historical contexts of displacement. However, whatever their ideologies of purity, "diasporic cultural forms can never, in practice, be exclusively nationalist as they are deployed in transnational networks built from multiple attachments and they encode practices of accommodation with, as well as resistance to, host countries and their norms" (1994: 287).

The concept diaspora has become one of the most crucial metaphors for a globalised condition of identities in constant motion because as Srebreny (2000) argues, it offers

approaches that can be historically and spatially more dynamic, that explore the senses of both fit and non-fit, belonging and longing that seem to reflect most diasporic experiences, while drawing attention to the multiple identifications and third-or-more-spaces in which diaspora is constructed. Chapter Four will provide a detailed interrogation of the term and its contestations. In the next section, however, I return to the notion of identity as a social construction.

2.6 Identity as Social Construction

These different concepts for thinking about identity are all grounded in a social constructionist approach popular in contemporary media sociology as it serves to challenge essentialist notions that see people as having singular, integral and altogether harmonious and unproblematic identities. By the same token, this approach also challenges accounts of collective identities as based on some "essence or set of core features shared by all members of the collectivity and no other" (Calhoun 1996:13).

Essentialist definitions of identity suggest clear, authentic sets of characteristics which people belonging to one community, collectivity or nation share and which do not change across time, while a non-essentialist definition focuses on differences and contestations, which has meant that many investigations of the constitution and politics of identity are often predicated on a distinction, articulated as between two forms of struggle over two models of the production of identities (Hall 1990). This view is replicated to a certain extent in Bauman's ethnographic study (1996) of diverse ethnic communities in Southhall in London, in which he characterises essentialist discourses as the dominant

discourses that reify culture and identity as opposed to demotic discourses that challenge existing reifications, and which entail a dual discursive competence, embracing the dominant as well as the demotic "...it is the dominant that emphasizes the conservation of existing communities and the demotic that allows Southallians to re-conceive community boundaries and contest the meaning of culture...These contestations, however, tend to stop short of taking one final step: the word culture remains restricted, in many contexts to its reified meaning [...]" (1996:195)

This thesis, as stated at the outset, adheres to the view that identities are socially constructed, not given, and to the understanding that identity is a short-hand description for ways of talking about the self and the community. However, rather than assuming a simple opposition or dichotomy between essentialism and social constructionism, I argue that under certain circumstances, self-critical claims to strong, basic and collective (national) identities are important to acknowledge. What this means is that where a particular category of identity has been repressed, de-legitimated or devalued in dominant or public discourse, it is possible that it may be invoked in an essentialist way, suggesting that people's thinking of and talk about identity can oscillate between essentialist and essentialising versions of identities to ones that are more open to possibilities, though this oscillation may not be for instrumental purposes as Bauman above suggests.

As Craig Calhoun (1994) notes, essentialist invocations of race, nation, gender, class, and a host of other identities remain common in everyday discourses throughout the world. In other words, categorical identities can be invoked and given public definition by individuals or groups even where they are not embodied in concrete networks of interpersonal relationships. Calhoun's suggestion does not suggest accepting a

predominantly essentialist understanding of the notion of identity, but calls for examining the different processes through which this dualism comes into play in order to understand the ways in which identities are claimed, constructed and contested. This means that we have to take the politics of identity seriously. As he says:

> The struggles occasioned by identity politics need to be understood not as simply between those who claim different identities, but within each subject, as the multiple and contending discourses of our era challenge any of our efforts to attain stable self-recognition or coherent subjectivity (Calhoun 1994:19-20).

Philip Schlesinger (1991) also moves us towards combining a theoretical perspective with an empirical investigation in noting that to understand identity, we need to conceptualise the processes involved in the constitution and reproduction of cultures to be able to address the relationship between collective identities and cultural processes. In this respect, we need to reverse the argument by first posing the problem of collective identity itself before asking how it might be analysed and what importance communicative practices might play in its constitution. Chapter Four addresses this challenge by detailing the relevant literature on collective (national) identity while the empirical chapters Seven and Eight specifically address the processes through which the informants concerned produce and reproduce their identity. In the remainder of this chapter, I turn to the theoretical framework of 'identification as discourse' as it provides the conceptual and analytical framework for this work.

2.7 Identification as discourse

To put across the proposed direction regarding identity, I draw on Hall's (1996) theoretical framework of 'identification as discourse' and of identity as constructed across different intersection and antagonistic discourses, practices and positions of self and othering that people use in their daily encounters. This perspective allows for understanding identity construction as a continuing, dialogical production that allows us as researchers to examine the tension between the self and the other or multiple others, and between the self and the collective or the national in people's talk of their identities.

Identification, in this sense, refers to the unstable, contingent reflection of a 'dialogical' process where identity is constructed through a dialogical understanding of the conceptual horizon (cf. Bakhtin 1981) of the individual concerned. The information exchanged in this dialogue is constituted, on the one hand, on positive assertions of individual or group self-identity and, on the other, on statements about or labels affixed to the identities of others, constantly making and re-making divisions. What this means is that processes of identification are fluid or constant movements that capture the ongoing, changeable and authored 'technique' that people use to situate themselves within social and cultural contexts (cf. Rabinow 1984).

Put differently, processes of identification suggest that people engage in reflexive and continuous processes that are steps towards the end of the road, rather than the end itself, suggesting that the project of constructing identity is always 'for' or 'towards' something.

Therefore, it follows that the social and political identifications of a person or a group 'for' one thing may shift and change as it is constituted 'for' something else.[15] This conceptualisation is particularly relevant once it becomes accepted that communities are rarely homogeneous in themselves as they involve both internal and external contradictions and once it becomes recognised that every individual within these communities is to some extent involved in more than one single interpretative community. Talking of identity construction as a process is relevant in discussing migrants and diasporic groups in general, to whom ascribing an identity, as Silverstone (2003) points out, is premature because processes of identification are continuous, contradictory and unstable both within and across gender and generation; and community-building, for the most part, remains at the level of the imagined, but without, for many, the uncomplicated constructive potential that Anderson assumed.

Crucially for this thesis, this understanding allows for an empirical inquiry of how people talk about belonging and how they map boundaries. Of these two dimensions, belonging is the more problematic as it necessarily constitutes a political and cultural field of global contestation that brings into focus a range of pertinent issues concerning relations between individuals, groups and communities (Hedetoft and Hjort 2002). As a contested term, 'belonging' has often been discussed in the literature by relating it to space, but such a relationship can be difficult to assess when discussing diasporic groups or migrants because space and place have different connotations. For example, we can say that where people feel they belong (the cultural or ethnic home) may not match objective ascriptions of membership (to the political or civic home) because belonging

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[15] This is symptomatic of most Palestinians' discourses about themselves and their community, discourses that are often coded with implications for future action or for something waiting to happen.

separates into its two constituent parts; 'being' in one place, and 'longing' for another

(ibid: ix). Boundary-mapping, on the other hand, is the productive and often emotional

activity of constantly making and re-making divisions, an activity that remains relevant to

people and groups despite suggestions that the post-modern world is fluid (e.g. Castells

1997) because of its potential in locating the strange and the friendly, the past and the

present and the individual and the collective. Indeed, it is in the marking out of

boundaries that we maintain a sense of who we are and who we are not.

The proposed understanding of identification as discourse I follow here draws on

Bakhtin's (1981) notion that people's individual acts of expression, both written and oral,

are the result of a difficult internal struggle in which the various voices of the past and

present are linked to one another through language, therefore highlighting the relevance

of memory[16] in the process. What is relevant here is that the multiplicity of voices means

that processes of identification emerge within the interplay of specific modalities of

power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion than the

signalling of identical, naturally-constituted identities — meaning ones that are all-

inclusive sameness, seamless and without internal differentiation.

Importantly for this work, this notion allows us to understand precisely the ways in

which identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, and therefore to address

identities as 'narrated'. Identities, as narrated, suggests they are constituted and

reconstituted in time and over time, through narrative processes and discourse. It is a

constructive starting point for an analysis of the relationship between news and the

negotiation of identity, the central question in this thesis, because narrating means

making sense of experience.

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[16] Chapter Four interrogates the meaning of memory.

In the analysis of the empirical work for this study (Chapter Eight), the idea of identity as narrated comes across clearly when the informants' talk of news reflects their attitudes to belonging and boundaries.

Having put across the theoretical underpinnings for addressing how identity is negotiated and constructed, it is important to add that neither subjective nor collective modes of identification are constructed independent of other factors[17]; rather they are constructed in relation to cultural, social and national referents, which means taking into account the macro context. This refers to broader social contexts such as family and social relationships as well as historical, social and political contexts within which people engage with symbolic products, including media products, pointing to how their representations are negotiated within and regulated by the wider social, cultural and political contexts within which they are consumed.

Broadly speaking, this means examining the discursive processes through which identities are negotiated in relation to different foci (reference points) and contexts, which allows us to address how identities are created within pluralised social contexts and in relation to different mediated cultural products. This conceptualisation uses the notion of 'relationality' (Somers and Gibson 1994) as an important analytic variable, therefore addressing the various and fluctuating socio-cultural relations that an individual upholds. Hall, too, uses the notion of relationality in noting that identification "is constructed on the basis of recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation" (Hall 1996: 2). Identification:

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[17] Gillespie (1995) has argued along similar lines in noting that there are limits to free-floating identities.

...is not determined in the sense that it can be always 'won' or 'lost', sustained or abandoned. Though not without its determinate conditions of existence, including the material and symbolic resources required to sustain it, identification is in the end, conditional, lodged in contingency.[...] As a process, identification operates across difference and entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of 'frontier effects' and requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process (Hall 1996:2-3).

To conclude, I would like to stress the arguments proposed here and which inform the remainder of this work. The first is that theorising the relationship between identity and media must take into consideration the dialectic nature of globalisation processes and the interplay between the global and the local. The second draws on the framework of identification as discourse which can help us understand how identities are always in the process of becoming, not being. The third is that identity can be best understood as narrated as it is through talking about oneself and one's sense of self and other that people can take up different discursive and imagined positionings that can oscillate between essentialist ones to ones that are more open and ambivalent.

These arguments provide the groundwork for an analysis of the relationship between news and the ways in which Palestinians in Britain talk of identity and community. If at this stage the relationship between news and the construction of identity seems complex, it will become more apparent in the progression of this work. With these notions in mind, the next chapter turns to news to examine how it has been assessed in the literature and to provide a theoretical understanding that explains its centrality to some people's everyday lives.

Chapter Three

News as Cultural Discourse: Towards a New Understanding

The news serves a vital democratic function whether in a given instance anyone out there is listening or not. The news constructs a symbolic world that has a kind of priority, a certification of legitimate importance. And that symbolic world, putatively and practically, in its easy availability, in its cheap, quotidian, throw-away material form, becomes the property of us all. (Michael Schudson 1995: 33)

Given the normative assumptions about the functions of news implied in the above comment, it is not surprising that journalism has attracted a lot of interest since studies on public opinion and propaganda began in the early 20th century. The literature on news within and across disciplines is vast, with inquiry examining how news influences public opinion, society and politics, what or who governs news values, the nature of news work and the dynamics of political and cultural information inherent in the texts. Debates on news processes have, on the other hand, focused on production strategies and constraints to explain the effect of the globalisation processes on news forms and content while work in political communication has largely focused on the role of news in politics and democracies, drawing on normative and explanatory models of democratic theory. Within the last two decades, reception studies and other forms of qualitative audience research have served to emphasise the 'critical' sense-making processes of audience members, in terms of social interaction and media decoding, using the domains of social and cultural practices with the textual, via an emphasis on language, consciousness and

subjectivity as constitutive elements of social reality (for some surveys of this literature, see Morley 1989; Moores 1990/1993; Silverstone 1990).

However, despite the abundance of work in these areas, little work has been carried out on how people employ news as a social and cultural resource in their day-to-day experiences (Jensen 1998), how they view news, how they define it and what they do with it. These are the very questions that, I argue, we need to answer to address the centrality of news in some people's everyday lives and not in others', or, putting it differently, to explore why some individuals invest in news stories, reflexively and emotionally, and what these investments mean for notions of belonging, community and social action. And these are the very questions that draw attention to the ways in which the 'social bonds' between audience members and their overall interaction with news may fall short of an active or reasoning polity (Habermas 1989), and yet do not mean that news media do not create shared cultural and ideological perspectives that people make sense of by taking varying subjective and affective discursive positionings.

In Chapter Two, I argued for understanding identity as a continuous discursive process of identification that captures how people negotiate meanings and experiences as they navigate different tensions and points of reference in their lives. Here, I draw on various theoretical paradigms, particularly related to the meaning and place of news, to argue for understanding news as a form of *'cultural discourse'* that allows us to examine through an audience study how news may have a potential, though indirect, social impact. The argument is two-fold; first, it suggests that news may enable members of its audience to make connections with the wider world they inhabit, what Lewis (1991) calls ideological resonance, and second, it takes into consideration the changing dynamics of news

formats, the aesthetics of news and its narrative structure, as well as the connection

between news and popular culture, which serve to link its audience to the wider world "in

ritualistic, symbolic and mythical ways" (Dahlgren 1992: 205), thus institutionalising and

legitimising its significance and potential in their lives.

The proposed understanding shifts attention from the normative functionalistic

perspective of news as 'public knowledge' prevalent in the political communication

literature[1] to a focus on its socio-cultural meanings, therefore facilitating the examination

of how news may shape societal interactions and the ways in which people relate to

others in their sameness and in their differences. Methodologically speaking, these

considerations help move analytical attention from the point of contact between

audiences and text, or the point of consumption, to *people's talk of news around these*

moments. The key starting point framing this argument sees that news cannot simply be

defined as providing information[2] only, but must also be explained and placed within the

wider historical 'field of mediations' (Martin-Barbero 1993), the history of the various

forms by which social action has been mediated through the public circulation of images

and text (Couldry 2000), and which require the understanding of production and

reception of symbolic material as dynamic and inter-related.

The theoretical framework of mediation is not new — it is implied in the early works

of Raymond Williams (1973) in which he refers to the content of modern

communications as a "form of unevenly shared consciousness of persistently external

events…It is what appears to happen, in these powerfully transmitted and mediated ways,

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[1] Liberal and critical approaches to news production, with the latter emphasising news media's role as public watchdog, as influencing public opinion and as facilitating democratic processes, share a rationalistic approach which sees news as producing information.

[2] This is particularly relevant in today's differentiated information environment, where information is accessed through different means and via diverse channels.

in a world with which we have no perceptible connections but which we feel is at once central and marginal to our lives" (1973:295-6). Silverstone (1999) goes further, referring to mediation as the circulation of meanings, a notion that captures its dialectical nature and underscores the circulation of meanings between institutions and individuals that means it between the self and the collective and between the private and the public.

Significantly, the theoretical framework of mediation shifts attention from effect, or the transmission model of communication, to one that conceptualises media power "as far from automatic...but [...] that has to be continually reproduced through various practices and dispositions at every level of social life" (Couldry 2000: 4). In this way, media power, broadly speaking, cannot be simply explained as a binary relation of domination between 'large' and 'small' actors, with large actors (the media) having the automatic ability to dominate small actors (audience members), but as reproduced through the details of what social actors (including audience members) do and say (ibid: 4). What this means is that the connections news has to the political action of its audience or the political acts of government officials or other elites might be difficult to measure concretely and decisively (cf. Schudson 1995), but that its potential in shifting thinking and attitudes can potentially be by analysing people's discourses.

Situating news within the theoretical framework of mediation informs both the theoretical and the methodological approaches adopted in this study. I will elaborate on the methodological impetus in this study in Chapter Five. First, however, I use the following sections to place this thesis within the context of relevant research on news within the field of media studies. Other fields of inquiry into journalism include history,

language studies, political science and cultural studies, but the aim of this thesis does not require me to elaborate on any of these in much detail.

3.1 News Studies — Three Paradigms

News stories, particularly television news, penetrate living rooms and work spaces and are accessed in the domestic and the public spheres. Indeed, by virtue of its pervasiveness in societies, it has been suggested that news helps shape everyday consciousness as well as consciousness of the world that is beyond people's immediate reach. However, how best to explain the function of news in societies remains contested, both within various academic disciplines as well as between scholars and practitioners themselves. As Berkowitz (1997) notes, understanding journalism resembles viewing a hologram — there is no single vantage point where the entire hologram can be seen and from which we can acquire an understanding of its social meaning.

The vast amount of literature on the meanings of news bears out this statement — indeed there is so much scholarship on the topic that it is difficult to know where to begin. In an insightful and much referenced essay, Michael Schudson (1997) offers a way out of the maze by identifying three key traditions that have dominated thinking in media and communication research, and are useful starting points for addressing the theorisation of news in the literature. These approaches can be grouped under three broad categories: the economic and political, the professional or social-organisational and the cultural.

The political economy tradition has formed the backbone of much research on news production and strategies. Starting with the path-breaking work of Dallas Smythe and

Herber Schiller, this approach sees that the output of news media is principally

determined by the economic structures of the organisations concerned. With its origins in

the Marxian tradition, its arguments reflect a broadly class-based analysis, where news

media are explained as institutions that legitimise the demands of capitalism. For

example, Murdock and Golding (1974) have argued that the mass media are industrial

and commercial organisations whose role is to produce and distribute commodities within

a late capitalist order, suggesting that the production of ideology cannot be adequately

understood without grasping the general dynamics of media production and the

determinations they exert. Herman and Chomsky (1988) adopt similar views in their still

influential 'propaganda model' of the mass media in which they see news as serving "to

mobilise support for the special interests that dominate the state and private activity"

(1988: xi). For them, the propagandist nature of news is related to the fact that it is

produced by a concentrated industry of several dozen profit-making corporations that is

dependent on advertising for profits and government officials for its sources, and that

remains influenced by right-wing pressure groups.

In privileging production over consumption processes and class rather than other

social, racial, gender and generational divisions within societies, the political economy

approach has been useful in explaining the global reach of news media. Cultural

imperialism theorists (for example, Schiller 1991) have drawn on political economy

perspectives to describe how the export of consumerist products and values has served

largely capitalist considerations and undermined authentic cultures. These assumptions,

however, have been qualified by the cultural globalisation approach, which offers a more

complex theorisation of processes of globalisation (see Tomlinson 1999; Volkmer 1999; Thussu 2000).

Some studies on global news agencies, such as Reuters, Associated Press and Agence France-Presse, can also be located as falling within the political economy tradition and the media imperialism thesis[3]. Paterson (1998), for instance, argues that global news agencies are largely responsible for the homogenisation of international news due to the similarity of factors that influence news production, the similarity of news production routines among agencies, competitive pressure to duplicate coverage by other agencies and the universal focus on standard 'frames' or themes in news coverage.[4] But Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen (1998) provide a more culturally nuanced account, arguing that both political economy and cultural studies "provide information on the broad social, political and economic contexts of agency operations, their news production practices, their texts and the social contexts and practices associated with the reception and use of their services" (1998:3).

The second approach identified by Schudson is the social organisational approach, sometimes referred to as the professional organisational framework, which explains journalism in terms of practices and routines of work, bringing a sociological emphasis to understanding how working arrangements and occupational beliefs shape news making and production. Broadly speaking, the sociological organisational approach rejects an overly deterministic stress on the political and economic factors behind journalistic production, focusing instead on the professional culture and organisational structure

[3] Volkmer (1999), in a study of CNN International, argues for a more differentiated understanding of globalisation processes, noting that the audio-visual communication strategies tend not to homogenise the globe, but work with strategies of diversification.
[4] In later work, Paterson (2003) has found that news websites do little original reporting, relying on the input from the major news organisations.

underpinning the process: the objectivity ethic, as well as limitations imposed by the news forms, deadline pressure and other elements of routine news work (McNair 1999).

This tradition also builds on symbolic interactionism, which explores how labels, symbols and meanings inform human interactions and understandings and which was popular in the dawn of cultural studies. The early works of the Glasgow University Media Group and the work of Stuart Hall and his colleagues (1978) draw on these latter ideas, though they move beyond ideas of 'labelling' to ideas of ideological 'legitimation'. According to this view, journalists' accounts are informed by dominant cultural assumptions, which in turn dictate systematic and preferential patterns of news access. In *Policing the Crisis (*1978*),* Hall et al., for example, contend that the news media reproduce the voices of the powerful via routine access and news legitimation, thus commanding the discursive field and setting the terms of the debate. The media, according to them, do not simply 'create' the news, nor do they simply transmit the ideology of the 'ruling class' in a conspiratorial fashion:

Indeed we have suggested that, in a critical sense, the media are frequently not the 'primary definers' of news events at all; but their structured relationship to power has the effect of making them play a crucial but secondary role in the media as 'accredited sources' . From this point of view, in the moment of news production, the media stand in a position of structured subordination to the primary definers. (Hall et al. 1978: 255 as cited in H. Tumber *News: A Reader* 1999)

The emphasis on the dominant rather than the deviant is abundant in the literature, spilling over into inquiries of news practices, news texts (van Dijk 1988), news-gathering procedures (Fishman 1980; Gans 1979; Gitlin 1980; Tuchman 1978) and news audiences,

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broadly generating linear models of media power explained as the dominance of the strong over the weak. Some studies have also stressed the ideological consequences of the organisational or 'routine' character of news production, which, as Schlesinger (1978) says, have "definite consequences in structuring news...The doings of the world are tamed to meet the needs of a production system...[which] in many respects [is] bureaucratically organised" (1978:47). Fishman (1980) follows a similar approach in his analysis of news-making, describing how journalists go through several phases where they detect occurrences, interpret them as meaningful events, investigate their factual nature, and assemble them into stories, while Ericson et al. (1987) point to the development of a 'vocabulary of precedents' that helps journalists recognise, produce, source and justify their output.

Also falling within this tradition are gate-keeping studies of news (White 1950), studies of the effects of journalistic expectations on reporting behaviour (for example, Lang and Lang 1953), work on 'objectivity' (Tuchman 1972), as well as the framing theory of news, where frames are seen as the "principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of tacit theories about what exists, what happens and what matters" (Gitlin 1980:6). Tuchman (1972), too, uses the concept of framing in her study of newsroom practices and presentations, while Goffman (1986) uses it to describe the principles of organisation that govern events. The social and organisational routines of journalists are relevant to understanding news as discourse (van Dijk 1988) because they highlight specific factors such as the division of labour, hierarchical relations, deadlines, competition, journalists' class membership and the economic conditions for news production, which are important considerations in addressing the production of foreign

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news, particularly as the international flow of news is also determined by the organisation of the news-processing industries (Curran and Seaton 2003).

The third approach Schudson identifies is the cultural tradition, where news is seen as a product of the relationship between occurrences and a culture's symbolic system. Although the 'cultural' perspective of news has not been codified nor established as any sort of 'school', often merging with the social organisation view, it remains analytically distinct (1997:17). As he notes: "Where the organisational view finds interactional determinants of news in the relations between people, the cultural view finds symbolic determinants of news in the relations between ideas and symbols" (ibid:17).

The cultural tradition links elements of the political economy and social organisational approaches within a framework that incorporates a materialist analysis with elements of the pluralist model of media influence. Consequently, it does not focus on who owns the news media, but on how the media are positioned relative to the power elites in society. It also locates the source of bias in news in the external environment within which journalists carry out their work, which means that content is not regarded as simply a matter of ownership or of journalistic practices and routines, but also as a result of the interaction between news organisations, the sources that pertain to their output and other social institutions (cf. McNair 1999).

Though early studies within this tradition used a Gramscian approach to hegemony in rethinking the meaning and implications of news discourse (the work of Stuart Hall and his colleagues at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Birmingham was the most influential in this area), much of the scholarship here paid attention to the audience through addressing news institutions' awareness of audiences, the relations between ideas

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and symbols, the interplay within discourses, the 'imagined audiences' inscribed within media texts, as well as the nature of cultural power exercised in and through these texts, all of which serve to challenge rigid views of 'ideological domination' as the presumed end-point presupposed in media ownership and control models (Cottle 2003).

The main advantages of the cultural approach, however, come from its acknowledgement that journalistic practices are informed by cultural and social perspectives, thus broadening the study of journalism from its narrow 'metonymic' conception (Dahlgren 1992), referring to the narrow definition of the political, to the wider lens of culture that encompasses patterns of communication, practices and meanings which provide resources for collective life through the interplay between form and content. Content is the substance of taken-for-granted values, the "unquestioned and generally unnoticed background assumptions through which the news is gathered and within which it is framed," while form refers to "narrative, storytelling, human interest and the conventions of photographic and linguistic presentation that shape the presentation of all the news the media produce" (Schudson 1997: 19-20).[5] Both form and content are important for the understanding of news proposed in this work.

This approach has been popular within British cultural studies, where the blend of neo-Marxism, psychoanalysis, feminist studies, critical theory, semiotics and ethnography has complemented the interest in pragmatism, symbolic interactionism, cultural anthropology and cultural sociology in the United States. However, it was Raymond Williams (1978) who firmly created a place in the academy for critical engagement with journalism's cultural dimensions, arguing that culture should be analysed not only through its idealist

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[5] For further discussion about the various structures of news, see Schudson's "The Politics of Narrative Form; The Emergence of News Conventions in Print and Television" (1982).

side, but also through the social arrangements and conditions by which cultural settings are put in place, therefore shifting attention to texts, practices and journalists as members of collectivities that influence their behaviour and output.

Though Schudson's typology is concerned mostly with news production studies, news content and reception studies, too, are informed by these traditions. Some content studies, for instance, have shown how news is essentially ideological, with the power to limit and structure audience belief (e.g. Philo 1990; Herman and Chomsky 1998). Other studies have emphasised the political consequences of restructuring knowledge and opinion (Gamson 1992), the ways in which the organisation of news reports removes structural causes (Iyengar 1991), how news content is primarily governed by commercial criteria, based on what the audiences really want to watch, and how the news media play a role in promoting a culture of ignorance (Schechter 1998).

These three approaches mentioned are not mutually exclusive – they are premised on profound differences over the nature of the state's functioning, of journalism's role in societies and of the concept of ideology. Broadly speaking, however, much of the inquiry within these traditions has been driven by assumptions about the perceived failure of the media to meet its normative potential assumed in the Habermasian concept of the public sphere. This has meant that inquiry has often started with constricted perceptions of what is meant by the public, deflecting awareness from a number of salient issues over the processes through which the public or publics are constituted, the media's role in this process and, importantly for this thesis, the ways in which "journalism and other media output help or hinder in stimulating dialogue and debate" (Dahlgren 1991:16).

It is exactly such concerns with dialogue, debate and participation that drive the methodological impetus in this study, an audience study of the ways in which the Palestinians in Britain use news and make sense of it and what this sense-making means for questions of belonging, identity and citizenship and what it means for societal action and dialogue. Before I go on to review audience studies relevant to this work, I turn to the theorisation of television and television news as this is the genre the informants in this study engage with most (see Chapter Seven). Television also remains the primary medium through which the public in Britain is informed about important issues; three polls in 1989, 1993 and 1997 suggests this holds true for up to 84 per cent of the population (Stone 2000 cited in A. Srebreny and C. Patterson International News in the 21st Century, 2004)[6].

3.2 Television — socio-cultural perspectives

As with the scholarship on news production summarised above, the literature on television is also vast; hence, I will not be surveying the whole field of research, but will make use of that scholarship which is helpful for developing an analytical starting point for understanding news, particularly television news, and its uses, and which is pertinent to the methodological approach undertaken in this study.

Much of the work on television has been influenced by the three paradigms mentioned above — a survey of work on international or global television shows that much

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[6] The same holds true in the US where surveys have consistently shown that Americans prefer and trust television news the most (see, for example, research by the Pew Centre for the People and the Press).

scholarly attention remains confined to political economic and social organisational analyses of the changing media landscape, focusing among other issues on the concentration of the global structure of news gathering and dissemination and the gate-keeping processes which are based on uniform sets of values adopted by the main global news agencies and that have influenced the global flow and production of news.

Inquiry has also examined how new media technologies have influenced production, delivery and reception and addressed the challenges posed by the proliferation of transnational news media to the hegemony of the traditional news providers, the main five international news agencies, and to the impact of advanced editing techniques, the use of improved technologies, live news and embedded reporters on the traditional ways journalists carry out their work. As Patterson and Srebreny (2004) note:

> While the nature of news and news production has changed in massive ways from two decades ago and beyond — globalisation, ownership and technology are prime examples — news research has failed to keep pace. The notion that journalists objectively mirror the key events of the day is still widely accepted within the industry itself, however, evidencing the limited practical influence of the seminal early analyses of news (Patterson and Srebreny 2004: 17)

The debate over objectivity and criticism of value-rich journalistic orientations is dominant in the communication literature, where there are widespread perceptions about the rhetorical slant of journalistic representations. However, there are some in the academy who argue that, for all its shortcomings, television journalism can stimulate socio-cultural interactions within the public sphere and that, as such, can strengthen public and democratic participation (see, for example, Scannell 1989). As Dahlgren

(1995) notes, the arguments and evidence from the defence of news cannot be totally

dismissed because "television journalism does [...] foster forms of awareness and public

knowledge conducive to the democratic character of society, yet [...] all such

overarching evaluations are of limited utility" (1995: 47).

It is difficult to condense the literature into a few paragraphs, but briefly, much of the

criticism of television news emanates from concerns about the increasing blurring of the

boundaries between 'information' and 'entertainment, a distinction that journalists have

traditionally used to demarcate their practice as being different from, or as being high as

opposed to the low culture of popular soaps, for example. However, competition over

what is widely regarded as fragmented audiences, changes in government regulations and

increasing pressure of the market situation and demands of the audiences, all of which

have radically transformed television news output, have challenged these distinctions as

well as the old models of public service broadcasting in Europe and traditional news

television formats in the US.

The changing formats of television news, manifest in attached as opposed to detached

journalism and emotional content, have been criticised as trivialising political issues,

creating, on the one hand, disagreement over what is meant by 'good journalism' and

over which criteria can separate 'serious' journalism from popular culture (see Dahlgren

and Sparks 1992), while spurring, on the other hand, various studies of television output

or text which have tended to focus on what Dahlgren (1995) has called the double

contingency of the actual process of signification in television. This process, he notes,

derives from the familiar and generally agreed on notion of the polysemic quality of all

communication and all texts which means that meanings are seldom fully unequivocal

and from the fact that the contingency of meaning resides partially in the text, because it is only in the encounter with a public that the meaning becomes realised. Though this double meaning within the audio-visual text does not make the text irrelevant in research, it does make textual research complicated, particularly in the time of 24-hour news. While as an enterprise, the industry of television (i.e. its political economy) remains central to the understanding of the institutional characteristics of the public sphere and while the social organisational approach is relevant to understanding the constraints on news production, this study is more concerned with approaches that have addressed television's cultural and social implications, which I turn to next.

Among such approaches, it is Roger Silverstone's theorisation of the centrality of television (1981; 1988; 1994) in everyday lives that is particularly relevant to this study. In *Television and Everyday Life* (1994), Silverstone argues that this centrality is related to its articulation of "the primary concerns of human existence and in which they are themselves primary [...] Television's effectiveness consists of its ability to translate the unfamiliar and to provide frameworks for making sense of the unintelligible" (Silverstone 1994: 181). What this means is that television becomes a resource for the discourses people employ to process and organise personal experiences or to *mediate* the horizons of their everyday world and those beyond their immediate reality, therefore offering 'symbolic' legitimacy and validation for television's place in their everyday lives.

Silverstone's reference to television news is also worth elaborating. Implying that television news does have a social function, he draws on Giddens' concept of ontological security (1990) to argue that television news is the "key institution in the mediation of threat, anxiety and danger" from the outside world (1994:17). Of all the various genres of

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programming on television, Silverstone writes, it is news that most clearly demonstrates "the dialectical articulation of anxiety and security", therefore providing a paradoxical sense of reassurance (I turn to this in the analysis of the empirical material in Chapter Six and Seven). It is precisely this tension between televisual news' creation of an apprehension and its narrative resolution which encourages the viewer to find in the newscast a sense of reassurance:

> Reassurance is not provided only, of course, in the content of reporting....Yet the levels of anxiety that could be raised (and of course may well be either inevitably or deliberately raised) are ameliorated both in terms of the structure of the news as a programme (the tidying of papers, mutual smiles and silent chat following a 'human interest' story complete news bulletins, except under exceptional circumstances of crisis or catastrophe, all over the world), and in terms of its ritualised flow (ibid: 16-17)

Writing in a different context, Paddy Scannell's (1989) work on public service broadcasting also addresses television's social and cultural implications, particularly in his arguments that television's most important effect is to expand the sphere of the 'merely talkable about' (1989:144). Avoiding problems associated with using media 'texts' or 'audiences' to analyse the question of power and ideology, Scannell makes a compelling case towards understanding the 'communicative intentionality' (Cottle 2003) of programme producers and demonstrates historically how this has informed the production of programme forms. Scannell writes:

> News intends to provide information. Adverts intend to persuade. But even where there is a manifest content with obvious strategic-purposive intentions (most

obviously, as we shall see in the propaganda that saturated every area of programming in the Second World War), there is a necessary prior sociable commitment in the communicative form of every programme [...] The character of broadcasting as necessarily sociable lies in the form of its communicative context. (Scannell 1989:23)

What both these accounts, though with different emphases, suggest is that it is possible to understand television and television news as a 'socio-cultural' experience. In other words, "what appears on the screen is encountered and interpreted by viewers, and then enters their social worlds through social interaction, being reinterpreted and inserted in a vast array of discourses" (Dahlgren 1995:39). These theoretical perspectives set the stage for developing the proposed understanding of the social meanings of news, discussed later on in this chapter. In the next section, I turn to audience studies to address the development in thinking and theorisation of the news audience.

3.3 Dilemmas of the Audience

The audience as an analytical concept is relatively new. Indeed, early studies of media's role in societies referred to the concept of mass society to explain the relationship between media and public belief. This overarching term implied that the world was composed of a mass of fragmented individuals who were subject to powerful media messages — the so-called hypodermic needle model of mass media effects. However, audience studies have gradually come to specify different interrelated types and stages of impact and influence.

The earliest influential studies in this area remain *The People's Choice* (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944) which proposed that media's influence comes in stages or steps, involving personal contacts, and *Personal Influence* (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955), which showed that whatever impact the media have is also mediated through interpersonal communication and other interactions within social networks. Later research associated with the political economy tradition focused on how the structures and processes of, in particular, news production, alienated people from the production process and their capacity to participate in the political process (see Neuman 1991; Nightingale and Ross 2003).

By the 1970s, a new period of research began to question the overly pessimistic theories of the media audience. Halloran (1970), for example, conceptualised audience members as actively structured by their position in societies by integrating studies of news production with studies of people's responses to particular events, while Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1973) proposed that the audience used media to satisfy its needs and demands, this became known as the uses and gratification approach. However, it was not until Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding (1980) model that media research shifted towards a theory of popular culture that embraced both textual production and audience interpretations and that combined an understanding of media as regulatory regimes for maintaining social control with a recognition that these regimes also created discursive spaces for contestations (Nightingale and Ross 2003).

One of the most widely cited works that built on Hall's model was David Morley's the *Nationwide Audience* (1980), in which he examined how different groups interpreted the British popular current affairs programme *Nationwide*. His path-breaking work concluded

that audience readings of the same text were based on "cultural differences embedded within the structure of society" — cultural clusters which guide and limit the individual's interpretation of messages. Morley's work challenged the hitherto prevalent formalism of screen theory and its obsession with avant-garde reflexivity popular in the 1970s and offered a more nuanced understanding of inter-discursive processes in audience reception by bringing together text and audience. In later work[7], Morley qualified his early conclusions to argue that the audience's 'decoding'[8] of the media text was connected with the wider field of communication (work, school, family, leisure) to which viewers belong (cf. Morley 1992:77).

James Lull (1980) followed in Morley's footsteps in producing a prototypical study examining family uses of television that informed a wide range of empirical projects on media use in different contexts, while Liebes and Katz (1993) combined social-scientific and humanistic approaches to explore the worldwide reception of the American soap *Dallas*. Over the past two decades, mainly ethnographic reception studies that drew on Hall's model and the classic qualitative audience studies of Ang (1985), Lull (1990), Morley (1980), Radway (1984), Hobson (1982) and so on, began to take into account the concrete problems associated with trying to separate text/audience from the culture within which the audience members are embedded, drawing attention to how audiences too participate in the mediation of culture and political life.

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[7] Although Morley's work was seen as path-breaking in the analysis of television audience, it did not escape criticism (see, for example, Tulloch 1998; Curran 1990; Corner 1991).
[8] The word decoding itself has been criticised for over-simplifying what audiences actually do with media texts. Nick Couldry (2000) argues that the complexity of what audiences do with media material matches the variety of functions fulfilled by the media beyond the purely textual, including a ritual, participatory function whose "ideological effects escape the encoding/decoding model" (2000:9).

Other scholarship, drawing on quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, suggested that a series of processes and patterns clearly implicated in precise ways the role of the media and news in the construction of social meaning (for example, Iyengar 1991; Philo 1990; Gamson 1992; Lewis 1991), while work by the Media Group at Glasgow University in 1994, 1999 and 2000 showed that decisions by broadcasters helped influenced audience members' negative perceptions toward the developing world because of the lack of explanations and contexts in television reporting (Philo 2004).

There is little doubt that most studies on the news audience have been broadly preoccupied by news' political influence, an area of study that has mushroomed over the past three decades. Inquiry within the political science discipline has examined various aspects, drawing on propaganda theory, campaigns, persuasion, the effect of news on public opinion and its effect on whether the audience becomes more informed because of exposure to news. Interest in public opinion, popular in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, was complimented by interest in the agenda-setting functions of news.

In the UK and Europe, among those studies relevant to this inquiry is Justin Lewis' examination of audience responses to British television news (1991), which showed a clear relationship between "'texts' preferring devices and the discourses that structured people's views of the world" (1991:108), and the afore-mentioned work by Morley (1980) because of its drawing attention to the relevance of the domestic and local settings in understanding global and local processes. Also relevant to this study is Klaus Bruhnen Jensen's (1990) suggestion that we need to move beyond the individual text or genre to provide an analytical basis for understanding the relevance of news in society. He writes:

...polysemy may be a characteristic of the reception of news, which bears witness to contradictions at the level of social structures. It is the polysemy of reception, rather than the polysemy of media texts, which must be explored in order to assess concretely the relative power of media and audiences (Jensen 1990:58).

Though Jensen's proposal and work regarding the news audience shows that meaning production may potentially challenge dominant definitions of reality because the processes of making sense of television news, in particular, are over-determined by both the social definitions of the genre and the macro-societal structures, it is, he argues, ultimately "the audience-public that must insist on the substantive uses of media, both within the political system and in other areas of social and cultural life, by transcending the ambiguous role of recipient" (ibid: 74).

This, of course, means shifting attention to the audience, but not in the conventional way. Indeed, Jensen's proposal shifts attention away from discussions of whether audience members are active, passive or critical[9] to discussions of their participation and the forms of their participation in public life, if not politics in the strict meaning of the word, and to addressing the contexts within which we can transcend the notion of the audience understood as merely a recipient of information to an audience understood as public or as a participant in the public sphere.[10] This shift in focus transcends the pessimism about the failure of the news media to meet its normative potential assumed in the Habermasian model of the public sphere symptomatic of much scholarship in media and cultural studies, and which have served to deflect sociological awareness from a

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[9] Chapter Five details the debate on the audience.
[10] These have been pressing questions in the political communication literature, in particular, where scholarship, drawing on the Habermasian principle of the public sphere, has associated the term public with participation in politics and with citizenship (there are various arguments suggesting that media undermine the public sphere and political participation, such as Putnam's 2000).

number of salient issues, including how "publics are constituted, the media's role in this process, the nature of the social bonds between members of the public and the ways in which journalism and other media output can help or hinder in stimulating dialogue and debate" (Dahlgren 1991:16).

Both Jensen's and Dahlgren's arguments are crucial for the empirical focus in this research, an audience study that examines the extent to which the informants, members of the Palestinian diasporic community in Britain, relate to one another and to the larger host society they inhabit through their uses of news, and how their making sense of news, their oppositional decodings or otherwise of news, may help them engage or disengage in public life. These notions do not mean that the informants' appropriation of news is in itself a manifestation of political engagement[11], but that their identification with the news texts, as individuals and as members of a collective, and their social uses of news allows us to examine what participation means and whether participation in or withdrawal from public life are linked to identity politics and to questions of inclusion and exclusion.

Importantly, though this is something I do not address in this thesis, this allows us to address the prescriptive top-down models of multi-cultural citizenship. At this juncture, I turn to the theorisation of the news audience relevant to this study.

3.4 Theorising the Audience for News

The attempts to capture the different aspects of audience responses to the media have generated distinctive research traditions. In this section, I will focus only on those

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[11] It is important to note that traditional measurements of political participation – voting, party membership, etc. – are not the purpose of this research.

approaches pertinent to this work, namely the uses-and-gratification approach, the agenda setting and framing theories and the active audience theory.[12]

The uses- and- gratifications approach, a key tradition that has been in use since the 1960s, charts the use-values and experiential qualities that audiences associate with different media (Blumler and Katz 1974). Starting with the question of what people do with media, rather than what media do to people, this uses-and-gratifications approach identifies the audience's orientation towards and motivations for media use, which was later modified as the gratifications the audience seeks from different media (e.g. Katz et al. 1973). This mode of inquiry uses various empirical methods, but mostly content analysis and questionnaire-based surveys to gauge the meanings the audience members attach to texts and to understand their perceptions of the qualities of different news media, particularly because news lends itself to a variety of uses; as instrumental information, as entertainment or diversion from other concerns; as an occasion for identity-formation and as an opportunity for para-social interactions (see Jensen 1998). Since the uses and gratifications the audience members acquire from texts are broad, this tradition suggests that journalism's role is essentially benevolent, and that the media generally have only a limited impact on the audience, who use media content to gratify particular needs.

However, because of its comparative neglect of content, this approach may overemphasise the malleability of the audience and hence the variability of reception,

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[12] Among other important approaches to understanding the audience of television news draws on social psychology and media sociology to explore people's recall of news. Hoijer (1990), for example, argues that television news can test people's memory in a real-time setting because memory is highly dependent on the quality of initial comprehension. Doris Graber (1990), too, says that memory for visual themes is better than memory for verbal themes, while Harris' (1999) work suggests that intense emotional shots have a complex effect on memory.

problems that have beset later reception studies (Jensen 1998). Furthermore, its broad

assumptions that media are benign, meaning having little direct impact on their audience,

have been challenged by 'critical' theorists, who, drawing on Marxist and other analytical

paradigms, have maintained that journalism essentially reproduces the interests of

dominant groups and classes. Structuralists, drawing on the work of Lacan and Althusser,

have argued that the linguistic structures of news 'positions' the audience as subordinate

to the dominant class of capitalism, thereby suggesting that ideology is produced in

language, at the level of the unconscious (McNair 1999). Others, such as Hall and Eco,

have noted that that despite the presence of a dominant ideology, there is a possibility of

oppositional and different decodings by members of the audience. For this group of

theorists, ideological struggle is a hegemonic process to which journalism contributes by

"reproducing consensus about the social order" (Ericson et al. 1990: 19).[13]

The second approach to theorising the audience is the "agenda-setting" approach,

which argues for a direct, causal relationship between [journalistic] content and

subsequent public perception of what the important issues of the day are. The basic

hypothesis here is that journalistic news values act as a cue for the audience, alerting

them to the importance of an issue, which suggests that despite limited recall of specific

news items and despite the varied gratifications that the news may provoke or enforce,

news stories serve to focus the public's attention on specific issues in the political process

(McCombs and Shaw 1972). Simply put, agenda setters argue that news does not tell

people what to *think, but what to think about* (own emphasis added). Agenda-setting

research has become one of the most influential traditions in political communication

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[13] A different approach sees journalists constructing the world in terms of categories, such as the normal versus the deviant and so on.

work[14] and has been used to explain how journalism works in different national and transnational contexts. However, the new media ecology reflected in the diversity of media form and content has challenged its presumptions particularly because of its limitations in providing documentation of the processes of interpretation and uses of media that audiences perform in everyday contexts and which are seen as the most important interface between institutionalised politics and people's lives.

In McCombs and Shaw's original theory, agenda-setting was a linear theory of media effects that saw effect as a range and salience of the issues the audience members thought about. In the later version of this approach, known as 'framing' studies, the theory acquires two focal points; effect, where the effect is not just selection of objects and their salience, but selection of specific features of those objects; and audience activity, where the frame includes the conceptual apparatus[15] used by the audience in their decoding of media output (McCombs and Bell 1996). According to them, the framing approach links agenda-setting to the uses and gratifications approach by seeing agendas as a form of personal orientation that is actively sought by the audience (ibid).

Generally speaking, frame theory provides a framework that explains meaning production in media texts and in social practices as individual and as socially shared knowledge. An expanding literature also has examined the ways in which readers and viewers interpret frames and the degree to which these frames shape audience understandings, at best revealing the complexity of audience interpretation of news texts

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[14] The other two leading paradigms of political effect are the spiral of silence and the cultivation hypothesis.
[15] Other theorists, such as Tuchman (1978), Hall (1978) and Gitlin (2003), use the concept of the media frame to refer to what makes the world beyond the direct experience of people appear natural. Erving Goffman (1974) has also argued that in everyday life people frame reality in order to negotiate, manage and comprehend it and to choose appropriate repertoires of cognition and action.

and the degree to which these decodings are shaped by the complex interaction of media frames and personal experience (Gamson 1992: Neuman, Just & Crigler 1992). The conceptual framework of frame in the news is particularly significant in a research of this kind as the framing processes can be assessed through an audience study.

The third approach to theorising the audience is the broadly named 'active audience' theories which focus on what audiences do with media texts rather than what impact mediated communications have on the audience. Although active audience theory usually refers primarily to analyses in which the main focus is on specified audience participation with particularities of texts (e.g. Morley 1980; Radway 1984), a wider range of analytic approaches shares its key features. Recent ethnographic studies within the active audience approach have generally focused on the context in which media are used, especially the domestic frame of everyday media use (e.g. Morley 1980), as well as on the relationship between audience perceptions of textual meaning and some features of their social composition (Ang 1996; Alasuutari 1999).

Most of these studies have been criticised because the audiences targeted in mainly ethnographic work are contextually defined – the contexts are domestic in nature and the audience composition is based in age, religion, nationality, gender, class, educational achievement, etc. Consequently, these microcosms of audience meaning construction and action have been seen as a problem for active audience theory since they are often described in 'cultural terms'. In other words, the process of meaning construction is seen as an activity located in a group of subjectivities that is culturally or sub-culturally determined.

This thesis fuses elements of the above approaches, particularly framing theory and active audience theory, and which allow for an empirical analysis of the cognitive processes[16] the audience concerned uses to make sense of news. Cognition[17] as an explanatory framework has been employed to explain how individuals as members of an audience make sense of international political news in diverse cultural settings and to develop 'super-themes' (see Graber 1984: Jensen 1998) which help de-construct the traditional functionalistic approaches to understanding the meaning of news in societies.

Focusing on the processes through which the audience makes sense of news is important for developing a comprehensive understanding of the news audience because it addresses the ways in which mediation is a political process that involves the circulation of meanings between institutionalised political news media and consumers of these news media. These notions are taken up in the analysis of the empirical work in Chapters Seven and Eight. I now turn to the prevalent understanding of news in the literature to set the stage for my own argument regarding its understanding and meanings.

3.5 The Meaning of News — Contested Territory

The meaning of news remains hotly debated, particularly between the profession and the academy. From a purely journalistic perspective the answer to the question 'what is news?' is relatively straightforward — news is a story about real events or information

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[16] This thesis takes its point of departure in the specific understanding of news that comes through the interview material, thereby using a bottom-up approach derived from the data. It does not, therefore, intend to verify or disprove the theoretical understanding of cognition, but uses it as an analytical tool to explain the processes of meaning-making resulting from engagement with news.

[17] Goffman (1986) sees cognitive schemes as providing a basis for the conceptualisation of social behaviour. For him, a frame is a 'scheme or interpretation in which the particulars of events and activities which we attend to are organised and made sensible' (Goffman 1986: 10)

that people need to know and should know about their community and world. Media

critics, however, say news is a construction of reality, a language that journalists object to

as it implies that journalists are pawns in a wider game of power and control, and a

language replete with phrases such as "news is what newspapermen make it" (Gieber

1964), "news is the result of the methods newsworkers employ" (Fishman 1980) and

"news is manufactured by journalists" (Cohen and Young 1973).

Contestations about what news is extend to elite and popular definitions of news and

to news formats. In most American writings on news, as well as in journalistic practices,

for example, news is often seen in terms of sets of different dichotomies, hard versus soft,

important versus interesting, serious versus non-serious and information versus narrative.

Hartley (1982) and Fiske (1992) add to these dilemmas by referring to human interest

stories as 'non-serious' news, while Langer (1998) sees 'non-serious' news stories as

stories that focus on what he calls the domain of common sense and lived experience,

which is popular with television audiences. These dilemmas are becoming more difficult

to address in the contemporary news environment where the boundaries between soft and

hard and serious and non-serious news[18] are becoming increasingly porous and blurred.

Attempts to define news in broad strokes do little to resolve these conceptual

dilemmas. Walter Lippmann (1922), for instance, famously defined news as simply "the

signalling of an event", echoing modern textbook journalistic definitions of news.

However, this no longer holds true as such a distinction is not enough to distinguish news

from other media genres that also play this signalling role in that they, too, draw the

public's attention to issues and events of social and political importance. Indeed, it can be

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[18] There is a large body of work about sensationalism in news and about the debate whether news functions
more like infotainment. These are important debates, but are beyond the remit of this study.

argued that all of the usual characteristics people normally associate with news or public affairs media can be found in other media genres, while those associated with popular or entertainment media can also be found in news.

An equally complex dilemma poses itself when discussing news values, which Hall (1973) notes, "remain among the most opaque structures of meaning in modern society". In practice, all serious journalists are supposed to possess news values, but few are able to define what these are because they are often confused with notions of newsworthiness, which has been much more broadly defined in the scholarship on news production.

News values have been discussed in different ways in the literature on news. However, to date, the most widely quoted study on news values is and remains Galtung and Ruge's (1965/1970) model on foreign news. In detailing the criteria which make some events more likely to be selected as news, as well as which aspects of a news item are emphasised once selected, they identified 12 conditions that events have to satisfy to be classified as newsworthy. These include frequency, threshold, lack of ambiguity, meaning, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, composition, reference to elite nations, reference to elite people, reference to persons and reference to something negative, all of which are referents most journalists use when deciding on which story to tell the world.

However, as Patterson and Srebreny (2004) note, while the model of news values and newsworthiness remains relevant for the study of the pressures emanating from within media institutions themselves on the ways in which journalists do their work, it cannot be easily sustained as the most efficient model to explain news, particularly in the contemporary news environment characterised by rolling news and immediacy and by media literacy which, simply put, means the audience has the critical skill of analysis and

appreciation of the social dynamics and social centrality of media[19] 'as *framing the cultures of everyday*' (Patterson and Srebreny 2004:18) (my emphasis).

Another contentious concept used to assess news is the notion of objectivity, which refers to a normative principle that implies trust in journalists and journalism as it assumes that the facts presented to the world can be open to independent validation as opposed to values that form the basis of an individual's conscious or unconscious preferences for what the world should be (cf. Schudson 1978).[20] However, like news values, the concept of objectivity and the related term 'impartiality', both central to discussions of British broadcasting journalism, have come under attack from within and outside the profession with criticism buttressed by empirical work that has found that news is biased. A more fundamental critique asserts that there can be no objectivity in journalism (cf. McNair 1999). In recent work on the Arabic satellite broadcaster *al-Jazzeera,* Iskandar and el-Nawawy (2004) proposed that the term 'contextual objectivity' better explains how television news media present their stories in a fashion that is both impartial and yet sensitive to local sensitivities.

Furthermore, the increasing porousness of the classic information/entertainment divide that has often been used to distinguish news from other media genres makes it difficult to easily distinguish what constitutes news, while, at another level, as Dahlgren (1995) notes, the loosening of boundaries between journalism, entertainment, public

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[19] In political science scholarship on news, the media-centric focus has been offset by the decidedly normative impetus behind the examination of the relationship between journalism and the political system, emanating from the long-held traditions and expectations about the role of news as the fourth estate. Dating back to the work of Lippmann (1922), this scholarship has been mainly concerned with the political role of news, with work paying particular attention to measuring the effectiveness of the news media in fulfilling its primary roles as public watchdogs overseeing the state; as representatives of society and as providers of information to promote public rationality (see Curran 1996 for critique of models of media and democracy).
[20] Objectivity, as Schudson (1978) points out, is a relatively recent concept which emerged as an ideal following the spread of fascist dictatorships and their propaganda in the 1920s and the 1930s.

relations and advertising, precisely the trends which Habermas lamented, may have

detracted attention from 'the importance of the general media culture in producing shared

interpretive frameworks whether the communities produced are authentic or not is

another matter, but what is clear is that media-based interpretive communities are a

precondition for sense-making in the modern world' (Dahlgren 1995: 17).

3.6 News as Cultural Discourse – Mediation, Ritual and Narrative

These different debates set the stage for addressing the proposed understanding of *news*

as cultural discourse proposed in this thesis, and which helps explain how news can be

an expression of the beliefs, cultures and values of societies and how it can function as

ideology, therefore serving to sustain relations of domination.

This understanding, I argue, goes beyond and draws on the notions of news as 'public'

presumed in the two dominant and contrasting views of news in the literature, the first as

public knowledge, which reflects the normative functionalist perspective on news

production prominent until the mid-1980s, and second as *public culture*, which reflects

the cultural approach to news introduced in the 1980s cultural studies and which suggests

that the meanings conveyed in news are mediated by news workers and producers[21] and

received or mediated by audiences in different ways (Cottle 2000a).

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[21] Cottle points to a number of recent studies that have begun to examine the differentiated nature of news forms and professional practices and explore how news production contexts and news texts can be productively approached as mutually interpenetrating (Bell 1991; Cottle 1993a; Clausen 2003) thus showing that the earlier theoretical emphasis placed on routine tend to reflect a form of organisational functionalism in which ideas of journalistic practices and agency become lost (Cottle 2003).

In proposing to understand news as a form of cultural discourse[22], I combine

interpretative and social constructivist approaches that bring together the perspective of

news as an ideological resource that helps in the formation and the de-limitation of public

assumptions and attitudes (cf. Gitlin 2003) and the cultural perspective of news that takes

into account its aesthetic and emotional characteristics[23], as well as its appropriation as

ritual, which serves to link audience members in their everyday lives to the larger world

in a symbolic way (Dahlgren 1992). The notion of discourse implies conflict and

contestations, while the notion of culture refers to patterns of communication, practices

and meanings that provide taken for granted orientations as well as resources for

collective life and which guide people's actions, speech and understanding.

Methodologically speaking, understanding news as cultural discourse allows us to

examine the relevance of the *what* and the *how* (content and form) of news, where the

former refers to the taken-for-granted values and the "unnoticed background

assumptions....through which the news is framed", and the latter to "narrative,

storytelling, human interest and the conventions of photographic and linguistic

presentation that shape the presentation of all the news the media produce" (Schudson

1997: 19-20).

The proposed direction, I argue, is relevant for addressing through an empirical

investigation the power of news by addressing the "pre or non-political that becomes

actualised at particular moments when politics arise...the key here is to underscore the

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[22] I draw on Hall's (1992) notion of discourse (which he bases on Foucault) and which he sees as a 'set of statements or beliefs which produce knowledge that serves the interests of a particular group or class' (Hall 1992: 292). In this sense, discourse can be said to operate in a similar way to ideology, though it cannot be aligned with a single axis of power as the Marxian notion of ideology assumes.

[23] The aesthetic characteristics of news describe the communicative forms in news or the conventions that allow for the transmission of certain expressions (Helland 1993).

processual and contextual dimension; the political and politics are not simply given, but are constructed via word and deed" (Dahlgren 2003: 155). In other words, this approach acknowledges individual agency, but also the ways in which news, by drawing the public's attention to collective or other political and social concerns, may direct people to take positions in relation to these concerns. Seen this way, news, news as cultural discourse functions like ideology though it does not directly influence action.

The proposed direction situates news within the theoretical framework of mediation which marks a step beyond recent studies of news reception insofar as it emphasises news as a social and political phenomenon rather than focusing on its textual representations. This understanding is clear in Roger Silverstone's *Why Study the Media* (1999) in which he argues that mediation involves the movement of meanings from one text to another, from one discourse to another, and from one event to another. Mediation, he writes, involves the constant transformation of meanings, both large scale and small, significant and insignificant:

> Mediated meanings move between texts, certainly, and across time. But they also
> move across space, and across spaces. They move from the public to the private, from
> the institutional to the individual, from the globalising to the local and personal, and
> back again [...] Mediation [...] neither begins or ends with a singular text. Its claims
> for closure, the product of the ideologies and narratives of news, for example, are
> compromised at the point of delivery by the certain knowledge that the next
> communication, the next bulletin, the next story or comment or interrogation will
> move things and meanings on and elsewhere (Silverstone 1999: 15).

Nick Couldry (2003) also suggests that the notion of mediation explains how ritual functions to confirm an established social order that becomes natural and taken for

granted. Drawing on Emile Durkheim, he argues that it is not "enough to make finer

descriptions of media practice by using existing conceptual tools; only through a new

concept, or so I will argue, can we cut beneath the apparently chaotic surface of everyday

media practice. Once we do so, we will find more order than we expect and in the process

add something to media and social theory, and also, I hope, to anthropological theory;

where not only ritual but now mediation, too, are central concerns (2003:4).

The theorisation of the relationship between mediation and ritual can be traced to the

work of James Carey (1989) whose ritual view of communication is associated with the

communicative process as performance rather than movement, participation rather than

consumption, meaning rather than strategy or results (cf. Rothenbuhler 1998). In his

analysis of 'ritualised communication', Rothenbuhler (1998) details four ways in which

mediated communication has been discussed as being ritual in its form. The first refers to

the special 'media events' in which television coverage functions as a key part of the

ceremonial event. Media events have been famously theorised by Katz and Dayan (1992)

in their seminal work *The Live Broadcasting of History* in which they hypothesise that

these events play the role of periodic social gatherings for the celebration of society[24].

The second relates to the rituals of media work — an area that covers journalists'

routine, their use of standard questions and their interest in standard topics; the third is

the claim that television, in particular, functions as a religion; and the fourth, which is of

particular relevance to the empirical work in this thesis, refers to the 'ritualised media

use' which refers to how audience members appropriate news as ritual in their everyday

lives. (The analysis of the empirical work in Chapter Seven will show how the informants

use news as ritual and how they appropriate this in their lives).

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[24] For a differentiated and sophisticated view of media events, see Couldry's Media Rituals (2003).

In paying attention to form, we take into account its narrative characteristics,

considerations that have been held back (Bird 1988/1997) by the continuous debate on

such dichotomies as 'hard' versus 'soft, or 'news' versus 'human interest', but which

remain relevant because they address the journalistic process in a much more complex

manner than a 'consensual model' or a manipulative model would suggest. Importantly,

this understanding means that "...the media's narrative reshaping will be most successful

when [it] can present new information in such a way that it accords with readers' existing

narrative conventions and can be accommodated within them" (Bird 1997:346).[25] The

notion of news as narrative, therefore, explains why people remember the dramatic and

the personal stories, confirming how news can become a symbolic system in which the

informational content becomes less important than emotional meanings and less

important than the repetition of mythic[26] truths embodied within the story form itself.

Indeed, recent scholarship has shown how audiences become more engaged with news

when it resembles a drama. For example, in his account of the coverage of the September

11, 2001 attacks, Keith Tester notes that the viewers became more committed to news

'precisely because it was wholly unfinished', (Tester 2004: 193, emphasis in original).[27]

What this means is that, as Scott Stossel (2001) comments: 'Television in the era of 24-

hour-a-day coverage is news as *a process*.[28] (2001:37). News as a process implies a

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[25] This is very relevant in contemporary journalism, where there is a tendency towards tabloidisation.
[26] Many media critics have commented on the mythical qualities of news. Jack Lule (2001) has argued that news as narrative has roots in drama, folklore and myth.
[27] This is collaborated in the empirical work for this thesis where the informants attach to news because it is similar to an unending drama, or a continuous narrative of the continuous conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.
[28] This is collaborated in the empirical work for this thesis where the informants attach to news because it is similar to an unending drama, or a continuous narrative of the continuous conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

'continuity' and/or 'circularity', serving to underline differentiated experiences of time[29], which, as Todd Gitlin (1980) has argued, are constructed by the media whose modern forms have contributed to a shift in the balance of "social memory from eyewitness and living memory to more mediated forms of remembering" (Hoskins 2004:4).

What this suggests is that at a time of fast-paced globalisation processes, notions of time and speed of mediated events have greater applicability and meaning because the increasing blurring of the public and private domains becomes part of the "loss of context...it is these frameworks that are today fundamentally intensively and extensively mediated [...] one can even suggest that the media themselves operate as a 'framework'[30] of memory as they assist continuously in the reconstruction of our past by dominating the present" (Hoskins 2004:110).

Though the individual remains the real holder of memory, there can be no doubt that remembering is a process that is increasingly media-afflicted, particularly by television as the primary medium of memory and its collapse:

> Memories do not reside as a 'store' in the mind — as is perhaps our everyday understanding of human memory — but instead are *provoked*, being challenged, altered sustained and shared by others. Collective memory, in this way is the product of a negotiation between individuals and their wider surround at a given time and in a given context. Today, these features of reporting war and other events have reached a new intensity. Saturated and extended news coverage provides little relief in terms of the space and distance necessary for memory to become settled: television appears as

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[29] The analysis of the empirical data will show how time for the informants concerned, members of the Palestinian diasporic community in Britain, is mediated as a continuous time.
[30] Recent scholarship has argued that Arabic transnational television channels, such as *al-Jazeera,* operate as memory banks in the ways they continuously re-weave the past in the present. Chapter Seven will detail how this is reflected in audience discourses about themselves and their nation.

out dominant surround delaying or disabling the forgetting function of social memory (Hoskins 2004: 2-4) (emphasis in original).

To emphasise the connection between time, memory and news, the next chapter tells the story of the Palestinian diaspora, the significance of the political (the nation), collective memory and political mythologies and the twin narratives of what it means to be Palestinian and what it means to feel Palestinian.

Chapter Four

The Palestinian Diaspora- Events, Memory and Nation

Without remembrance and without the reification which remembrance needs for its own fulfillment and which makes it, indeed, as the Greeks held, the mother of all arts, the living activities of action, speech, and thought would lose their reality at the end of each process and disappear as though they never had been. The materialization they have to undergo in order to remain in the world at all is paid for in that always the "dead letter" replaces something which grew out of and for a fleeting moment indeed existed as a "living spirit" (Hannah Arendt, 1958: 95).

What it means to be Palestinian (Palestinian-ness) has been central to Palestinian national consciousness (Palestinian-ism) since the emergence of this consciousness in the 20th century. This centrality is reflected in Palestinian oral history, collective memories and political mythologies, as well as in popular discourse, often providing taken-for-granted assumptions about the twin narratives of Palestinian-ism and Palestinian-ness that appear as natural markers of difference and that make it difficult to remember that their emergence is recent, an outcome of historically contingent forms of organising space in the world.

This chapter begins by telling the story of this organisation of space, starting with *al-Nakba* (the catastrophe) of 1948, which has gained a central location in the narratives of Palestinian-ism and Palestinian-ness, and in Palestinian collective memory and mythologies, both of which are dependent on story-telling and narrativisation, which require form (s) of communication and/or mediating frameworks to ensure their durability over time and across spaces. The relationship between *al-Nakba* and Palestinian nationalist discourses is not difficult to understand. Indeed, narratives about *al-Nakba* have emerged

as symbolic lynchpins of an ideological, discursive consciousness (Billig 1995) of what it means to feel and be Palestinian which run hand in hand with discursive constructions of difference and dinstinctiveness (Hall 1991). This chapter examines this relationship by drawing on relevant theorisation on nations, collective memory and national identity before turning the focus back to the Palestinians in Britain by exploring the recent academic debate on diasporas. In doing so, I selectively focus on theorisation of diaspora from the mid-1990s to identify how the understanding of the term has evolved.

Of particular interest to this thesis is the theorisation of diaspora's ability to look around (Srebreny 2000) and their connectivity, which make the term meaningful for academic study. Drawing on these notions, this thesis argues that diasporas cannot just be seen as given communities that are logical extensions of ethnic communities, but as cultural, economic, political and social formations in the process of becoming, which means they are responsive to nation and international crises, discourses and representations.

This understanding brings to attention the tensions in diasporas' lived experiences and the conflicts in their identifications, not only between the self and the collective (national), but also between the national and the cosmopolitan[1] which is essential to this inquiry as it draws attention to the multiplicity of voices and ideas around which diasporic members can think about and construct their identities (Gillespie 1995). I end the chapter by arguing that news narrations can help construct these meanings through their mediation of the past in the present, the imagined and the real and the personal and political, therefore helping

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[1] Beck has usefully described the cosmopolitan perspective as one that provides an alternative imagination (of identity) to the national, an imagination of alternative ways of life and rationalities, which can also include the otherness of the other (Beck 2002:18), therefore drawing our attention to the ways in which issues of global concern can become part of people's everyday experiences.

blur the boundaries between the private and public and between real experiences and shared or collective experiences and memories of events.

4.1 The historical context

The political and historical beginnings of the Palestinian diaspora are well rehearsed in the literature, but are worth recounting, albeit briefly, here. The story began with the exodus of about 750,000-800,000 Palestinians (some 80 per cent of the total number of Palestinians) from the areas of former Palestine either allocated to Israel in the UN partition plan of 1947 or conquered by Israel in the ensuing war against Arab armies. Though the circumstances surrounding the exodus remain disputed,[2] this cataclysmic period, referred to by Palestinians and Arabs as *al-Nakba* (the catastrophe) has passed into Palestinian collective memory as one of unexpected, unnatural events and a period of forced exile, brought about by the fighting, the violence and real atrocities or fear of atrocities.

The events of 1947-48 have since been etched in Palestinian minds as narratives linked to real personal or shared experiences, which have often been communicated to others, thus forming a significant and emotional site for individual, collective memories and mythologies of the Palestinian nation. Over the course of more than five decades, the Palestinian collective narrative has simplified, polemicised, shaped and sometimes distorted a highly

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[2] The Palestinian and Arab stories tell of forced evacuation and intimidation by Israeli forces and gangs, while the official Israeli line argues that Palestinians were induced to leave their homes by radio broadcasts from neighbouring Arab countries. Only in the late 1980s did Palestinian and Israeli scholars agree on the perspectives. This was the result of the work of Israeli revisionist historians, such as Benny Morris, Avi Shlaim, among others, who distanced themselves from official Israeli historicism. However, there remain differences over the aims of the war. Benny (1987), for instance, has argued that a master plan to evict the Palestinians did not exist, but that the expulsion happened as a result of the war and fighting. This has been challenged by Palestinian and other authors, such as Walid Khalidi (1992) and Nur Masalha (1992) who argued that Zionist policy both before and during the war was intent on 'transfer' or 'expulsion' of the Palestinian population.

complex conflict situation (Bowker 2003). However, the sense of betrayal and helplessness over the events of 1948 and their aftermath and the drama of Palestinian collective memory[3] of the catastrophe remains potent, despite the passage of time and generational changes.

That said, the history of Palestinian migration, particularly to Western Europe and the Americas, predates that event. Politically motivated flight commenced before *al-Nakba* — a peak period was the Great Revolt of 1936-9, a popular uprising against the Jewish institutions which were beginning to take a foothold in Palestine. Migration, though in small numbers, began in the late 18th century, when mainly Christian families from the towns of Bethlehem, Beit Jala, Ramallah as well as Jerusalem, motivated by socio-economic, personal interests and family considerations, began migrating to the West, though this was on a much smaller scale (Schulz 2003).

For many of these Christian[4] Palestinian households, migration was mainly linked to socio-economic factors as well as by the belief that opportunities for work and improvement were better in the West. Though some members of first generation of migrants returned later on, similar considerations continued to play a key role in motivating subsequent generations to follow suit. Other factors also contributed to the post-1948 migration patterns, including the lack of a strong and credible Palestinian/Arab leadership, which led to the migration of thousands of Palestinians to oil-exporting states of the Arabian Peninsula, Europe and the Americas over the next two generations.

Forced migration did not end with *al-Nakba*. The 1967 Arab-Israeli war, popularly known as *al-Naksa* (the setback), too, had a profound impact on Palestinian population

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[3] Imagery associated with the events of 1948 has galvanised political energy among the Palestinian diaspora population, particularly the refugees, since that date.

[4] There are no specific figures on the Palestinian Christian population. In absolute terms, however, the Christian population is reported to have fallen from 6 per cent in 1944 to 3.2 per cent in 1989, based on different statistical sources).

movements, leading to the forced repatriation of about 320,000 Palestinians (Masalha 1999) though the dispersal this time was not solely a result of mass flight and/or expulsion. Many refugees residing in camps in the West Bank fled to new camps in Jordan amid worries about their safety, becoming refugees twice over, while others were not allowed to return to the West Bank by Israel. In the years that followed, Palestinians continued to leave their homes, 'encouraged' to do so by various Israeli transfer schemes and 'financial incentives' (ibid).

Forced migration and expulsions, but on smaller scales, have continued throughout the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza — Israel has used deportation as a form of collective punishment. In 1992, for instance, Israel deported some 400 Palestinians, allegedly suspected of membership of the Islamic group Hamas and Islamic Jihad to Lebanon. Subsequent regional events have contributed to the continuous though irregular process of uprooting. These included the Lebanese civil war in the 1970s and the 1991 Gulf War which forced around 350,000 Palestinians residing in the Gulf[5] and the Arabian Peninsula to flee because of political differences with the governments of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and other oil-producing countries. Most returned to Jordan, some to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, while some middle-class and upper-middle class families emigrated to the West, including Britain.

Both forced expulsion and voluntary migration have had important consequences for the demographics of the Palestinian people. There are no exact figures on the size, structure and distribution of the Palestinian population — the last official census of the Palestinians was conducted during the British Mandate in 1931. Scattered sample surveys taken since then,

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[5] Palestinian migration to the Arabian Gulf region began in the 1940s. The Gulf states were not the primary host for the Palestinians, but hosted what is popularly known as secondary migration related to the Lebanese civil war and other regional conflicts.

each with its own sampling frame, biases and concerns, form an uneven database for making

any coherent statistical statements. However, projections by the Palestinian Central Bureau

of Statistics put the number of Palestinians worldwide at 7.9 million in 2001. Of these, 4.5

million were said to be living in the diaspora[6] (*al-Quds* newspaper, 11 January 2002).

According to UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency) data, there were

nearly 3.9 million registered Palestinian refugees in June 2001 — the largest group (about

1.5 million) were in Jordan, 1.46 million in the West Bank and Gaza, followed by Lebanon

(380,000) and Syria (392,000). Jordan hosts about one million Palestinians.

4.2 The Palestinians in Britian

Broadly speaking, European countries, Britain included, were not a primary destination for

the majority of the migrating Palestinians. The reasons are relatively easy to grasp —

difficulty of access, distance and language problems, not to mention different migration

policies. In fact, it can be said that unlike mass Palestinian immigration flows to

neighbouring Arab countries, such as Jordan and Lebanon, Palestinian immigration into

Europe has generally taken the form of infiltration (Malki 1992).

The lack of a specific pattern to the Palestinians' modes of arrival in Europe has made it

difficult to trace, create or obtain any official histories of or figures about the number of

the Palestinians in Europe. Moreover, the ways in which European governments normally

design their respective censuses do not offer easy signposts as to the ethnic make-up of

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[6] The diaspora in this sense refers to Palestinian refugees residing in camps in Jordan, Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza and Syria.

their populations. In Britain[7], the 2001 general Census report, which put the various ethnic

groups' total at 4.6 million, or 7.9 per cent of the population, does not give the Palestinians

a distinct category, but includes them in a generic 'Middle Eastern' one.

Furthermore, since census figures are based on place(s) of birth, this has meant that

Palestinian children born in Britain do not show up as being Palestinian. What compounds

the problem is the fact that Palestinians are not easily identifiable as a separate ethnic

group — they share language, customs, traditions and religion with other Arabs. Janet

Abu-Lughod (1992), who has compiled one of the most authoritative demographic studies

on the Palestinians after *al-Nakba*, argues that it is virtually impossible to determine

exactly how many persons of Palestinian birth or ancestry exist today. (A 2001 study by

the Palestinian Diaspora Studies Centre *Shaml* in Ramallah, drawing on data through

fieldwork as well as guesswork, has put the number of individuals of Palestinian origin in

Europe at about 177,000, most of which are in Germany[8] and Britain).

It is, therefore, not surprising that few serious studies have been carried out on the

Palestinians in Britain, partly, as mentioned above, because of a lack of statistics and data

on their numbers and whereabouts or of their journey into exile, because of their

invisibility within the wider Arab diasporic community and because the number of

Palestinians in Britian — estimates suggest there are around 20,000[9] (this compares to an

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[7] Britain is said to have achieved a high level of sensitivity to multi-culturalism and integration (Parekh 1997) though this does not mean that there is little discrimination, particularly along racial lines.

[8] Many Palestinians went to Germany following the first Intifada, leading to the formation of an important Palestinian community with origins from Gaza. Palestinian immigrants in Germany tend to be younger than those in Scandinavian states or Britain.

[9] Afif Safiyeh, the Palestinian representative in Britain, privately estimates there are around 20,000 Palestinians in Britain though his office's records comprise only 5,000 addresses for Palestinian individuals and families around the country. The difficulty in updating these records is related to the fact that many recent arrivals, estimated at about 3,000 (Shaml 2001), are mostly ex-refugees and political asylum seekers who do not want to officially register themselves as Palestinian for a number of reasons, including concerns over losing their refugee status and worries about being too easily identified as Palestinians.

estimated 80,000 in Germany, for example) — is small in relation to the number of

Palestinians worldwide, estimated by the Palestinian Authority at 8.7 million, of whom 3.7

million were in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 2003. Furthermore, apart from several

scattered attempts to map their whereabouts, the Palestinians in Britain, as well as in other

Western European countries and the US, have been relatively neglected in the emerging

literature on Palestinian oral history and collective memory.

Broadly speaking, the Palestinians in Britain come from varied socio-economic and

religious backgrounds. Their journeys to Britain and the time of their journeys are also

varied. Some, particularly the traditionally well-off and business people, came to Britain in

the 1930s to pursue their education[10] or for work purposes. Some arrived after the 1991

Gulf War, leaving openly hostile Gulf Arab countries angered over the Palestinian pro-

Iraqi stand in that war. Other more recent arrivals are political asylum seekers either

fleeing the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip or the refugee camps in Lebanon.

The aforementioned *Shaml* report suggests that the degree of integration within the host

society markedly differs between these later larger arrivals and the smaller, but better-

established groups that had migrated over the past half century, and that the interaction

between the two groups is minimal, even non-existent at times.

This lack of interaction between the diverse members of the Palestinian diasporic

community in Britain does not only reflect differences in the timing of arrival in Britain,

but also socio-economic situations and political and religious cleavages that influence and

are influenced by the extent to which individuals feel secure in the host country and by the

degree of their assimilation. Before going on to discuss the particularities of Palestinian

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[10] Consequently, there is a high proportion of professionals within the Palestinian community in Britain.

national consciousness and Palestinian national identity, I provide an overview of relevant

scholarship on nations and nationalism and collective memories.

4.3 Nations and Nationalism — Between Remembering and Forgetting

Academic inquiry into how nations and nationhood are formed gathered pace in the 1980s

with the publication of three key works[11] (Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm

1983), all of which argued, though with different emphases and historical grounding, that

nations are constructed or invented, rather than given or presupposed.[12] Though these

assumptions have been criticised, most notably by Anthony Smith — he has argued that

the success of the invention of construction of national identities must be based on pre-

existing social and cultural forms and networks (1998) — they have inspired much

research on the constructedness and the discursive imagination of modern nation-states.[13]

Building on these key studies, relevant scholarship has defined the nation as a

community of shared memory and forgetting (e.g. Renan 1996; Deutsch 1966; Anderson

1991; Smith 1991). Smith, for instance, describes the nation as a "human population

sharing an historic territory; common myths and historical memories; a mass public

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[11] Of the three, Eric Hobsbawm, combining a Marxist outlook with Weberian functionalism, argued that the birth of nations was forged by 'invented traditions', thus forming the sustaining myths that can be borrowed, revived, transformed or simply invented.

[12] These studies have been categorised as falling within the modernisation literature on identities, which counterbalanced the prevalent literature associating national identity with primordial elements. Taking nationalism as an inevitable and inexorable dimension of modernisation and industrialisation, many of the modernisation theorists sought to assess the creation of national identity through the window of elite class politics (Kedouri 1964) and the formation of nations as political communities with consolidated or bounded territories (Gellner 1983). Nations, in this view, came into being as a result of a new configuration of state-culture relations resulting from the demands of a capitalist-industrial economy or because of the acceleration of a radically changed understanding of time and space, thus providing the impetus for the popular imagination of nations as communities (cf. Anderson 1983, 1991).

[13] This brief overview does not do justice to the exceptional literature on nations and nationalism. My focus on these authors, however, is related to the fact that their works had a crucial impact on subsequent theorisation and studies in the field.

culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members" (1991: 14). Ernest Renan, too, gives centre stage to the relevance of history, which he sees as mediated by 'a double act of imagination'. For him, subjects need to imagine themselves as part of a national community before national history can have any significance, while history itself is imagined rather than experienced and, what is more, is selectively remembered (Renan 1996).

Other scholarship has drawn attention to the 'essence' of the nation as opposed to its construction, offering an extension of the modernist interpretations of Hobsbawm, Gellner and Anderson. Among works relevant to this research study is that by Walker Connor (1978; 1993) who argues that, to understand nations and nationalism, we need to take into account the essentially irrational psychological bond that brings fellow nationals together and which is supposed to constitute the essence of national identity or, in his terms, 'a sense of belonging'. Smith's later contribution (1999) to the study of nations and nationalism is also important in that he applies an ethno-symbolic[14] approach that helps overcome some of the inherent limitations to modernist theory[15] while also acknowledging its insights.

The introduction of a psychological dimension to the definition of nations is implicit in Anderson's catchy statement that a nation is an 'imagined political community' (1983:15) and in Emerson's notion that "the simplest statement that can be made about a nation is that it is a body of people who feel they are a nation" (1960:102) which Michael Billig

[14] According to Anthony Smith, the ethno-symbolic approaches make a number of claims based on a set of basic themes, including the longue durée, the national past, present and future, the ethnic basis of nations, the cultural components of ethnic groups, ethnic myths and symbol; ethno-history; routes to nationhood and the longevity of nationalism detailed in *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (1999).

[15] These limitations, Smith (1999) argues, refer to the modernists' systematic failure to accord any weight to the pre-existing cultures and ethnic ties of the nation that emerged in the modern epoch. Smith sees this failure as related to serious inadequacies in the social constructionism and instrumentalism that underpin modernism (1999: 9).

(1995) links to questions of national identity. For Billig, identity, "if it is to be understood as a form of talking, is also to be understood as a form of life" (Billig 1995:60). This psychological dimension, in other words the 'in-the-mind' consciousness of nationhood, is relevant to the present case as the political and the national do not conform to Gellner's (1983) argument about their congruence in modernity. Therefore, to understand 'national identity', we need to outline the general forms of nationalist *thinking*:

> These include ways of conceiving of 'us, the nation' which is said to have its unique destiny (identity); it also involves conceiving of 'them, the foreigners' against whom we identify ourselves as different. Nationalist thinking involves more than commitment to a group and a sense of difference from other groups. It conceives of 'our' group in a particular way. In doing so, it takes for granted ideas about nationhood and the links between peoples and homelands...If this way of thinking seems to be commonplace and familiar; then it, nevertheless, includes mystic assumptions which have become habits of thoughts. (Billig 1995:61)

Billig's arguments in *Banal Nationalism* are, as he notes at the outset, particularly relevant to established nations, where he points out that nationalism, when it moves in from the periphery, or its hiding place, only comes as a 'temporary mood'. Nevertheless, the term banal nationalism can be extended to cover any ideological habits which enable the established nations [...] to be reproduced (Billig 1995:6). In illustrating his proposal, Billig conducts a survey of British national newspapers on a randomly selected day, showing how they constantly flag nationhood, while also reflecting a taken-fro-granted attitude about the existence of different nations in the world.

Though the Palestinians' is not yet an established nation — indeed, the national and political have not yet coincided in time and space[16]— Billig's argumentation is illuminating in discussing Palestinian-ism (Palestinian national consciousness), particularly because of his explicit linking of the imagining of the nation to "a wider ideological, discursive consciousness" (Billig 1995:10), and his affirmation that the construction of national identity always runs in parallel to the construction of difference and uniqueness[17].

The idea of national identity as imagined was proposed in Benedict Anderson's path-breaking account of the historical emergence of the modern nation-state. For Anderson, the emergence of the modern nation-state was enabled by the creation of an 'imagined, political community' determined by shared natural characteristics and a common system of values and beliefs, the key reference points for the construction of a shared sense of belonging. In his account, Anderson clearly links this sense of belonging to the modes of representation in plays, novels, scores and newspapers.

Anderson's theory, as discussed in Chapter Two, has been criticised for being too deterministic and also for giving too much weight to the power of nationally structured communications systems. However, the impact of communications systems on imagined national cultures cannot be trivialised because we cannot ignore the ways in which representation, the story-telling and evocative narrations, provide the link between the past, present and future, therefore remaining central to many other accounts[18] of nations and nationalism. (Bell 2003). This means that:

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[16] Gellner (1983) argues that nationalism is a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent.

[17] The analysis of the empirical work in this study, particularly Chapter Eight, both draws on and illustrates these notions.

[18] The different theories of nations and nationalism can be classified into the following categories: primordialists, perennialists, modernists, historical ethno-symbolists and post-modernists. (For further

Representational practices are thus inherently bound up in the process of national identity formation; to mould a national identity — a sense of unity with others belonging to the same nation — it is necessary to have an understanding of *oneself as located in a temporally extended narrative*, and in order to be able to locate oneself in such a way, nationalists discourse must be able to represent the unfolding of time in such a way that the nation assumes a privileged and valorised role (Bell 2003:69). (My emphasis)

Bell's reference to understanding oneself as located in a temporally extended narrative is particularly true of the Palestinians, whose narratives of the self and the collective suggest that the accumulation of traumatic events weaves into a narrative of continuity that marks the texture of Palestinian history as remembered and as experienced and Palestinian memory as an existentially felt relationship of the past to the present (this is collaborated in the empirical work, particularly in the ways in which the informants commute between the present and the past). While painting, oral history, drama, literature and film are the main communicative channels that clearly portray a historicist vision of the nation, this study argues that news, in particular television's, is, too, a suitable genre that enables people to see themselves as located in an extended narrative[19] because of its mediation of the past in the present and of individual and collective memories. I will return to this argument later on in the chapter, but first I will review some work linking national identity, collective memory and political mythologies.

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discussion of these different approaches, please see Duncan S. A. Bell (2003) and Anthony Smith's (1999:2001) typology of the four theoretical paradigms of nationalism.

[19] The empirical data detailed in Chapter Seven will show examples when the informants think of themselves, through their engagement with news, in similar ways.

4.4 Between Collective Memory and Political Mythologies

One of the most influential theorists to make a link between national identity and collective memory is Ernest Renan (1996). He defined the nation as a '...soul, a spiritual principle' which is made up of two things "one in the past, and the other is in the present; one is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is current consent, the desire to live together, the willingness to continue to maintain the values of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form" (Renan 1996:52). For him, the stories of the nation's past are kept alive in the present, in the mind of individuals, and are narrated in written texts as well as performed on stage and encoded on monuments.

Anthony Smith, too, focuses on the interplay between memory and national identity. For Smith: "[One] might almost say; no memory, no identity, no identity, no nation" (Smith 1986:383). Bell (2003) gives an additional focus to the significance of memory in the construction of nations, particularly because he connects this to the construction of boundaries, which are important to how we understand ourselves and others, and how we differentiate between the stranger and the friend:

> memory demarcates the boundary between Them and US, delineating the national self from the foreign, alien Other. Such binding memories can be passed from generation to generation, transmigrating across multiple historical contexts. They can be (allegedly) invented, acquired, and established, although more often than not they assume a life-force of their own, escaping the clutches of any individual group and becoming embedded in the very fabric, material and psychological, of the nation (Bell 2003:70).

Scholarship on the relationship between memory and national identity is not confined to nationalism studies, but straddles across other disciplines, such as sociology, social psychology and historiography, and political studies. Interest here draws in part on the work of sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1950; 1992) in which he argued that every group develops the memory of its own past that highlights its unique identity vis-à-vis other groups, and in part on the field of historiography, popularised in France in the 1970s.

While the concept of memory itself is largely polysemous, or even metaphoric when it covers all forms of the presence of the past, what is interesting in Halbwachs' notion of collective memory is his distinguishing of the historical and the autobiographical, therefore highlighting the importance of understanding collective memory within its 'social frameworks' while shifting the analysis of the social bases of memory from the individual to the society as a whole.[20]

Halbwachs's work has inspired a growing body of research on the meanings of collective memory across disciplines. In the field of commemoration studies, Yael Zerubavel in *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (1995) has argued that collective memory is "substantiated through multiple forms of commemoration: the celebration of a communal festival, the reading of a tale, the participation in a memorial service or the observance of a holiday, through which groups create, articulate and negotiate their shared memories of particular events" (1995:5), while pointing to how each act reproduces a commemorative narrative, a story about a particular

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[20] The distinction between the individual and the social is important in discussing memory. For theorists like Smith, for instance, an essential element in any kind of human identity is memory. Identity in this sense is not a matter of sameness through time, or persistence through change, but also of reflective consciousness of personal connection with the past. In the case of collective cultural identities, he argues that new generations continue to carry shared memories of what they consider to be their past and what they consider to be the past experiences of older generations of the same collectivity (Smith 1999:208).

past that accounts for this ritualised remembrance and focuses on the group's distinct identity and history, thus contributing to the construction of the nation. Smith (1999) reiterates this point in arguing that collective memories are transmitted very often through oral traditions of the family, clan or community. In other cases, "oral traditions are supplemented, sometimes overshadowed, by canonical texts — epics, chronicles, hymns, prophecies, law-codes, treaties, songs and the like — as well as various forms of art, crafts, architecture, music and dance. All of these [...] embody and crystallise popular memories and myths, local, regional and pan-ethnic" (Smith 1999:208).

The potency of remembrance which preserves the Palestinians' 'internal map' (Khalidi 1997: 205) and the notion of the 'nation' believed to be at the core of what it means to be Palestinian are rooted in a largely Western model of traumatic memory in which authority and authenticity are grounded in narrations of extreme trauma and where the rhetorical power of memory is underpinned by the belief that disadvantaged communities are oriented towards remembering and have a rich oral tradition through which to record the suffering of the past.

Historically speaking, the sharing of memories and the reproduction of oral histories has been a family prerogative in Palestinian society. The family has thus been, as Rosemary Sayigh (1977) notes, a weighty 'institution' that has been instrumental in creating a Palestinian identity in exile and in maintaining the sense of a distinctive Palestinian community. Shulz (2003), in her historical account of the Palestinian diaspora, too, speaks of how Palestinians growing up in refugee camps had often recast their mothers and grandmothers and other elder people as orators and story-tellers, therefore keeping the memory of *al-Nakba* and its consequences alive in their lives.

What this means is that the Palestinians' narratives of the catastrophe of 1948 come from multiple sites and a plurality of voices In the absence of national and state institutions, the role of Palestinian intellectuals both in the homeland and the diaspora has taken on added importance, with scholars such as the late Edward Said, and poets, like Mahmoud Darwish [21] making crucial contributions to the sustenance of remembrance.

The literature on national and political mythologies — the narratives that shape collective consciousness and national-cultural identity by anchoring the present in the past (Wistrich and Ohana 1995) — illustrates how like collective memories, they, too, are dynamic and central to ideas of the nation. Robert Bowker in *Palestinian Refugees: Mythology, Identity and the Search for Peace* (2003) notes that mythologies respond to changing needs, which emphasises their dynamism; they are durable because they are linked to wider frameworks of understanding among individuals of their social and historical context, or, in other words, to collective memories. Historian and political theorist Mohammed Bamyeh (2003) notes how mythologies on both sides of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict have come to represent enormous burdens, in which real grievances are being "buried deep under a barrage of culturalism, religion, civilizational discourse and identity" (Bamyeh 2003: 836).

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[21] Darwish in Memory for Forgetfulness (1982) writes that the "The true homeland is not that which is known or proved. ...Your insistent need to demonstrate the history of stones and your ability to invent proofs does not give you prior membership over him who knows the time of the rain from the smell of the stone. The stone for you is an intellectual effort. For its owner it is a roof and walls."

4.5 Mediating Memory

Crucially, political mythologies can be seen as linked to processes of communication as they require active processes by which particular narratives are preserved and told again and again — these could be oral histories, stories[22] that parents tell their children or stories that are used as part of official historical records or news stories that weave or 'collapse' the past into the present, serving to focus attention on moments that enable the remembrance of collective traumas and experiences, whether these have been experienced by the people involved or experienced by proxy.

Though this is not clearly highlighted in the above-mentioned literature, this study argues that the production and maintenance of collective memory and political mythologies are necessarily *mediated* (my emphasis) through their communication via the frameworks of memorial books, memoirs, novels, photographic books, personal testimonies, oral histories, documentaries and, importantly for this work, news narrations. Indeed, collective memories and mythologies need to be provoked, challenged, altered, sustained and shared by others, thus pointing to how memory is the product of negotiations between individuals and their wider surroundings at a given time and in a given context (Hoskins 2004) and emphasising how collective memory is in itself more dynamic, contested and variable than a first reading of the term would suggest.

In addressing how people negotiate memories and their social articulation — from informal conversation to public documentation and commemoration — scholars have used different terms, variously describing collective memory as 'cultural memory' (Sturken

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[22] Narration is an important oral activity in Arab and Palestinian society. Generally speaking, Palestinians have been keen to narrate their stories although some of my friends have said their parents were reluctant to speak and tell reflecting a sense of guilt.

1997), 'social memory' (Reading 2002) and 'new memory' (Hoskins 2004). Writing about the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York, Casey (2004) uses the term 'public memory' in his comments on the expressions of public remembrance and public grief following the event. The grief therefore is public, as is the remembrance, not only because it is publicly expressed, but also because it is collectively shared.

Though all these terms are relevant for understanding the different ways in which memory is negotiated, it is Andrew Hoskins' arguments (2004) that implicate the news media in the forging of what he terms 'new memory'. He writes: "…contemporary mediated events are marked by their immediacy. The time between the occurrence of an event and its dissemination as news has shrunk, so that often audiences watch events as they unfold in real-time implicating themselves in events as vicarious witnesses" (2004:5). What this means, he says in his work on television news, is that rather than causing 'a loss of context' (cf. Gitlin 1980) of mediated events, television significantly affords new contexts. Television, therefore, functions in a similar way to human memory in repeating and re-enacting events or, as Sturken (2002) argues, "television's re-enactment is much closer to the fluid ways in which memory operates not as a stable force but as a constantly rewritten script. Narrativisation is essential to memory; indeed, it is its defining quality. We remember events by re-telling them [and] re-thinking them" (Sturken 2002: 200).

The crucial point to be noted here is that collective memory, as Susan Sontag (2003) eloquently reminds us, does not only involve a process of remembering, but [also] a stipulation that this (act) is important; that this remembered story is about how it happened and that the picture of that story remains locked in people's minds. What this suggests is

that collective memory may refer to the political mythologies of societies while 'social memory' may refer to their practice.

Talking of collective memory as a 'social' memory is important for my work because it acknowledges that memory, in this sense, is socially constructed, not only by individual agency, but also by mediating frameworks that serve to jolt remembering and why it is important to remember. The next sections explore the 'political mythologies' and 'memories' that helped shape Palestinian national consciousness and identity.

4.6 The Narrative of Palestinian-ism

No Arab society has been researched, analysed and written about as much as Palestinian society. The literature related to the Palestinians and their history is vast, with a large number of works on specific refugee situations, the policies of the Palestine Liberation Organisation and on Palestinian society and nationalism. Broadly speaking, the literature on the Palestinians serves two contradictory political purposes (Schulz 2003). On the one hand, it serves to present a picture of a split and divided population, not really in possession of a 'genuine national identity' (e.g. Porath 1973; 1977), and, on the other hand, provides a discourse emphasising Palestinian essentialism in proving an authentic nation with inane rights and immanent connections to the land (Muslih 1990).

Much of the Arab scholarship on the Palestinians includes statements that Palestinian society is unique, that its historical experience is unparalleled and, therefore, that the theoretical literature on stratification, development, gender studies, ethnicity, etc., is not directly relevant to Palestine. Since the 1970s, however, a number of important

contributions have provided different perspectives on the evolution of Palestinian national consciousness and identity. These works include Rosemary Sayigh's (1979; 1994) ethnographic work on Palestinian refugees in Lebanon; Johnson's (1982) studies on Islam as an ideological system of meaning in Palestinian nationalism; and Kimmerling and Migdal's (1993) constructivist historical account of Palestinian-ism. Helena Lindholm Schulz (1999) provides an insightful account of how Palestinian nationalism has been constructed in relation to the dynamics of external and internal factors, the dynamics of content/meaning and form/boundary and the role of the nationalist elite and its followers.

Following the 1993 peace agreement between the Palestinians and Israel, Palestinian authors have joined the fray. Rashid Khalidi (1997), in an engaging narrative, details the formative years of Palestinian nationalism by drawing on Anderson's (1983) theorisation of the role of the press in the rise of modern national consciousness, while Yazid Sayigh (1997), in his well-researched book *Armed Struggle and the Search for State* (1997), adds another element to this narrative by highlighting the role of the armed struggle as the foundation stone of nation building.

Most studies of Palestinian national consciousness argue that Palestinian-ism emerged partly[23] in reaction to Zionism. Indeed, several authors, including Israeli, point to how Zionism and Palestinian-ism were the very generative forces which have brought into existence both Israeli and Palestinian societies as well as the conflicts between them. Israeli and Palestinian societies, as Portugali (1993) notes, enfold each other to the extent that neither is definable today independently of the other. This view is replicated by Kimmerling and Migdal (1993) who write that it is not possible to tell the story of Zionism

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[23] Other factors such as the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the emerging pan-Arab nationalism also played a part (for a detailed discussion, see Rashid Khalidi's *Palestinian Identity; The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* 1997).

or Palestinian-ism without understanding the impact they had on one another. Or, as

Rashid Khalidi (1997) puts it, Palestinian society today cannot exist completely and

independently of the Palestinian one, and vice versa. It is as though both societies carry the

other with them:

> it is this intertwined history, this counterpoint between two extraordinary narratives,
> and the interplay between the two senses of identity which have certain things in
> common with each other, but are completely different in so many other ways, is one of
> the themes that stands out in any study of the emergence of Palestinian national
> identity. (1997:5)

Assumptions of distinctiveness are implicit in many analyses Palestinian nationalism

However, as Sayigh (1997) notes, there are two opposing trends in this field, one tending

to refute its existence and to suggest that it is primarily a reaction to the emergence of

Zionism and the creation of the state of Israel, thus emphasising its historical artificiality,

and the other affirming the existence of Palestinian nationalism as an autonomous

phenomenon whose roots can be traced back to earlier periods.[24]

Of the above-mentioned authors, it is Rashid Khalidi (1997) who makes a distinct

connection between the emergence of Palestinian national consciousness at the beginning

of the 20th century and the role of the Arab press in drawing attention to the inherent

dangers in the region. Heavily influenced by Anderson's (1983) theorisation, he provides

an intricate and well documented narrative of the role of newspapers and periodicals

published in and around Palestine in the politics and cultural life of the early 20th century

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[24] Sayigh argues that the widely held notions that Zionism was the main factor behind the emergence of
Palestinian-ism ignored the historical context surrounding it.

and since, thus providing a valid counter-narrative to notions that Palestinian identity and

nationalism are ephemeral and of recent origin. He writes:

> This is most commonly expressed as the assertion that both of these phenomena are in
> some sense artificial — the implication being that they must be distinguished from
> "real" identities and "real" nationalisms — and that they emerged only in the 1960s
> (Khalidi 1997:177).

In his analysis, Khalidi argues that the hiatus or the trope of Palestinian non-existence in

international or national discourses before the 1960s, the decade marking the birth of the

Palestinian resistance movement, was due to several reasons, one of which was the power

of the ideology of pan-Arabism which served to obscure the identities of the separate

Arab nation-states it subsumed (ibid: 181). He also proposes that the press played a

central role in the development of Arab attitudes towards Zionism, not only informing

readers of the day-to-day details of the progress of colonisation, but also explaining the

aims and extent of the Zionist movement:

> This is a perfect example of the kind of "imagined community" mediated and shaped
> by the press, whose members did not know one another, but who shared a certain
> body of knowledge, a certain understanding and a joint sense of grievance which
> Anderson has written about (Khalidi 1997:143).

Khalidi also draws attention to the difficulties of separating Palestinian-ism from other

ideologies because of the existence of multiple foci of identification "partly because of

the way in which identity for the Palestinians is and has always been intermingled with a

sense of identity on so many other levels, whether Islamic or Christian, Ottoman or Arab,

local or universal, or family and tribal" (Khalidi 1997:6). These conflicts of identification continue until today and are not exclusive to the Palestinians. What this means is that it is normal for a Palestinian today to identify him/herself primarily as an Arab in one context, as a Moslem or Christian in another, as a Nabulsi or Jerusalemite in yet another, and as a Palestinian in a fourth, which is not unusual given the lack of a Palestinian state. He writes: "This relationship between definition of the self and of the other is characteristic of many peoples in the Middle East and elsewhere...For all of these people, transnational identities (whether religious or national), local patriotism, and affiliations of family and clan have competed for loyalties. The pull of competing loyalties has been considerably stronger for the Palestinians than for others, so that these multiple foci of identity are characteristic features of their history (Khalidi 1997:10)

Bernard Lewis (1998), too, notes that political identity and loyalty among Arabs as a whole are determined by three considerations; the first is religious or communal, which means membership of the universal family of Islam, the second is allegiance to a specific state or dynasty and the third is at the level of the ethnic or local, where allegiance is to the family, the clan or the tribe. Although Arabism, namely a strong sense of identification with the Arab nation as a collective unity, seems to be waning, Islamism has gained currency in recent years, particularly following the collapse of the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians, the second Palestinian *Intifada* (uprising), the September 11 attacks in the US and the 2003 conflict in Iraq. That said, historically speaking, there has always been a special bond between Arabs in general and Islam. By and large, Arabs, Palestinians included, view Islam as their own religion as it was revealed to an Arab, in Saudi Arabia, and in the Arabic language. Broadly speaking,

Arabs feel they belong to both the Arab community (*al-umma al-arabiya*) and the Islamic

nation (*al-umma al-Islamia*) (Tibi 1981/1990/1997). Indeed, while many scholars argue

that Arab nationalism is a secular movement that has nothing to do with Islam and that

pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism are rival political movements, many ordinary Arabs feel

that pan-Arab nationalism is unimaginable without its religious foundations[25]. Drawing

on these complexities, Mohamed Ayish (2003) uses the concept of worldview, which

concerns the fundamental assumptions of a people about the nature of the world as

expressed in their philosophy, ethics, ritual and scientific belief, to argue that the

particular Arab and Palestinian worldview, is centrally located in both Arab and Islamic

perspectives. The Arab-Islamic worldview, he says, sees individualism as a central value

in society, but unlike its conception in the West where it may set the limit for group

involvement, individualism in Arab-Islamic cultures is composed of both individual and

group identification.

4.7 Events and Identification

Though this understanding can help explain why conflicts of identification between the

individual and the collective and between the secular and Islam remain a source of

tension for people like the Palestinians, I use this section to argue that critical events have

played and continue to play a crucial role in the Palestinians'negotiation of identity as

they have been and continue to be emotional foci of identification that trigger off

memories in different and specific ways.

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[25] These notions are used by some Islamic groups, such as *Hamas*, whose leaders point out that Islam has been a component of Palestinian national identity since the early days of the Palestinian liberation movement.

There is little doubt that the key event with which most Palestinians identify as a collective is *al-Nakba* (the catastrophe) of 1948. Indeed, as much of the literature on the Palestinians show, the experience of exile continues to overshadow all else for *jil al-nakba* (the generation of the catastrophe), creating a new form of cultural ferment, which has been largely literary, or based in communicative practices (Kimmerling and Migdal 1993). Indeed, a folk culture conveyed by songs, ballads, poetry and narrative[26] since then forms around three motifs — the praise and memory of the lost paradise from which Palestinians were expelled, lamentation about the present and the depiction of the imagined return, thus forming the founding stones for some of the most durable collective memories that have shaped Palestinian popular discourse for more than five decades:

For the Palestinians, the (national) story centres on *al-Nakba*, a catastrophe that produced a strong collective consciousness transcending all the fractures. In the misery of the camps — in the permanence of temporariness —refugees developed a powerful new nationalism. Its fuel was longing and injustice, humiliation and degradation — bitterness and hatred towards the Jews, the West, other Arabs and the cosmic order (Kimmerling and Migdal 1993:279). The drama of this narrative — both in its capacity to be related to direct family experience and to narrated experience — is manifested in its durability and potency as a critical historical event in Palestinian collective memory and mythologies despite the passage of over 50 years and generational changes. Indeed, imagery associated with the events of 1948 has galvanised and sustained political energy, mainly among the Palestinian

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[26] The most important works include the resistance poetry of Mahmoud Darwish, Samih al-Qassdem and Taqfiq Zayyad, which came from inside Israel and began to find their way across the border most visibly after 1967.

refugee population and the overall diaspora, despite the overarching presence and dominance of the 'other' counter-narrative — that of the birth of the state of Israel.[27]

As Sayigh (1997) points out, the experience of collective dislocation and uncertain exile and the desire to return to a specific territory made *wataniya* (patriotism), the sentimental attachment to homeland or even a more localised birthplace, a common denominator among the Palestinians. However, "while *al-Nakba* made for the emergence of a distinct Palestinian-ness, the rise of a distinctly Palestinian nationalism (or its precursors, nationalist patriotism or proto-nationalism) was not inevitable, given the absence of the common political and institutional framework of the state"[28] (Sayigh 1997:23).

Palestinian-ism did emerge ultimately as a dominant force, but its extent, form and timing depended primarily on the progress made by the scattered Palestinian communities in rebuilding their 'sociological space' that involved revising their social networks, value systems and norms, and cultural symbols (1997:666). For Palestinian nationalism to truly gain a mass following another event was required. If *al-Nakba* can be seen as constitutive of Palestinian national identity, then the 1967 war was the major catalyst behind Palestinian nationalist ideology (cf. Sayigh 1997).

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[27] For a long time, Palestinian experiences were formed in the context of persistent dissemination of misinformation about the historical events that led to their exile. The Israeli government has for long claimed that Palestinian refugees fled the country as a result of orders given by Arabs and Palestinians, an argument that until recently has been widely accepted by the international community until revisionist Israeli historians in the 1990s, such as Benny Morris and Ian Pappe, began confirming what a handful of Palestinian scholars had been writing for decades.

[28] Sayigh notes that host Arab governments, still open to challenge by their own citizens, whose identification with the new states created by the colonial powers was not secure, responded to the influx of Palestinian refugees by isolating them from their populations through physical and legal barriers, or by inhibiting the emergence of social and political organisations with an explicitly Palestinian character among the refugees. For all these reasons, Palestinian political activism after 1948 was unfocused and operated at grass-roots level, and was often initially channelled into Arab parties espousing radical national, social or sectarian agendas (1997:666).

4.8 The Narrative of Palestinian-ness: to Suffer, to Struggle, to Resist

The rupture within Palestinian society caused by the events of 1948 produced three distinct populations: the refugees, the Palestinians inside Israel and those in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, thus forming three differentiated sites of collective experience and memory. Nowhere has memory claimed to be more authentic or vital than among refugees living in the camps[29] which emerge as the places in which "the Palestinian national spirit was, and still is, burning. *They are the real Palestinians*" (Klaus 2003: 129) (emphasis in original). Interestingly, though not surprisingly, there has been little official or public mention of the Palestinians in the wider diaspora, including in Europe and the Americas.

In most official and public discourses, the focal year 1948 repeats itself in narrative after narrative, suggesting that Palestinian-ness (what it means to be Palestinian) cannot be understood without acknowledging the impact of dispersal and uprootedness on the ways in which people who are living or who had lived in the area formerly known as Palestine began to think of themselves as Palestinian or without acknowledging that, since that event, Palestinian national consciousness has struggled for acceptance and legitimacy[30] in the world.

Though some elements of Palestinian identity did exist before the dispersal (see, for example Khalidi 1997), there is little doubt that the experiences in exile have been building blocks in shaping Palestinian-ness (Schulz 2003). In fact, it was in exile that the national

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[29]The motif of the refugee is often found in Palestinian literature. The poet, Fadwa Tuqan, not herself a refugee, nevertheless speaks from a position of exile and employs the figure of the refugee as the quintessential representative of Palestinian collective experience (see Barbara Parmenter, *Giving Voices to Stones: Places and Identity in Palestinian Literature* 1994).

[30] In fact, Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir's widely circulated remark that "There was no such thing as Palestinians...They did not exist" was significant not only for its broad impact on public discourse, but also as expressing a common view that over time has come to be widely held among Westerners generally. At the same time, Palestinian official discourse had for a long time refused to accept Israel's right to exist.

mythology of resistance (*al-mukawama*) and armed struggle *(al-kifah)* was asserted as a

strategy to overcome processes of victimisation and to transcend the state of dispossession,

denial and statelessness (R. Sayigh 1979; Peteet 1991, Y. Sayigh 1997) and it was in

diaspora that the two central poles of 'to suffer' and 'to struggle' and/or 'to resist'

composing the main components of Palestinian identity (cf. Schulz 1999) took form[31]

(these mythologies were used by the Palestinian revolutionary leadership, led by Yasser

Arafat in the 1960s. In fact, Arafat himself became part of these mythologies — until his

death, he continued to don the garb of a revolutionary and the headdress shaped as the

historical contours of Palestine. The popular image he was seeking to project at a popular

level derived mainly from its symbolism, while his self-image reinforced that stance (see

Andrew Gowers and Tony Walker's *Behind the Myth: Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian*

Revolution 1991).

The components or 'political mythologies' of what it means to be Palestinian, as they

have been represented in popular discourse, appear paradoxical, in a way serving to trap

Palestinian politics in a romanticisation of a victimised self, while functioning as an

interactive process, reinforcing a common base for politics and action. The use of active

verbs, such as to suffer, to resist and to struggle, is important as these verbs reflect passion

and action, as well as a temporal dimension (implying something done now to achieve a

goal in the future). Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, notions of resisting and struggling

galvanised guerrilla attacks against Israel, but, as Sayigh (1997) argues, it was another

human and political disaster (the 1967 war) that led to the embodiment of 'struggle' (*al-*

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[31] However, the meaning and function of exile or diaspora for Palestinian nationalism and identity has changed. This is related to the territorialisation of the Palestine Liberation Organisation as a result of the peace agreement and the self-rule arrangements with Israel in 1993 and the re-focusing of identity to the Palestinians 'inside', meaning inside the Occupied Territories and Gaza, because of the first and second intifada (uprisings) in 1987 and 2000, respectively.

nidal) as the prime political principle and a main ingredient in Palestinian nation-building. Indeed, Palestinian identity was crafted around idiom-signifying actions, not to surrender, not to give up, not to yield, whatever the consequences.

Rosemary Sayigh (1988) in her early ethnographic studies on the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon found that the personal qualities that were employed to describe Palestinian-ness were 'struggle personalities', 'strength, courage, resourcefulness'. Resistance was a strategy to be launched against Israel, and also against exile, against assimilation in host societies, and against the categories that were designated to them by others. Sayigh (1979) captures this well in her book *Palestinians: from Peasants to Revolutionaries*:

> The Palestinian felt after the Revolution that he's living like a normal person again after a life of humiliation. The camps now are like fortresses, where in the past people had nothing to do but die under zinc roofs (quoted in R. Sayigh 1979:164).

While the political mythologies around the signifying idioms of Palestinian-ness have focused on the refugee camps as focal points, dispersal and fragmentation, also consequences of *al-Nakba*, served to focus attention on other equally key dimensions of political mythologies surrounding the emergence of Palestinian national identity. Khalidi (1997), Sayigh (1997) and Schulz (1999) all argue that homelessness and insecurity constitute main representations of Palestinian identity, while dispossession and uprootedness amplify the feelings of a people deserted and at the mercy of stronger forces. Dislocation is symbolised by such widely used metaphors as "in any airport you find a Palestinian" (Schulz, 1999). In fact, the dispersal from their original homeland has given rise to the narrative of the Palestinian as the wanderer of the earth and an identity that

experiences denial[32], suspicion, difference and exclusion. Rashid Khalidi elucidates this

dimension of Palestinian identity:

> The quintessential Palestinian experience, which illustrates some of the most basic
> issues raised by Palestinian identity, takes place at a border, an airport, a checkpoint; in
> short, at any one of those modern barriers where identities are checked and verified.
> What happens to Palestinians at those crossing points brings home to them how much
> they share in common as a people. For it is at these borders and barriers that the six
> million Palestinians are singled out for 'special treatment', and are forcefully reminded
> of their identity; of who they are, and why they are different than others...As a result,
> at each of these barriers which most others take for granted, every Palestinian is
> exposed to the possibility of harassment, exclusion and sometimes worse simply
> because of his or her identity (Khalidi 1997:1f).

Within such contexts, what it means to be Palestinian has been mythologised as someone

with an identity out of place, as well as someone suffering and struggling, either under

the threat of occupation or the wilderness of exile. Crucially, such mythologies are linked

to the construction space (in this case the lost homeland) and the construction of time as

the ambiguous relationship between the present, past and future. This relationship

(Schlesinger 1991) must be understood, at least in part, as an imaginary one, mediated by

the continual, selective reconstitution of 'traditions' and 'memory', and drawing attention

to how cultural institutions and practices can help forge a link between the past and

present. With these notions in mind, I turn to the debate on diaspora to further understand

the relevance of the past and present in the lived experiences of diasporic members.

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[32] The empirical work will show how the informants relate to the question of home.

4.9 The Meaning of Diaspora

The use of the term diaspora has mushroomed in recent years particularly within

globalisation and transnationalism scholarship because of its relevance in addressing core

dilemmas faced by dispersed or transplanted people: how to survive as a group, and how

to adapt to new environments without compromising group identity. As Marie Gillespie

(1995) says, diaspora has become a key term in contemporary theorising about

immigration, ethnicity and identity as it emphasises the ways in which identities have

been and continue to be transformed through relocation, cross-cultural exchange and

interaction.

Crucially, a diasporic perspective stages the dynamic processes of identity-formation

in a specific manner, accentuating the power that people enjoy to create themselves and

their distinctive cultures, while at the same time associating the exercise of that creativity

with particular histories of suffering and violence. The globalisation of media and culture,

as Featherstone (1990) notes, is deeply implicated in this process as more sophisticated

technologies are used by transnational media corporations to serve and attract dispersed

ethnic markets. By articulating new kinds of spatial and temporal relationships,

communication technologies can transform the politics of representation and the modes

of identification open to migrant and diaspora groups (Gillespie 2000).

However, the concept diaspora remains problematic, not least because of its largely

loose framework embracing such different categories as immigrants, guest workers,

ethnic and racial minorities, refugees, expatriates and travellers. This problem has been

exacerbated by the increasing use of the concept as a metaphor to signify a global

condition of mobility, to describe any community that has emigrated and/or whose numbers make it visible in host communities; to describe the space where migrant communities reside (such as living in diaspora) and to describe a condition or a state of consciousness of connectedness to a real or imagined homeland.

In his comprehensive work *Global Diasporas (1997)*, Robin Cohen attempts to bypass these conceptual dilemmas by shifting the emphasis from the historical use of the term to a wider frame that sees it as a particular kind of migration, defined not just by physical movement, the forced or voluntary shifts of populations from one society under stress to another, but also by its psychological implications to the sense of longing, loss and the possibility of return, which are the common dimensions of the diasporic condition. In this vein, Cohen makes a useful distinction between various forms of diaspora, not all of which result from trauma. Distinguishing between trade, victim, labour, imperial and cultural diasporas, he nevertheless identifies them as having common features which distinguishes them from other kinds of dispersal and displacement. Diasporas, for him, involve an idealisation of the putative home, and a commitment to its restoration, a strong ethnic group consciousness across the multiply dispersed populations, a belief in the group's distinctiveness and an often-troubled relationship with the host culture.[33]

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[33] Common features of a diaspora (Cohen 1997: 26, after Safran 1991) are (1) dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions; (2) alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions; (3) a collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history and achievements; (4) an idealisation of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity; (5) the development of a return movement that gains collective approbation; (6) a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate; (7) a troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance at the least or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group; (8) a sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement and (9) the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism.

Cohen's discussions of the term range from its historical contextualisation to its real

and imagined representation, in the process acknowledging that, in modern times,

transnational bonds no longer have to be cemented by migration or by exclusive

territorial claims: In the age of cyberspace, a diaspora can, to some degree, be held

together or re-created through the mind, through cultural artefacts and through a shared

imagination (Cohen 1997:26). In his analysis, he describes the Palestinians as a 'victim'

diaspora, victim being one of the categories he uses to describe various diasporas. These

also include labour and imperial diasporas, such as the Indians and the British, 'trade

diasporas' such as the Lebanese and Chinese and 'cultural diasporas' such as the

Caribbean one.[34] Cohen's model, however, has come under criticism, not the least

because as Srebreny (2000) notes, it suggests a sense of tradition already invented, a

group consciousness that is already strong and a model that assumes rootedness as the

driving force in the diasporic experience, which are the very elements that need to be

investigated and explored.[35]

Among other efforts to delineate the concept, William Safran (1991) has argued that

diasporic groups may be characterised by a triadic relationship between self-identified

ethnic groups in a particular setting, between them and similar others in different places

and as an uneasy relationship with the host country, therefore stressing the transnational

character of diasporas and the symbolic and material importance of the homeland. Such

ideal-type definitions of diasporas with their emphasis on the perceived nostalgic links

and memories diasporas have of their original homeland have drawn other criticism,

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[34] The Palestinians could also be termed a trade and labour diaspora as the story (ies) of their migration depended not only on the historical event, but also on personal circumstances.
[35] This study sees Cohen's categorisation as useful if only as a yardstick against which one can situate contemporary diasporas historically.

prompting suggestions to shift the focus from the limited and static focus on 'roots' to a more dynamic analysis of 'routes' (Gilroy 1993) to reflect the precariousness of the link between diasporic communities and their homeland (Hall 1993). Avtar Brah (1996) has also argued that the notion of home is much more complex than approaches to diasporas premised on the power of nostalgia would want us to believe as it 'is intrinsically linked with the way in which the processes of inclusion or exclusion operate and which are subjectively experienced under given circumstances' (Brah 1996: 192).

That said, there is little doubt that people living in the 'diaspora space' do retain romanticised and idealised visions of their ancestral homeland, referred to in the literature as a form of 'diasporic consciousness' that does not preclude tensions between here and there and belonging and longing. Naficy (1993), for example, has labelled this tension as a state of flux and his subjects as exilic liminars, while Clifford (1994) speaks of diaspora consciousness as an experience of in-betweenness...a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and there and remembering/desiring another place (Clifford, 1994: 311). Diasporic cultural forms, he writes:

> ...are deployed in transnational networks built from multiple attachments, and they encode practices of accommodation with, as well as resistance to, host countries and their norms. Diaspora...involves dwelling, maintaining communities, having collective homes away from home (1994: 307-8).

Recent research into diasporic cultural politics has provided a differentiated and interesting account of the link between diasporas and their countries of origin, suggesting this link is often fraught with tension and ambivalence as diasporic communities juxtapose themselves to definitions of themselves emanating from the country of origin,

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which means that diasporic identity can often draw much more on the experience of migrancy and settlement (Tsagarousianou 2001).

These different, though by no means exhaustive, accounts of the various ways diaspora has been theorised capture the ongoing difficulties of precisely locating the meaning of diaspora, further complicated by the acceleration of globalisation processes which have changed the contexts, such as the political, cultural and geographical, that impinge on the relevance of national identity and belonging for diasporic groups. It is within such contexts that the term diaspora can be seen as one of the most crucial metaphors for *a globalised* condition of identities in constant motion because as Srebreny (2000) argues, it offers approaches that can be historically and spatially more dynamic and that explore the sense of both fit and non-fit and belonging and longing that seems to exemplify diasporic experiences as well as capture the multiple foci of identifications or spaces in which diasporic identity is constructed. She writes:

> Such a construction supports the conceptual move from identity viewed as either/or to a sense of identifications as and/and and seems preferable to the claim of identity as hybridity, a new mixing which seems to simply highlight some putative pristine original stages (Srebreny 2000: 181).

This approach to diaspora, she writes, invites "a looking around, not only in and back, but also a scoping all-around gaze, multi-directional" (ibid: 182), an approach, this thesis argues, that makes the term diaspora meaningful for academic study because it allows us to address how diasporic identity is constructed, and how this construction can be related to diaaporic members' mobilisation around their awareness of themselves as a diaspora.

Importantly, this approach draws attention to the ability of diasporas to construct and negotiate their identities, everyday lives and transnational activities, therefore reflecting how diasporic identities are the product of active engagement in cultural and political action that articulates elements from different cultures and different frames of action and experiences.

Put differently, this understanding means that diasporas can be understood as cultural, economic, political and social formations always in the process of becoming, not being, which means they are responsive to local, global and international crises, discourses and representations. This understanding is particularly relevant to this study as it brings to analytic attention the tensions in the informants' lived experiences and the conflicts in their identifications, between the self and the collective (national) and between the national and the cosmopolitan/global[36] as a result of their probing and looking around.

These tensions are of particular interest for an analytical approach to understanding the ways in which the informants (members of the Palestinian diasporic community in Britain) construct their identities in talking about news, especially as they have had to lurch between critical events, each of which has provided a new focus of identification that has a significance for what it means to be Palestinian and what it means to be a citizen in a global world. Before I wrap up the chapter, I briefly explore the conceptual and ethical problems in using the term diaspora to define the Palestinians in Britain. The term diaspora has been extensively used to refer to the Palestinian population outside

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[36] Beck has usefully described the cosmopolitan perspective as one that provides an alternative imagination (of identity) to the national, an imagination of alternative ways of life and rationalities, which can also include the otherness of the other (Beck 2002:18), therefore drawing our attention to the ways in which issues of global concern can become part of people's everyday experiences.

Israel and the Occupied Territories.[37] But using the term to describe the Palestinians who left their homeland remains contentious because of national and conceptual considerations. The national consideration relates to a widespread belief that using the term diaspora to refer to the stateless Palestinians implies acceptance of the Palestinian dispersal as a permanent condition[38] of modern times (cf. Kodmani 1997).

On the conceptual level, it is argued that although the signifier 'Palestinian' serves as a label of identity for all Palestinians, there is no consensus about its distinguishing characteristics, making it difficult for Palestinians living in the Western world to say that their situation is similar to other Palestinians living in Arab countries. These problems have caused much consternation and debate on a popular and national level, with some Palestinian communities, meaning a geographically situated community, suggesting that their particular situation is worthier than others of the signifier 'Palestinian.' What makes these issues more poignant is the existence of real differences between the lived conditions of Palestinian refugees in camps in host Arab countries and for whom the question of return remains a salient condition[39] of their exilic experiences, and between other members of the Palestinian diaspora, some of whom are 'integrated' with host societies.[40]

Besides these difficulties, as Schulz (2003) argues, there is no word in the Arabic language that corresponds to the term 'diaspora', although a number of different terms have been used in Arabic to account for its meaning. Among these is the term *al-shatat,*

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[37] The term has therefore served to conceal the variegated experiences of the diasporic Palestinian communities and individuals.

[38] This is a bone of contention in different failed attempts to forge peace between Israel and the Palestinians in that Israel refuses to acknowledge the right of return while the Palestinians insist that any peace agreement must cater for the rights of the Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland.

[39] Many Palestinian refugees continue to hold keys to their homes in the homeland and many refuse to alter the conditions of their refugee situation, preferring to live in ramshackle buildings rather than build proper foundations and housing because of fears that in doing so, they are accepting their refugee status as permanent.

[40] These differences have meant that few scholars have paid attention to the Palestinians in the West.

which means to be dispersed, scattered or separated, therefore relating in some ways to the original Greek notion of being scattered and dispersed. However, the term *al-ghurba*, meaning the absence from the homeland, has more emotional currency in Palestinian lore.

At the popular level, the word *laji'* (refugee)[41] has been used in association with diaspora and given a central place in popular Palestinian discourses while also valued and protected as a sign of the ultimate temporality of exile and of the refusal of the exiled population to become naturalised, or put down roots in a place to which one does not belong.[42] Indeed, this has been reflected in the ways in which many refugees, particularly in Arab countries, continue to think of their status as temporary and still yearn for return. The predominant idiom for articulating this urge to return is the sentiment of 'localism', a powerful undercurrent that continues to run through Palestinian society up to these days.[43] Tensions of identification will be addressed in the analysis of the interview material, particularly in Chapter Eight. Before moving to discuss the methods of this research study, I return to my argument linking events, identification and mediation.

4.10 Events, Memory and Identity

Nationalism scholarship has provided numerous examples of how 'nationalist' movements have typically created master commemorative narratives[44] that highlight their members' common past and legitimacy in order to enhance the sense of national consciousness and

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[41] It is problematic to use the term *laji'* to define Palestinians in Britain. Indeed, many of the respondents would not define themselves *as lajieen* (the plural) as this often denotes lower socio-economic status.
[42] Although Palestinian refugees share the same language, culture and religion with host Arab communities, they have often been excluded from social and political life in the host countries.
[43] In fact, Palestinians usually voice strong attachments to the villages or towns of their origin. Residents of particular towns and villages are often identifiable by distinct dialects and intonation and women by the embroidery on their dresses. In addition, people were often known for their occupation.

bonding. Indeed, as Smith (1999) notes, the potency of some ethno-nationalisms, such as Zionsim, can be traced to their capacity to reinterpret through these narratives the situation of Jewish exile and diaspora as one that can reach its fulfilment through restoration.[45]

In the case of the Palestinians, the potency of Palestinian national consciousness (Palestinian-ism), this chapter has shown, can be linked to the ways in which key and critical events, most importantly *al-Nakba*, have been potent sources of 'shared' beliefs and values, and collective memories, that have sustained, through official and public discourse, notions of Palestinian-ness and Palestinian-ism.

What this suggests is that collective memories have starting points in real and remembered events, and that their power does not come from their accurate, systematic, or sophisticated mapping of the past, but from establishing personal and shared images and memories that articulate or reinforce a particular 'ideological' consciousness, thus helping construct the nation's identity during the formative years and beyond. Therefore, it follows that the significance of collective memory and political mythologies are centrally related to their importance in reconstituting the ideological consciousness of a nation (see the argument on national identity above).

The linking of collective memory to events is of particular interest for an analytical approach to understanding peoples' 'discursive' construction of identity, especially in light of the different ways in which 'events' can be told in different media; which parts of these events are told and by whom; and which parts can be remembered or forgotten,

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[44] This is not peculiar to the Palestinians. The Israeli experience in fact has some parallels to that of the Palestinians in the sense that Israeli political mythology has traditionally accorded the Zionist movement a track record of ongoing success in pursuing and later defending core political objectives, including the creation and securing of a nation-state.

[45] In the case of Zionism, for example, this reinterpretation depended on the ways this nationalism presented the Jewish history as one of millennial continuity.

either by those telling these narratives or those receiving them. These are important questions to address particularly in the era of globalisation, where, as Beck tells us, concern must shift from 'time-space compression' and 'de-territorialisation' to explaining the impact of 'globalisation and cosmopolitan society on the dimension of time and collective memory' (Beck 2002:27).

Such concerns can be addressed in different ways, but in terms of memory and memory work, it is worth noting that whereas the construction of social memory used to take time, as intense, shared experiences filtered into the consciousness of any community through repeated practices and ritual, new technologies and the preponderance of 24-hour news have made the process almost instantaneous[46], creating a situation in which history appears to precede collective memory, rather than coming after it, or a situation which contributes to the collapse of memory (Hoskins 2004) and where news, particularly television news' repetition of images and mediation of the past in the present provide a different context for our experiences of time. To understand how this happens requires exploring "how these images re-enter individual, social or global consciousness in new times and new contexts" (Hoskins 2004: 8). These challenges are taken up in Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight, which explore the processes the respondents concerned in this study use to make sense of news particularly within the context of their engagement with diverse media. Before I do so, I first discuss the methods employed in this research and then provide a detailed sociological analysis of the informants.

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[46] In the interviews conducted for this research, many parents commented on the fact that their children used to complain about their telling them stories of the past and of Palestine, preferring to view the impersonal narratives and news stories on television.

Chapter Five

Methodology: Theory and Implementation

The previous three chapters set the scene for understanding the theoretical arguments that inform this work. This chapter explains how this research evolved, and accounts for the choice of an audience study to examine the ways in which members of the Palestinian diasporic community in Britain make sense of news and what this interaction means for their everyday experiences and social interaction. The assumptions underpinning the empirical work come from the interpretive tradition that focuses on the relationship between the audience and the medium of consumption, which in this case is news. The overall methodological approach adopted in the thesis is a synthesis of the empirical work and theorisation of identity, collective memory, audiences and news.

The chapter is in three parts. It begins with an outline of developments in and debates over audience research. It then addresses the empirical and methodological framework, the criteria for choosing the particular group for study and the rationale behind the methodology. The third part provides an account of the procedures involved in the collection of the data. The chapter closes by considering the analytical methods used in making sense of the interview material.

5.1 Audience Research — A Continuing Dilemma

Sonia Livingstone (2004) has recently summarised the difficulties associated with researching the audience:

Methodologically, audience research is faced with trying to capture experiences which are private rather than public, experiences concerned with meaning rather than overt practices, experiences of all society not just the elite, experiences commonly regarded as trivial and forgettable rather than important. (Livingstone 2004: 82)[47]

In an earlier paper, she argued that audience research is facing a paradox that means stepping back to take stock of the situation of research. Researchers, she says, must resist a 'canonical' approach to audience scholarship and should move toward conceptualising audience studies as part of a larger project of understanding mediated culture, therefore establishing a "research agenda...that connects audience research with production/texts/contexts research as firmly as actual audiences are, inevitably connected with actual production/texts/contexts." (1998: 196)

These comments sum up the state of the ongoing debate over how best to conduct research into media audiences, an explosive area of study over the past 20 years. The history of the media audience can simply be explained as a narrative of a series of oscillations between two opposing perspectives over who holds power in societies, the text (message) or the audience — these broadly fall within the remit of media scholarship in general, which has been concerned with establishing the consequences of the mass media and the difference that the modern media of communication make in people's lives.

These two perspectives have influenced the direction of much research on the audience, beginning with the effects tradition, followed by the uses-and-gratifications tradition and

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[47] Livingstone, S. (2004) "The challenge of changing audiences – Or, what is the audience researcher to do in the age of the Internet?" *European Journal of Communication* 19 (1): 75-86.

the encoding/decoding approach, and more recently by what the cultural turn in audience studies that has attempted to take account of the contexts and settings on audience responses, the role of interpretive communities, the possibility of resistance to meanings and uses and the role of unconscious response structures (cf. Barker and Brooks 1997). While the effects tradition predominantly sees media programmes as determining the construction of meanings, the uses-and-gratifications approach shifts attention to the audiences who are believed to be agents, selectively choosing which programmes to interact with, thus drawing attention to individual agency and the functions media serve in societies.

The third tradition, Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model (1980), attempts to theorise a middle ground between the above two traditions, while accounting for the social context within which media programmes are produced and consumed. This model emphasises both decoding and encoding as parts of social processes in which the meaning of a programme is seen as a result of an interaction between the audience and the context of that programme. In taking the conception of the text and the reader as mutually defining, literary or high culture theories were applied to the study of popular culture, specifically addressing the relationship between the model and actual audiences (e.g. Livingstone 1998), while feminist scholarship (e.g. Radway 1984; Ang 1985) moved attention to a marginalised audience that has been largely sidelined in mainstream normative theory.

With its clear break from the old effects model through the emphasis on the meanings of texts, particularly the ideological role texts could have on people, this new direction

spurred much research, though some of this tended to celebrate audiences[48] as tacticians that resist official meanings or to emphasise the domestic settings within which audience interaction with media takes place, therefore seeing those contexts as shaping the ways in which people used media (see Brooks and Barker 1998 for a critique of this model).

The development toward a discursive and/or a constructionist approach in media reception and qualitative audience research meant that researchers were beginning to distance themselves from the 'determinate' moment of decoding. Indeed, the new agenda of cultural studies entails a shift towards addressing media use and reception in an even broader way, where the media and programmes and messages are seen as part of social reality. Furthermore, the implications of the increasing mediation of everyday life has drawn attention to the need for more sophisticated qualitative methodologies contributing to a differentiated understanding of audience reception processes, especially in the domestic context of television viewing. Within this context, it is not surprising that the latest development in critical efforts to explore television's centrality in everyday life saw a turn to the research strategies of ethnography to considerable advantages (Ang 1985; Lull 1990; Silverstone 1990; Morley 1991; Gillespie 1995; Miller and Slater 2000; Georgiou 2001).

Ethnography has thus been employed to provide new theoretical approaches to the audience (Ang 1991; Morley and Silverstone 1990), while serving to shift the way of thinking about audiences from one that sees them as passive recipients of media messages and dominant discourses to one that sees them as participants in the processes of the construction of meaning. Sonia Livingstone (1998) explains this shift as a turn

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[48] The active role of the receiver of media messages was taken to the extreme by Fiske (1987) in his notion that television, in particular, offers viewers the possibilities to produce their own readings and interpretations.

from the moment of textual interpretation toward the contextualisation of that moment, the result of which has been detailed analysis of the culture of the everyday that stresses the importance of 'thick description' as providing a grounding for theory, together with an analysis of the ritual aspects of culture and communication and the practices by which meanings are reproduced in daily life.

The turn to ethnography in what is often referred to as 'new audience studies' has been subsumed under the broad field of ethnic media studies, a relatively new avenue for research concerned with diasporic communities and their engagement, which has helped expand the understanding of audiences, not only in width and in relation to the complexity of media consumption, but also in depth and in relation to media's role in sustaining commonality (Georgiou 2001). In this field, emphasis has been placed on 'ethnic' media's role in empowering minorities and in sustaining their cultural particularity, therefore challenging the domination of the mainstream culture (e.g. Dayan 1998: Riggins 1992: Husband 1994).

5.2 Between Text and Context

There is little doubt that the turn to ethnographic research, dubbed as a paradigm shift (Neumann 1991) in cultural studies, has been crucial to advancing our understanding of the ways in which audiences interact with media. As Moores (1993) says, ethnographic studies can help us reach a better theoretical understanding of "constrained cultural creativity and a proper method of interpretive cultural study" (1993: 40).

However, ethnography has not escaped criticism partially because of concerns that ethnographic accounts tend to focus on micro-narrative while failing to adequately address the question of media power (e.g. Corner 1991; Curran 1990), raising the spectre of the original conundrum — how best to study audiences' experience of media. In addition, the question of the polysemic audience, or the power and resistance of the active audience versus the power of media institutions and texts, has come back to haunt the academy amid criticism over the absence of adequate analysis of the political, social, economic and ideological determinants (Algan 2003). David Morley (1997), too, has argued that some work in cultural studies reflects an 'unhelpful romanticisation of consumer freedoms' that tends to forget that the original objective of reception studies was to illustrate the question of cultural power. However, these assessments fail to recognise that the cultural approach configured the mass audience differently, seeing it as an expression of multiple and overlapping groups and identities, rather than as a representation of a uniform national culture (Nightingale and Ross 2003).

Despite this valid point, fresh anxieties about the state of research have spurred calls within the academy for the adoption of a more contextual framework that can expand the understanding of the social, political and ideological structures within which media consumption takes place. Ang (1996) has, for instance, proposed the need for what she has called 'radical contextualism', which takes into consideration not only the contexts of media consumption, but also the contexts of ethnographic knowledge production itself, thus addressing the lack of a comprehensive theory of the audience.[49]

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[49] Even Ang herself conceded that there are difficulties in adopting such an approach, proposing to shift attention to the uncertain 'trajectories of the politics of narrative and narration of story and discourse' (1996:254).

Morley (1997) has countered that more context does not solve the problem, but conceded that the self-reflexive character adopted by post-modern ethnography that aims at laying bare the power relations between the researcher and the subject of the research has tended to focus more on how ethnographies are written rather than what they tell us. Sonia Livingstone, too, has noted the "impracticality of fully contextualised research as everything is connected to everything else" (Livingstone 1999:9), which makes the act of gathering contextual information unwieldy while raising issues about the focus of the research. Indeed, we are told that there is a danger that the amount of contextual information may limit the ethnographic enterprise, leading to partial stories being told. Other criticism has been lobbed at the notion of the active audience (Corner 1995) as well as the concentration on the audience, thus losing the text altogether, which Livingstone (1998) suggests can be addressed by striking a balance between text and audience.

The use of textual analysis in media studies has been seen as preferable to content analysis as it manages to bring out the determining but hidden assumption which remains opaque to quantitative content analysis. Qualitative (textual) analysis also aspires to a level of complexity that remains true to the actual complexity and contradictory nature of, particularly, television's 'artefacts' (Gitlin 1980), whose analyses reached its heyday in the 1960s and 1970s, a period characterised by Stuart Hall (1982) as the period of the 'rediscovery of ideology'.

The textual analysis method has been extensively used in recent years, particularly by critics working in the field of ethnicity and nationalism (e.g. Smith 2000), whose focus on the construction of national identity in mediated discourses remains relevant, particularly to this inquiry. However, problems arise when, as Algan (2003) argues, the

emphasis on how a mass-produced text is received by audiences centralises the use of a particular text and hinders understanding of the relationship between media use and the cultural practices of the audience, forcing us to start looking for ways that are non-text or non-genre based to investigate these relationships. Radway (1996), arguing along similar lines, has also warned against the risk of impasse in audience research if "we reproduce exactly the same sort of studies we have generated in the past ...Furthermore, continuous concentration on media activity that sees audiences as either passive or creative/active readers tends to simplify media use as a linear process of reception and response (1996: 244). This, of course, brings us back to the key problem with audience research — contestations over the term 'audience' itself.

5.3 The Audience: Visible, but Contested

There is little doubt that the key contribution of audience research has been to provide a differentiated understanding of the audience, as not a homogeneous, passive mass, but rather inventive and varied in its interpretations of the message, challenging prevalent assumptions of linear models of media power. Furthermore, as Livingstone (1998) says, one of the most important outcomes of audience studies is that they made 'visible' an audience which has hitherto been devalued, marginalised and presumed about in policy and theory.

That said, the field of audience studies has been in constant tension, not least over the concept of the audience itself. The ensuing debate over whether audiences are passive or active, critical or resistant, is unnecessary to cover in detail here. However, some of the debates are worth mentioning. Among the most potent criticisms were those that saw

problems with post-modern trends in media theory that equated the term 'active' with the term 'powerful' (cf. Ang 1996). Others, such as Hartley (2002) have gone further in their criticism, saying that the audience may be imagined empirically, theoretically, or politically, but in all cases the product is a fiction that serves the needs of the imagining institution, which could also mean the researcher. Thus, the term audience is used to:

> ...describe a large number of unidentifiable people, usually united by their participation in media use Given the varying demographics of this group, not to mention variations between nations, the concept itself is a means by which such an unknowable group can be imagined. Naming an audience usually also involves homogenising it, ascribing to it certain characteristics, needs, desires and concerns. The audience is a construction motivated by the paradigm in which it is imagined (Hartley 2002: 11).

Furthermore, critics faulted audience and reception studies for 'celebrating' audience activity, as most prominently reflected in John Fiske's phrase 'semiotic democracy' (1987) as well as for allowing the question of power[50] to slip off the agenda. Corner (1991), for example, has argued that a number of empirical reception studies have allowed the issue of media power to be neglected, while Ang (1996), as mentioned above, has criticised the tendency to go for the micro-narrative at the expense of the macro-narrative. Arguing that oppositional decodings, to use Hall's term, cannot be taken as manifestations of political oppositions to political and symbolic power in any meaningful sense, she suggests:

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[50] Although the question of power may not have been adequately answered, it would be wrong to say it has not been addressed. Indeed, early audience research such as Morley's (1980) work, which builds on Hall's encoding/decoding model is centrally concerned with the question of power.

A more thoroughly cultural approach to reception ...would not stop at the pseudo-intimate moment of the text/audience encounter, but address the differentiated meanings and significance of specific reception patterns in articulating more general cultural negotiations and contestations (Ang 1996:137).

Other problems relate to, as Abercombie and Longhurst (1998) argue, the changing nature of the audience itself, from face-to-face, to mass to diffused audience, which cannot be contained in particular places and times, but must be seen as part of all aspects of daily life. Indeed, "the qualities and experiences of being a member of an audience have begun to leak out from specific performance events which previously contained them, into the wider realms of everyday life" (Abercombie and Longhurst 1998: 36-7). Other scholars, like James Curran (1990), faulted audience and reception studies for neglecting previous research, not only in reference to the structural conditions and social contexts of audience activity, but also to comparable aspects of the audience response with different research traditions, while Jensen (1998) crucially draws attention to methodological concern related to the focus on the decoding of particular texts, rather than on the actions which different media and genres may orient and facilitate for audiences, both within and beyond the immediate context of reception.

The key problem, as a survey of the literature shows, stems from different normative perspectives of power and politics. In political science and political communication literature, the concept of power has been generally addressed in terms of media's role in enabling or disabling the political participation of their audience as citizens or members

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of a polity, thus making a clear distinction between the public and private domains. However, as cultural studies and feminist scholarship, in particular, have shown, the private domain is an important site for the creation of alternative or oppositional public spheres (e.g. Fraser 1990). Furthermore, the concept of the political and the related notion of the political public sphere, prevalent in Anglo-Saxon scholarship, have been defined too narrowly, often ignoring the relationship between communication, culture and politics. (In the Middle East, for instance, politics has always been more fluid and more informal than the organised politics of established democracies in the West.)

In attempting to move the arguments beyond these contestations, Livingstone and Lunt (1994) have proposed using the term 'critical audience' as it captures the increasing sophistication and media literacy (see Livingstone 2003 for an informed analysis on media literacy) within which audiences approach media texts. This has, in some ways, been corroborated in Miller's (1994) and Philo's (1996) work on different audiences in which they found that people are media competent because they can understand and be critical of what the intended message means. Billig's (1987) work on rhetorical psychology can be used to expand the meaning of critical in his argument that the very process of thinking is a process of ideology where thinking can be seen as alternative or counter-hegemonic discourses that can sometimes challenge the status quo.[51] In recent years, a number of ethnographic studies have begun to address the concerns over audiences by examining the use of media as an integral component in every life, offering more complex accounts of the different ways in which people engage with media and the

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[51] Another key argument is Dayan's in which he suggests that audiences who are active are those who are interested in the first place. This has also been reflected in the literature on fans.

different parameters that contribute to the media viewing processes (see, e.g., Gillespie 1995).

When talking of the news audience, attempts have been made to redefine this audience from its narrow conceptualisation linked to political action. For example, Bausinger (1984) has, demonstrated how newspaper reading (in Germany) is a collective process shared among family, friends and colleagues and Klaus Bruhn Jensen (1986, 1990) has provided an innovative ethnographic basis for thinking critically about different news audiences. This work, falling mostly within the field of cultural studies, has blended the domains of social and cultural practices together with the textual, via an emphasis on language, consciousness and subjectivity as constitutive elements of social reality.

In summing up the debate, Bird (2003) notes that the notion of the audience has been so problematic because we cannot "isolate the role of the media in culture, because the media are firmly anchored into the web of culture, although articulated by individuals in different ways..." (2003:3). However, she cautions, that does not mean we "need to abandon the 'audience' in despair...even as we acknowledge the importance of global and national economic and political forces in constructing the 'mediascapes' in which we live, we don't all need to become political economists...we need to move beyond the audience as a theoretically definable construct, but we should not be abandoning the goal of understanding real people, living real lives in which media play an ever-increasing, if certainly problematic role" (2003:190).

Given the lack of agreement on whether there is indeed an entity out there that can be identified as the media audience,[52] whose boundaries Moores defines as inherently unstable (1993), it is not surprising that the problem arises because we cannot isolate the role of the media in culture, because the media are "firmly anchored into the web of culture, although articulated by individuals in different ways [...] the audience is everywhere and nowhere" (Bird 2003: 3).

5.4 The Rationale of the Study

In setting the parameters of this research, I was conscious of these debates over the state of audience research, the audience itself, and over text and context, debates that seemed to go round in circles providing no clear direction about which approach would be best to undertake. While agreeing that a balance, as Livingstone prescribes, is needed, I did not think that this could *only* be done through a combination of audience research and textual analysis (my emphasis). Instead, I opted for an approach combining a synthesis of the empirical work, an audience study, and an interrogation of the literature and existing theories. The questions I set out to explore at the outset – what do the Palestinian in Britain do with news; how they use it and what does these uses mean for questions of belonging, identity and community - necessitated an audience study based on a qualitative interviewing.

In designing the methodology, I first considered the strengths and the weaknesses of the different methodologies to decide on the best approach. After some consideration, I opted

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[52] Moores (1993) has argued that the term audiences (used in the plural form) is preferable as it denotes the existence of several groups divided along gender, social and cultural positionings. However, this, too, faces conceptual difficulties, as it does not address the question of where media audiences begin or end.

for semi-structured interviewing not only because it was a methodology I felt most comfortable with, considering my professional[53] background, but also because it was the most suitable for my particular objective, in which I aimed to open up reflexive discourses that involved the subjects concerned as a participating party. My reasoning was that these questions could be best addressed through semi-structured interviews as this form of research allows us to analyse how people construct their identities, and whether they participate in public life through their talk about news.

In making this choice, I was conscious that I was moving against the recent trend in reception studies within cultural and media scholarship and which have used observational ethnography and textual analysis as the preferred techniques for studying everyday cultural practices, in this research. My reasons for rejecting these were at first practical ones; there was no obvious public space, i.e. local settings and places of social gatherings, where media are consumed en masse and publicly by the diasporic Palestinians in Britain.

The Palestinians in Britain, unlike the Punjabis or the Greek Cypriots in London (see Gillespie 1995; Georgiou 2001), generally do not live in clusters although there are areas, particularly within London, that have a large Arab concentration, while social organisation in response to political developments generally occur in fits and bursts, which would make it difficult to observe and record the everyday effect of media on the communities involved. Lastly, observational ethnographic work in public spaces in Britain would not be conclusive in this study, because it is difficult to distinguish the Palestinians from other Arabs — ethnic markers, which include language, dress and customs, are not clearly demarcated.

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[53] I worked as a professional journalist and editor for 18 years prior to taking the academic route.

The theoretical perspectives adopted in this thesis, particularly the understanding of identities as socially constructed through talk and action and news as cultural discourse, informed my final decision as these necessitated an interrogation of people's discourses and talk about themselves and their news consumption practices. This meant moving away from the triangulation favoured in recent reception studies within cultural and media studies, which would normally carry out a textual analysis that involves de-constructing the text by applying structuralist, semiotic, feminist, literary, narrative or ideological analysis, coupled with an audience interpretation of the text or genre under study, and followed by an illustration of how the content of the text was constructed by the media producers, which would support the analysis of the informants' statements.

I reasoned that undertaking such an approach would serve a different purpose than the one that I had intended at the outset, which is a study of the audience's uses of news in an attempt to find out whether they use it for identity work and what that means for the understanding of diasporas. Furthermore, practical considerations discouraged me from carrying out a textual analysis. These relate to the fact that the media genre I was investigating, the news story my informants engage with (that of and related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict), was of an open-ended nature, making it difficult to decide which text to analyse. This consideration was further complicated by the fact that the respondents engaged with different news media, which made it difficult to decide which text to choose for deconstruction without being personally implicating in the process.

Furthermore, I was interested in exploring the everydayness of news culture which (Allan 1999) can provide us with a rich starting point for further research. By engaging with the apparent 'normality' of how readers, listeners and viewers make sense of the

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news, we are better able to look beyond the fixed text-audience dichotomy indicative of so much previous research on news audiences (Allan 1999: 129). What this means is that an alternative approach which recognises the need to investigate people's deeply ingrained habits of interacting with news discourses as part of their lived experience of the everyday resists a rigid analytical separation from the conditions of its decoding. In its place is a conceptual commitment to interrogating the fluidly contradictory cultural relations of textual negotiation in all of their attendant complexities. It follows, then, that the materiality of news discourse is contingent upon the embodied experience of power relations as they traverse the contested terrain of ordinary culture.

The combination of theoretical, practical and research considerations convinced me that an audience study, drawing on social-scientific and humanistic inquiry, was the best methodology to address how the informants make sense of news and use them as resources in their everyday lives. Whereas the methods of data collection are drawn primarily from the empirical procedures of the social sciences (interviews), the methods of the data analysis derive from the broadly hermeneutic approaches of the humanities: discourse studies and thematic analysis.

It is a truism that every researcher starts an inquiry with pre-conceived ideas. Mine were grounded in my familiarity with the subjects of the study, their conditions and their situation and in the theoretical underpinnings for the research, discussed at length in Chapters Two, Three and Four. However, although I was aware of the general context of the research, I was not familiar with the particularities of people's engagement. Indeed, I started with the assumption that news is relevant for the Palestinians concerned, but that did not mean I knew what they did with it and what it meant for their everyday social and

cultural practices. Furthermore, my familiarity with the context of the research meant I started with some pre-conceived ideas about the informants and their lives, insights gained from my own experiences as a member of the Palestinian diasporic community in Britain.

As an insider, a member from within and without, I had some ideas about the political and social make-up of the Palestinian community, and was aware of the internal cleavages within the Palestinian community in Britain, based on political[54], religious, regional (whether rural or urban) and socio-economic backgrounds, as well as of the interchangeable categories, such as 'Arab', 'Palestinian', 'Palestinian-Arab', 'British-Palestinian' or 'British' that complicate face-value understandings of diasporic identities.

My pre-conceptions were also grounded in my familiarity, as a journalist working primarily within the mainstream news media establishments, of the language of 'othering' and the use of crude binaries (shorthand in journalistic jargon) that cropped up during moments of crisis. That said, I assumed a degree of naivete about the lives of the informants during the interviews, while trying to be sensitive to and curious about what was being said and what was left out, which allowed me to be critical of my own suppositions and presuppositions during and before the interviewing process. In other words, I put on the hat of observer, rather than participant, though it was difficult at times to maintain professional boundaries and emotional detachment.

In pursuing my objectives, it was imperative to resist the temptation to make an empirical division between ethnic (Arabic) and other media — my informants have the

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[54] Palestinians' political affiliations, meaning their loyalty to certain political factions within the Palestinian and Arab leaderships, are the heritage of the political history of the Middle East, apart from the many isms, including Ba'athism, Arabism, Islamism, and Communism, that divided loyalties.

choice to engage with either or both.[55] Indeed, the starting point is the need to acknowledge the continuous interweaving and interplay between mainstream (Western) and transnational news media (mainly Arabic satellite broadcasting), which informed the informants' choice of which news media to engage with.

5.5 The Research Design

My research approach adopted was to concentrate on a particular group, the Palestinian diasporic community in Britain, therefore forming a single case study[56]. Case studies focusing on single phenomena or groups have been recommended when the case is rare and 'unique', and when the researcher can access the phenomena that have not been previously studied[57].

The methodology is based on semi-structured, open-ended qualitative interviewing, where the very nature of the researcher and the subjects (I and the informants define ourselves as Palestinian although that does not mean 'we' are a homogeneous 'we') necessitate a measure of reflexivity, a notion I attend to below. In all, I conducted 24 semi-structured interviews with individuals, households and groups, (the following chapter provides a sociological analysis of the informants), a total of 52 people, with the aim of gathering information about their preferred sources of news, about their

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[55] There were some examples where language was a problem. Most informants spoke English although the extent of understanding English differed. This obviously had implications for their choice of the medium for their news consumption, as understanding news in Arabic was easier than trying to understand what was being said in English.

[56] I use the term case study in its broader meaning, rather than as in the meaning proposed by Yin (1994), which defines case studies as empirical inquiries that use multiple sources of evidence to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context.

[57] As pointed out in Chapter Four, there are few studies on the Palestinians in Britain, particularly as a complex diasporic group.

perceptions of news and what it means for them. In addition, I conducted several interviews for background information. The first part of the fieldwork, during which household and group interviews were conducted, began in November 2001 and continued throughout May 2002. The second phase of the research, also comprising semi-structured interviews, was carried out between January 2003 and May 2003. The interim period was used to consolidate the methodology and to check whether it suited the theoretical impetus behind the work. The reasoning is explained later on in this chapter.

This research project was designed, as noted above, with several intellectual challenges in mind, including how to address identity discourses, collective memory, news and mediation and by the relationship between news and power. Data was gathered using in-depth, qualitative interviews which were best suited to my purposes because the topic of the interview involves the real and imagined lived world of the subjects and their relation to it — what I mean is that the continuous news story related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the topic of the qualitative interview was and remains related to the lived world of my informants. The questions were set around broad themes dealing with how my subjects watched news (the circumstances of engaging with news), where they consumed news, which medium and language they preferred, what news stories meant to them, why and whether news was important for them and how they made sense of news.

The open-ended design of the questions meant that interviews were not conducted through a strict order of questioning, but were structured along subject-areas of discussion, proceeding from the general to the particular. They began at the broadest level, exploring which media the informants regularly engage with. My first point of departure was to allow the respondents to talk about news freely; the second was to find out why they

engaged with news and what that meant for them; the third attempted to elicit comparative assessments of the different news media they engaged with on a regular basis; the fourth sought to have them describe what typically happens in their daily lives in association with their engagement with news[58]; and the fifth encouraged them to describe the uses of news beyond the context of viewing.[59]

I then asked the informants to discuss their interpretations of the news story and its significance in their everyday lives, and it was during these exchanges that questions related to their identification, their sense of boundaries, their talk of othering, belonging and exclusion came up. The question guide, as shown below, begins at the broadest level:

1. Which media do you have access to?
2. Which news media do you have access to?
3. Which news media do you prefer?
4. Do you engage with news regularly?
5. How many times do you engage with news?
6. Do you engage with news on your own, or with family?
7. When do you engage with news?
8. Who makes the decisions about engaging with news?

I then went on to examine the reasons for their engagement with news and what it meant for them. Again, the questions are at the broad level:

1. Why do you engage with news?
2. Do you follow the same news item?
3. Why do you switch channels?
4. What does news tell you?

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[58] This draws on Lull's (1980) typology of the social uses of television.
[59] This was the most difficult aspect of my research to get across, but it did produce interesting data.

5. Why is it important in your lives?
6. What do you think of the different news programmes?
7. What do you think of the content of news?

Tackling these broad issues provided inroads into more specific themes relevant to this research, including themes related to what the respondents make of the continuous media events and/or of critical events and to whether and how their news consumption of these events had implications for their experiences in the diasporic space as well as for their identity perceptions and negotiations. What this meant was that the respondents became subjective and took positions, which is the bias that I needed to engage with the theoretical framework adopted here. Subjectivity meant that the respondents were emotional and engaged, but also reflexive about their positionings and understandings.

The open-ended nature of the questions, allowing respondents to take time to respond, to engage with the topic and to bring up new concepts and questions, were aimed primarily at forging a sense of 'familiarity' and at reducing the 'formality' of the interviewer-interviewee relationship. Most of the interviews took place in the familiar setting of the household of the informant/s and around normal activities that could afford the researcher fodder for some field notes and casual observations, an approach (Silverstone, Morley and Hirsch 1991) that emphasises the 'social' character of media appropriation and the ways consumption is ingrained in the structures of the domestic and the public.

The choice to use interviews as a research method, as Kvale says, involves a challenge to renew, broaden, and enrich the conceptions of knowledge and research in the social sciences (Kvale 1996:10). The choice to use a variety of interview forms, the individual, the household and the group, is informed by the qualitative nature of the research. The

groups I interviewed were not focus groups in the strict sense, but the discussions generated within the group took a life of their own by the presence of other group members that were familiar to them, prompting a range of different remarks about a topic by encouraging the respondents to speak from their "individual social or material positions defined by their respective cultural backgrounds" (Gunter 2000:46). Even when groups comprise demographically homogeneous memberships, a group identity may emerge once participants realise they share values and attitudes, thus enabling a consensus view to emerge (cf. Morley 1980). Though I was aware that individuals in the group may not divulge what they really think, the nature of the research meant that the individuals taking part in these group interviews did actually say what they wanted to say, as will be clear in the variations of opinions and ideas detailed in Chapters Seven and Eight.

Indeed, in this research study, I use the group interviewing to investigate, as Radway (1984) did, the broader 'interpretive community' where participants' routine interpretations are of primary interest. For me, the concern is the collective, rather than the taxonomic in nature as I wanted to understand the ways in which the interviewees, as consumers, were also taking part in mediation processes. Although the group research methodology has been criticised because of concerns about the validity of its results and its nature, the group interview emphasises the social nature of communication and does not reduce social scientific research to the individual (Gunter 2000). As Lunt and Livingstone (1994) note, this is important in the context of media research, where mechanical conceptions of media effects are giving way to more social, semiotic and diffusion-based conceptions of media processes.

5.6 Interviewing and Reflexivity

My choice to use interviewing was primarily informed by the cultural studies tradition

which generally sees interviewing as the most suitable method to study cultural

experience, a study that necessitates looking at a number of processes that may or may

not mesh neatly together (Couldry 2002). These, he notes, include, on the one hand,

action, which means the actual consumption choices people make, their level of

engagement and the direct interpretations people make of what they consume, and, on the

other hand, talk, meaning people's talk about the symbolic products they consume that

necessarily brings out the social contexts of this consumption. In the empirical chapters,

Seven and Eight, I will show how these two processes mesh together in the reality of the

Palestinian diasporic experiences in Britain; why the informants make their choices and

what this means for their discourses of identification and for their participation in or

detachment from social and public life.

Semi-structured interviews, as Kvale (1996) says, help "obtain descriptions of the life

world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described

phenomenon" therefore inviting critical discussions of the relations between the

researcher and the subjects of the research, and allowing for a framework of reflexivity

that can be useful for the interpretation and evaluation of the research study's analysis

and conclusions. Reflexivity, the thinking of the social and the cultural, means

developing the practice of reflection, which, from yet another angle, makes apparent the

contested and non-transparent nature of 'society' and 'culture' (Couldry 2000).

Reflexivity, in other words, is a back and forth continuous process allowing researchers

to evaluate how their own discourse and preconceptions interact with the subjects' discourses, and the other way round. In seeking to balance the requirements of the project and the need of the respondents to move away from the questions asked towards discussions of society, politics, and, more importantly, what they see as their own narrative, the narrative of the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict, I conducted the interviews in such a way as to encourage informants to address the research questions within the broader context of other political and social determinants that, along with media, influence their everyday experiences. In this way, the aim was to engage reflexively with the theoretical and empirical agenda set within this field as this relates to the question of identity (Georgiou 2001). By allowing the respondents to reflect on their experiences and social practices, I was able to trace some of the personal, cultural and political pressures that bear on these practices and experiences and which are not always visible.[60]

The interviews were conducted in informal settings, at the respondents' homes, in cafés and restaurants when the informants did not want me to access their private spaces for their own particular purposes or for convenience. Irrespectively, after an initial period of getting to know each other and making them feel comfortable, the interviews were normally held in an amicable atmosphere, with the respondents often putting on the interviewer's hat and asking me questions about myself.

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[60] This was achieved through the analysis of the data, which was reflexive as it involved constant reflection on what was being said while also juxtaposing it against the theoretical undertaking, rather than on-the-spot interpretation, which is a practice that I had used as a journalist.

5.7 Dilemmas of the Fieldwork

I soon found out that fieldwork is not a simple process or not as simple as interviewing as a reporter had been. This process becomes complex particularly in situations when the distinction between researcher and informant — I and the informants describe ourselves as Palestinian - is not clearly defined and where boundaries between the two roles are fluid. What added to the complexity of the interviewing process in this case was that, given the nature of the political climate[61] at the time of the research, respondents were worried about the purpose of the research and had to be repeatedly reminded that it had no hidden political agenda.

In my desire to make informants feel comfortable, I exerted considerable effort to convince them that the research objectives were not politically motivated and that I was not being paid for the work. In fact, there were many times when I was turned down because of informants' fears that the research had a hidden political agenda. Thus, I found myself engaging in small talk, discussing children, education and life in Britain in general, a time consuming activity, but which in the end provided me with valuable insights into the actual lives of the informants and their experiences which indicated that living in diaspora cannot be taken for granted as it involves continuous contestations of power relations.

Other dilemmas were of a more practical nature. As my intention was to cover domestic and public grounds and to provide a varied sample cutting across gender, class, religious, and generational boundaries, I resisted the temptation to contact personal

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[61] The interviews took place amid a large-scale military campaign by the United States and its allies against the so-called war against terror following the September 11, 2001, attacks against the US.

acquaintances and friends. In addition to the fact that this approach would not be considered scientific, I was worried about my objectivity as a researcher.

I therefore sought the help of the Palestinian Higher Delegation Office in London, which had access to the names and addresses of some 5,000 Palestinians spread all over the United Kingdom. This list, however, proved to be problematic. First, it was not accurate or up to date. In fact, unofficial estimates suggest that the number of Palestinians in Britain is somewhere between 15,000 to 20,000 as the 2000 *intifada*, conditions in refugee camps in Lebanon and a change in Germany's immigration laws brought in a large number of new arrivals and asylum seekers to the UK. And, second, the list gave no indication of how these people came to be in Britain, the reasons for their arrival or their status, irrespective of whether they had become bona fide British citizens or were still considered immigrants.

This lack of specificity and accuracy presented me with the major challenge of mapping the history of the informants' arrival and the circumstances surrounding their arrival in Britain — this proved to be a difficult task because there was no obvious way to acquire accurate and reliable data about the informants. This, as I had noted in the previous chapter, is partly because of the lack of precise statistics on the number of Palestinians and Arabs in Britain due to the complexity of the British classification system and partly because of the invisibility of the Palestinians within the Arab community — Palestinians share with other Arabs the same culture, language, traditions and religion, though they differentiate themselves and are differentiated by others by their distinct national aspirations. It is also difficult to estimate the number of UK-born Arabs as such groups are also subsumed under the heading 'born in the UK' (see previous chapter). In addition,

there is no community centre for Palestinians to meet or specific localities where Palestinians live, although there is a largish concentration of Palestinians in west and southwest London.[62]

Given the problems cited above, I set out to contact a selected number of families I chose randomly from the Palestinian Higher Delegation Office's list. I wrote introductory letters explaining the research study's aim and my background to some 300 households and individuals, only to receive five replies, two of which were not relevant to the research as the correspondents wanted me to take part in some fund-raising activities. I therefore decided to form a sample using the non-probability method of snowballing: this means asking an initial group of informants to put me in touch with their families and friends, who are then asked about their friends and acquaintances and then interviewing those people, a process repeated until a sample is formed.

The snowballing method, it is argued, does pose the problem of the researcher inheriting the decisions of each individual on who is the next available interviewee. In practice, however, the extensive use of snowballing leads to the construction of a rich and diverse sample. I supplemented this method by networking, making an effort to meet people by taking part in activities organised by the London-based Association of the Palestinian Community in Britain and by other Arab associations, including the Arab Club and the Jordanian-British Association. At the same time, I found myself taking part in the cultural and political activities as well as attending fund-raising functions in aid of the Palestinians under Israeli occupation particularly in the early part of 2002 and following the escalation of tit-for-tat violence between the Palestinians and Israeli forces.

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[62] This problem was, however, addressed by relying on secondary sources and estimates on the number of Palestinians in Britain (see Chapter Four for details).

In selecting the households for the interviews, I chose families where parents and children or siblings live together in one space. I had originally targeted 20 such families, hoping that all members of the family would be present. Needless to say, not all of these attempts were successful - in some cases, it was difficult to arrange for all members of the household to be present together at the same time because some family member was at work or because a family member, usually the male, would not feel comfortable being interviewed by a female. In other cases, I met the informants in public places because of social and other considerations (see the following chapter) and sometimes because they were reluctant to allow a stranger into the relative sanctity of their homes. The fact that I adopt Western dress may have been an inhibitor in some cases.

That said, I was determined to vary the sample to make sure I had a diversified group in terms of age, gender and class. In practice, that diversity also came into question. Although in most cases women and men took part, their participation, meaning their contribution to the conversation, was often not equal. Women tended to tend to house matters, such as making tea and coffee, lunch or dinner. However, this was compensated for when interviewing women on their own and it was during these interviews that I got some of the most valuable data for the research in that they tended to talk without apparent self-imposed restrictions. Men were generally, but not always, wary of what the research aimed at, but they did participate after realising that the work was not politically motivated.

5.8 Conducting the Research — the Operational Framework

Despite these constraints and problems, I persevered with the fieldwork, the first phase of which started in November 2001 and ended it in May 2002. The second phase started in January 2003 and ended by end-May 2003. The households and individuals interviewed for the research come from a broad range of socio-economic and religious backgrounds (Christians and Moslems). Most of the interviewees have access to a rich mixture of media, including satellite and terrestrial television channels, as well as a wide range of print media and the Internet, though most tend to watch television news or listen to the radio for their daily intake of news. This meant most had access to Arabic news sources, including the Qatar-based Arabic satellite channel *al-Jazeera* and other significant channels like the Lebanese-based *al-Manar*, which many said were important for them.[63]

In carrying out the interviews in households, I collected valuable visual data. For example, the fact that in almost every household the television was continuously switched on to a particular news channel confirmed the centrality of news in the informants' lives. While waiting for the informants to assemble, I took notes and observations, noticing how, in many households, ornaments and symbols of Palestine — flags, olive wood ornaments, calligraphy and religious symbols — were displayed prominently and were part of the home's essential decorations, which in their taken-for-granted presence in prominent positions in the households, brought to my attention the daily but banal reminder of the homeland in these people's lives.

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[63] Because of the way I selected the sample and the need to have a variety of respondents, I could not establish prior to the interview whether respondents had satellite television or had access to *al-Jazeera*. I felt it was important to establish contact, meet these people and then carry out the investigation. As it happened, all but two had access to satellite television.

The interviews often went beyond the research brief, with discussions moving on to food, cooking and lifestyle as well as questions of Palestinian peculiarities that were not directly relevant to the research questions, but that allowed me to understand certain social aspects of interactions in the diasporic space. The domestic space was the most appropriate place to conduct the research, although that did not preclude the use of public spaces to interview people and to widen the sample beyond the rigid structure of the traditional household. In the public space, I conducted interviews with two groups — one with a group of Moslem families from the same socio-economic background in a public restaurant in Manchester and another with a group of five 20-30 year-old male asylum seekers in a pub in London. These interviews come under the category of the small group or peer group interview, which mean the members of the group either know or are comfortable with one another. Smaller group interviews also go round the problems associated with the focus group (usually of about six to 10 people), such as the artificial homogeneity of the group or the dominance of one member over the others.

The conversations with the informants focused on the use of news in their lives (see interview guide in the above section). I wanted to find out whether news can serve as a point of reference and a mediating framework of memory, and whether it can provide an invitation to talk, an opportunity to remember, a ritual that helps bind these people together, a link that binds the Palestinian community, or even much more simply that could be the first tentative form of contact among members of these communities. What seemed clear at the outset, even before the analysis started, was that, while the activity of engaging with news takes place in the intimate space of the home, the experience of consumption extends beyond that. Indeed, people's socialisation processes revolve

around news and discussions of these accounts and their representations, moving the consumption activity from the private to the public, and, in doing so, helping the socialising and construction of identities in both spaces. During those interviews when all household members were present, I had the opportunity to observe the natural interaction between people.

The languages in which the interviews were conducted were Arabic and English, depending on the language skills of the informants[64]. In some interviews, people alternated between the two. This was crucial for the smooth conducting of the interviews, although it was very difficult in the transcription process – indeed, my ability to switch from one language to the other was important for easing and facilitating more expressive communication.

What is crucial to note is that the interviews were conducted during a traumatic period in the lives of the Palestinians. I was initially worried that the timing of the research would distort the results and was conscious that the timing was both positive and negative, positive in that the Palestinians interviewed were deeply engaged with news, particularly news related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and/or the perceived tensions between Islam and the West, but negative in that the engagement with the Palestinian-Israeli news developments meant that interviewees tended to 'commute'[65], in, other words to move the questioning and the answers to more 'personalised' questions related to the ongoing conflict with Israel. However, the analysis of the interview material showed that the notion of commuting was a sense-making process that informants in

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[64] Unlike other migrant groups, members of the first generation migrants are competent in both languages. This connects to the fact that most of them were of middle- to upper-class families.

[65] Commuting refers to the process whereby respondents constantly switched from discussions of the media text, the news narrative, to discussions about their own narrative.

general used to make sense of news and appropriate its meanings in their lives, therefore making the findings legitimate. This will be detailed in Chapter Eight.

The informal nature of the interview sessions — these lasted between two to three hours (we took a lot of breaks to make coffee, tea or to eat something) — meant that I had the chance to study the natural interaction between people who see themselves as existing as one group, allowing me to explore the dynamics of news talk in its dialectical expressions.

5.9 Discourse and Dialogues

Interviews conducted this way help us interpret the relevance of *what* is being said. My analysis started after I finished two-thirds of the fieldwork, or after the end of the first phase of the interviewing, when I decided to take 'time-out' to sift through the data without actively doing any fieldwork. Though unconventional, this was intentional, as I wanted to be able to analyse the data collected so far from a 'distance', in order to interpret it and construct meanings. Also, I wanted to see whether a period of normalcy, meaning one where there were no international crises or events related to the informants, was possible, as I was worried about the implications of the timing of the research on the findings.

Distance, it is argued in social research, provides a space beyond the specificities of the fieldwork and the 'emotional' involvement that is an inextricable part of the 'reflexive' approach adopted by most researchers these days. In my training and my work as a journalist, keeping a distance is part of 'good' journalistic practice, a practice that

effectively provided two accounts of the same narrative. Keeping a distance makes for good journalism because it implies a commitment to balance and objectivity as an ideal journalistic practice, capturing the essence of the journalist as the metaphorical fly-on-the-wall metaphor.

As I discovered, however, doing research meant throwing all these rules out of the window, and meant an intense emotional involvement with the interviewees and the subject of the research over the period. Gillespie (1995) argues that analysis without a complete withdrawal from the field has certain important advantages, one of them being that informants become part of an 'interpretive community'. One disadvantage, I would counter argue, is that immersion in the field could sometimes blind the researcher to other aspects and other possibilities of the research. It was for this reason that I decided to take time out two-thirds of the way into the fieldwork to reflect on the objective of the research, to convince myself again that I was on the right track and to allow myself a reasonable period to reflect on the data and to relate it to the literature.

As it happened, the second phase of the research, starting in January 2003 and ending in May 2003, did not provide a period of stability. The violence between the Palestinians and the Israelis continued with an escalation of suicide attacks against Jewish targets while the build-up to the war against Iraq and the actual invasion which took place in March 2003 only served to draw attention to the lack of resolution to the narrative of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

5.10 Analysis: Challenges and Constraints

The development of the analysis remains one of the main challenges for audience studies

and other qualitative research. In this study, I utilised a broad method of data analysis

most commonly derived from the hermeneutic approaches to the humanities — a blend of

discourse studies and thematic analysis, which allowed for the emergence of interpretive

frames or themes. These are distinctive, though sometimes overlapping, cognitive and

emotional categories that people use in constructing an understanding of social reality

(e.g. Neuman, Just and Crigler 1992). In discourse analysis, selected aspects of language

use are similarly conceived as indicators of how humans make sense of the world (e.g.

Jensen 1986). In each case, the analysis serves to establish the occurrence of particular

forms of understanding which can be interpreted with reference to other quantitative as

well as qualitative evidence, and with reference to explanatory theories of how social

institutions and practices may generate such understandings (Jensen 1998).

Thematic analysis is a process for encoding qualitative information and is therefore

suitable here. It is also an appropriate method of analysis in this particular case as most of

the interviews were conducted in Arabic, which meant they had to be translated before

being transcribed and coded for lists of themes.[66] Thematic analysis is a way of seeing,

which means it is subjective because as Boyatzis (1999) notes "what one sees through

thematic analysis does not appear to others, even if they are observing the same

information, events or situations...[it] requires observation, observation precedes

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[66] A theme is a pattern found in the information that at the minimum describes and organises possible
observations or at the maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon (Boyatzis 1999).

understanding. Recognising an important moment (seeing) precedes encoding it (seeing it as something), which in turn precedes interpretation. Thematic analysis moves you through these three phases of inquiry." (1999:1)

The coding for the analysis undertaken was theory-driven[67] in that I began with an interrogation of the theoretical framework informing this work, and then used this to formulate the signals or indicators of evidence in the interview material that supported the theory. In such cases, as Boyatzis says, the "wording of the themes emerges from the…construction of the meaning of style of communication or expression of the elements of the theory. The code, therefore, is often found in the language of the researcher's field, filled with the special meanings and jargon" (1999:33) of that field.[68]

I also followed Mishler (1986) in his argument that interviews that use a relatively 'open' interviewing style resemble narratives, which was a key point in the analysis as the transcripts of the data appeared disjointed and incomplete. However, once we realise that statements are fragments of narratives, we can begin to see them within wider discursive frameworks (cf. Lewis 1991). In this respect, the questions that I was forced to answer emerged in the themes and the links I made between various statements because the interview is only a fragment of a person's social and cultural history, which forces the researcher to consider not only what is said, but what remains unspoken.

Given these imperatives and, arguably, constraints, I would like to briefly re-state the key theoretical underpinnings for this investigation. The first is the assumption that news cannot be solely understood as providing new information, but must also be seen as a

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[67] Theory-driven codes have been popular is the disciplines of social psychology, experimental psychology and comparative anthropology.

[68] What this means is that theory-driven codes may involve difficulties as they often result in lower inter-rater reliability and therefore lower validity because they are more sensitive to projections on the part of the researcher and to the impact of his or her cultural bias (Boyatzis 1999: 35).

dynamic component of social and cultural life, and thus as a form of cultural discourse; the second sees identity as a continuous *discursive* process of becoming; the third is that diasporas are social formations that are responsive to social, economic and political contexts; the fourth is that the discursive construction of national identities runs hand in hand with the construction of difference and uniqueness (e.g. Renan 1996; Hall 1991); and the final assumption is that the discursive construction of identities, collective memories and political mythologies central to ideas of nation requires communicative frameworks to allow their durability over time and space. In the next chapter, I provide a quantitative and descriptive account of the informants and detail the analytical tools used in the analysis of the interview material.

Chapter Six

The Palestinians in Britain: Diversity and Particularity

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In Chapter Four, I gave a brief historical account of the Palestinians' migration to Britain, placing this narrative within the wider story of the mass Palestinian movement out of the area known as Palestine before 1948. Here, I provide a demographic account and descriptive details of the respondents interviewed for this research, using data gathered prior and during the interviews. I then discuss the method used in the analysis of the qualitative data ahead of the more specific analyses of the informants' uses of news in the subsequent two chapters.

6.1 Diverse Sample

The data on the informants, collected in the interviews and a simplified form of participant observation, highlight the diversity of the sample. The sample was collected through the snowballing sampling method, a non-probability sampling technique that is used when it is not possible to draw a random sample of the population from which the sample is to be taken. Though snowballing sampling has some methodological problems, one of which is that it may not be a representative sample, it remains an efficient and feasible method in qualitative research, particularly where the orientation to sampling is guided by a preference for theoretical sampling rather than the kind of statistical sampling associated with quantitative methods.

A total of 54 people, male and female and of different ages, socio-economic backgrounds and religious orientations were interviewed, either on their own, within families and households or in groups. In addition, I conducted five separate interviews with individuals for background information, including with the then Palestinian representative in Britain Afif Safieh and other prominent figures and business people who did not want to be quoted or identified.

Four-four per cent of the interviewees were female, 14.8 per cent were Christian Palestinian and the remainder of the group was Moslem; 31.8 per cent were in the 18-30 age group; 26.6 per cent were in the 30-50 age group; 23 per cent were in the 50-60 age group; 14 per cent were in the 60-75 age group and the rest were over 70 or under 15. I did not deliberately set out to exclude informants under 15 – however, the fact that they generally did not want to take part, preferring to watch cartoons and play video games in the households I visited and the difficulty of reaching this group (many were at school during the time of the interviews) discouraged me from persevering.

Nearly half of the informants said they came to Britain in the early 1990s, following the first Gulf War. About 20 per cent said they arrived in the 1970s, either for work reasons or because of the civil war in Lebanon and the political turmoil in Jordan, and about 10 per cent said they were recent arrivals, some of whom classified themselves as asylum seekers. The remainder of the informants arrived in Britain at different times and for different reasons. For example, Salim, who at 82 was the oldest person interviewed, said he came to Britain in the early 1940s to work with the UN.

About 70 per cent of the informants were competent in both English and Arabic, which is relevant to a core concern in this research – one of the key arguments is that the

juxtaposition of different culturally framed news accounts of the same events stimulates contrastive analyses of news texts heightening feelings of difference while encouraging participation and engagement in public life. About 30 per cent, mostly of the younger adult group (the term I use hereafter to refer to informants between 15 to 25 years old) were competent in English only, though they had a basic understanding of Arabic. About 80 per cent of the informants said Arabic satellite broadcasting was important because it allowed their children access to Arabic language in natural and everyday settings, pointing to instrumental and functional uses of news media, and about 90 per cent said they preferred Arabic satellite channels.

Television ownership was in most cases combined with diversity in access. Most of the homes I visited had access to satellite television, but the Farahs and Mansour (see details below) had no access to satellite broadcasting because of building regulations that prevented them from installing a satellite dish, while Reem said she did not have access to satellite television out of choice. Among the Arabic satellite television channels, *al-Jazeera* was the most widely watched channel at the time of the interviews. About 60 per cent of the households I visited, particularly those with young adults living in the home said they had more than one set.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Palestinians I interviewed do not live in clusters or in specific neighbourhoods in London or in Manchester, the two cities where I interviewed the respondents. Even on such streets such as Edgware Road in West London, an urbanised and busy street lined with stores selling Arabic food, clothes, newspapers and providing Internet access to the Arab world, the Palestinian presence can hardly be distinguished from the Arab one because the Palestinians and other Arabs share

common ethnic markers, such as language, dress, customs and a common religion. The fact that the informants live in different spaces can be linked to the pattern of the Palestinian migration to Britain, which was more like a process of infiltration tan mass migration and was due to varied reasons.

Furthermore, the interview material suggested that residential preferences do not reflect the need to be part of a localised community. Indeed, the choice of home or residence appeared to be more a reflection of other identifying criteria, such as class or socio-economic situation. For example, a few of the more affluent families I interviewed resided in the upmarket suburb of Hampstead in London, which is also popularly known to the home of a large proportion of London's Jewish community, suggesting that living alongside the 'other' was not of immediate concern for these participants. Some other families, such as the Karims, who had moved to a north London suburb because it had cheaper housing said they were pleasantly surprised to find that their Jewish neighbours were much more welcoming than their former English neighbours. For other informants, it was the 'cosmopolitan' character and the ethnic mix of some of London's neighbourhoods that attracted them. This is the position taken by Reem, for whom her middle-class identity, her marriage to an Englishman and her feeling comfortable with diverse ethnic groups have all helped define her residential choice.

Most of the interviews with families and individuals were conducted in the homes of the respondents. Of the three 'group' interviews, two took place in public spaces, the first was in a pub in London because the group was composed of young male asylum seekers who did not have suitable homes for a meeting, but were keen to take part to reflect their voices and concerns and the second took place in a restaurant in Manchester with a

Moslem family and their male friends because they were concerned about privacy. The other, with a group of middle-aged and middle- to upper-class women, took place at one of the respondents' home. A couple of interviews with individuals also took place in public spaces as the respondents did not feel they knew me well enough to invite me to their homes. The household and group interviews allowed me to observe the interactions between members of the household, while the individual in-depth interviews allowed me to achieve a more intense rapport with the interviewee, providing me with rich data about themselves, their feelings and their identity. Members within the group interviews were familiar to each other, making it possible to call these interviews as 'peer-group discussions' (Sasson 1995), which refers to naturally-occurring groups, or groups whose members are familiar to each other, and which is more pertinent to the informants concerned in this study – this term also avoids the common problems associated with focus group and their use in marketing research.

The majority of the households interviewed were nuclear families with parents and children living under the same roof. This does not mean that the interviews with individuals suggest they live on their own, but that the circumstances and contexts of the interviews dictated that they were interviewed on their own. Some, for example Um Ali, had been widowed, while others' husbands or children were not available during the interview. In some cases (see details of Maha below), I had a sense that the male member of the household did not feel comfortable being interviewed by a female.

During the interviews, it became clear to me that the informants' uses of news and the individual processes of constructing meaning were related to cultural contexts and social relations. For example, there was a sense that the family continues to be central in

people's everyday lives as it creates a context for the sense of common belonging and a context for participation in community. However, it was also clear that the family as an institution has undergone dramatic changes as a result of the Palestinians' dispossession, social fragmentation and wars. The family structure has been shattered because men migrating for labour have left families behind, which has meant that although the family continues to be of prime importance for social affairs, there has been a trend away the *hamoulah (*extended family*)* structure in favour of nuclear families. Many of the informants talked of the problems of meeting up with their extended family. This is the case of Jamil (see below), whose siblings have ended up living in different countries following their dispersal from the homeland.

The timing of the research and the escalation of the conflict between the Palestinians and Israel offered an excellent context for addressing the informants' uses and appropriation of news. The sensitivity of the topic to all respondents in the research was very relevant in this case, highlighting how the question of the collective may become a sensitive issue in certain contexts.

Broadly speaking, the interview material revealed a sense of identification with what I call a 'Palestine-centred' entity. However, despite this shared sense of identification, many of the informants made essentalising distinctions about their socio-economic status and their places of origin, voicing attachments to the villages and towns of their origins reflecting the continued relevance of localism, a powerful undercurrent that continues to run through Palestinian society until today. For example, those who came from semi-urban areas, such as Jaffa and Nazareth, were keen to point out the distinctions between urban and rural backgrounds.

Such cleavages, reflecting socio-economic as well as educational and in some cases religious differences (Christian Palestinians often come from the more affluent towns) within any community, may normally unite or divide the informants along several axes of difference. One such axis of difference related to the informants' reasons for leaving the homeland, a sensitive issue among many Palestinian exiles and refugees because of insinuations that they should have stayed behind to fight the Israelis and hold onto their land and property. Others, particularly those from middle-class or affluent socio-economic background, held onto another axis of difference concerning their status, insisting that their situation cannot be equated with that of refugees. That said, their talk and the context of the research – a period of heightened anxiety about the self and the collective – suggested that these distinctions were transcended as the informants voiced identifications with a loosely-defined Palestinian entity (see Chapter Eight).

In attempting to move away from abstract comments about identities – comments that suggest what identity should be more than what it means to the informants – I addressed questions that relate to the respondents' real experience and media interaction as the responses to queries about social networks, participation in activities, institutions and rituals can give some indication about the relevance of identity and belonging to people. In some cases, it can bring to light some dominant trends in these people's attitudes and experiences. So, when the majority of the respondents said that they define themselves as Palestinian, this appeared to confirm the strength and/or dominance of attitudes to collective boundaries. In addition, when the informants said that they mainly socialised with other Palestinians, rather than with their English neighbours, I deduced that the primary boundaries were set or constructed around what it meant to be Palestinian.

The informants' continuous switching between different news channels is compatible with the ways they think and talk of their identities, which came across as continuous movements between polarised positionings. At the same time they expressed concern about the Palestine-Israeli conflict and about its coverage, they also emphasised their loyalty to Britain. In their shifting emphasis about their belonging, there was no sense of an absolute contradiction. This was particularly the case for those who were born in Britain or who spent their formative years in Britain. Experiences of security and safety in Britain provide a source of feeling at home. What appears to be significant is that this sense of security is provided by them having a British passport and by the social security provided by the political system, though this does not mean that they feel included or integrated in the host society. For the majority of the participants, however, an increasing sense of belonging or partly belonging in a self-defined national community structured their self-identification and some of the choices they made in their everyday lives.

The interview material and my collection of data while waiting to be served with tea or coffee provided me with valuable insights about the participants' lives and relationships. For example, most households appeared to have recreated Palestinian homes in their use of decorations. With pictures and models of the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa mosque, posters of Yasser Arafat, embroidery and mother-of-pear and olive wood engravings of Palestinian icons, they seem to be recreating their original surroundings. For many of the informants, Palestine remains a central feature of their everyday lives. Even for those who say they have friends of diverse cultural backgrounds, the focus of their socialisation remains with people from the homeland. Some of the informants said they belong to Palestinian or international organisations, such as *al-Awda* (Return) and

the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, which focus on the Palestinian question. Others, such as Sharif (see below), have taken the initiative to form voluntary groups to counter the dominant media representations. The informants' responses, comments and expressed attitudes are discussed in detail in the two subsequent chapters. In the following section, I give a more descriptive account of the informants. All names bar Sharif's have been changed for confidentiality.

6.2 Household Interviews

The Said Family: My relationship with this family began at the start of the fieldwork. Hussein Said contacted me by phone when he learned through a friend of his that I was conducting research on the Palestinians in Britain and invited me to visit his house to meet his wife and children. I saw this family twice, the first on 24th of January 2002 and the second a couple of weeks later on 11th of February. My first interview was more of a socialisation exercise, where I was invited to join Said (50) and his wife Amani (35) along with their four children Qusai, (9); Safa, (7), Lu'ay (5) and Qais (4 months) for an extended lunch. Luckily, I had my tape recorder ready and proceeded to ask a few questions in between eating, drinking, watching the news together and playing with or feeding the children. During this time, Hussein and Amani gave me valuable information about themselves and their background and provided me with rich data on the power relations in the household. The Saids live in a modest two-storey home in west London. Their neighbours are mostly immigrants like themselves, mostly of Pakistani, Indian, and Arab origins. Hussein is self-employed and he considered himself as working class. The

couple professed themselves to be good Moslems, but said they were not fundamentalists. The Saids came to Britain in early 1991 following the first Gulf War when Hussein lost his job in Kuwait. However, he did not apply for asylum status as his contacts with the Arab community in London secured him a clerical job before his arrival. Hussein was born in the West Bank town of Tulkarem, which he left in 1967 when Israel defeated the Arabs in the second Arab-Israeli war. Amani was born in Amman, Jordan, to Palestinian parents.

The Saids have one television set, but have access to satellite broadcasting. They also have access to the Internet, which Hussein uses for business, for e-mailing friends to discuss the latest news events and for finding out what the Israeli media are reporting on the ongoing hostilities between Israel and the Palestinians.[1] Hussein also uses the Internet to alert his friends and colleagues about the latest developments he has seen on Arabic satellite channels and, though this is rare, to send emails of complaints about news coverage to the BB. "I do get very angry (about their coverage)...but I do not have much time," he said. The Saids rely on television for their daily news. They rarely listen to the radio and rarely buy the London-based Arabic papers citing their cost as a reason.

This household is a good example of gendered identities. Hussein dominated the discussions and showed his control by telling me he dictates which news programme and channels his family should watch. However, there were times when Amani challenged this domination. For instance, she complained about her husband's insistence that the children view transnational Arabic satellite television, citing their use of bloody images. The children, though present, did not want to participate in the interviews, preferring to

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[1] This seemed to be an activity that many respondents, particularly those with Internet access, engaged with on a daily basis. The favourite Israeli paper they access is *Haartez*.

take time out to watch cartoons on television, which Amani said they would not normally do with Hussein around as he insisted on the family watching the news together.

The Saids were acutely conscious of their Palestinian-ness, which came across in their talk about their socialisation and belonging. This emerges in Amani's comment: "We do consider ourselves British. We do not live the atmosphere here (sic). Inside our home, everything is Arabic, outside we know the English through the school. We do have good relations with the neighbours, but there are differences."(London 24 January and 11 February 2002).

The Mansour Family: I got in touch with this family through the snowballing method discussed above. When I called to explain my research, the Mansours were originally reluctant, but agreed to see me after several phone calls. However, they were very welcoming when I turned up. The Mansours are a well-to-do family – they live in a prime residential area of west London. Ali, 64, is retired, but remains active in business. His wife Nuha (50) is an active member of the Syrian and Arab communities in London. The couple came to London in the 1980s because of Ali's increasing involvement in property development in London. Ali was born in Haifa in the former Palestine and Nuha in Damascus. They have one daughter Ruba, 19, who was born in London, and who attends university in London.

The Mansours' account of their uses of news reflects how their daily lives are structured around news. This is detailed in Chapter Seven. Both Ali and Nuha are bilingual, though Nuha preferred to speak to me in Arabic during the interview. Ali switched between English and Arabic, while Ruba spoke in English only – she said she

did not feel confident to converse fluently in Arabic, but can understand it and therefore can take part in the family's news viewing practices. The Mansours is a close-knit family and their activities are usually family-centred though Ruba is increasingly pushing for more independence. They said they were not practicing Moslems and that they respect all religions and cultures. Nuha said she was beginning to feel integrated in British society, and Ruba's talk of her identity reflected movements between openness and closeness that were linked to the context of the research rather than cultural considerations: "Personally I befriend people that I get along with that I have something in common with, whether they are Arab or not. In fact, I have a Jewish friend...she's Iranian. I've known here since I was 11, we are very close. But, as far as politics go, we don't go there because we've been there once and it was a disaster... as far as the whole Israel thing it is touchy and for me the Palestinian thing is touchy so we don't go there at all." (London, February 25, 2002)

The Farah household: The Farahs is a family consisting of Odette, a 90-year-old widowed Christian Palestinian and her daughter Leila, a 60-plus single Christian Palestinian who has recently retired from her job as a secretary after almost 40 years of service, first in Lebanon and then in Britain. Leila and Odette live in a purpose-built block in north London overlooking a busy road. They arrived in the UK from Beirut in the late 1970s to escape the Lebanese civil war. They are middle-class Palestinians who had a better lifestyle, according to them, when they lived in their Jerusalem house up to the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, which forced them to leave to Lebanon.

The block they live has diverse families and individuals from different socio-economic and religious backgrounds, but Leila said that most of their neighbours were Jewish and that her mother, who was a fanatic card player, did not mind playing the odd game of Bridge with them as long as she won. Arabic is the spoken language at home, but Leila is fluent in English and Odette can understand it perfectly though she prefers to use Arabic at home. Odette's son Fuad lives nearby and calls on them every day.

The interview I conducted here was mainly with Leila, one of the three people who answered my letter to members of the Palestinian community in Britain informing them of my research plans and asking for interviews and introductions. Leila was interested in the research proposal because she describes herself as addicted to news and also because she is keen to talk about her memories and share her lived experiences in diaspora with someone other than her mother or her close family. This observation is in itself interesting as it confirms that very few studies have been carried out on the Palestinians in Britain. During the interview, Odette intervened a couple of times to talk about her memories of the homeland, her life before, the journey to exile and her ongoing legal battle with Israeli authorities over the ownership of their house in Jerusalem, which remains unresolved. The Farah household, like many others I visited, boasts several pictures of important places of significance to the Palestinians, such as pictures of the old town of Nazareth. I also saw other visible signs relating to Christianity, such as olive wooden crosses hung on different walls.

Leila is an avid news user – she reads the papers regularly and watches mainstream news media and BBC 24, but she has no access to satellite television because of building regulations. However, she says that she gets second-hand reports of *al-Jazeera's* news

accounts through her brother Fuad (see below), who calls on them every day. Odette prefers to read the Arabic-language daily *al-Quds*, which Leila buys for her daily. Leila was very keen to show me clippings of articles on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict reported in the weekly Jewish Chronicle which her brother brings to her to read. Later on, she sent me several clippings from this paper to read. The interview with Leila lasted two hours and was conducted in both Arabic and English. (London, November 15, 2001)

The Muhsens: This is a middle-class Moslem Palestinian family living in Southwest London, comprising the mother Widad (60), a widow, her two sons Khaled and Sami, 32 and 28, respectively, her daughter Judith (30) and nephew Bilal (21) who is staying with the family while finishing his university education in London. The Muhsens came to Britain in the 1990s from Kuwait where they had been living since the early 1980s following the civil war in Lebanon. All the children were born in the refugee camp of Ein el-Hilweh in Lebanon. Widad herself is a refugee who left the former Palestine with her family to Lebanon in 1948. Her husband Osama, also a refugee, was killed in the mid-1980s during a visit to Lebanon.

All family members are bilingual, but the younger son Sami is not comfortable with Arabic, finding it easier to converse in English. Khaled, Sami and Judith all work in major financial institutions in the City of London. I arranged the interview with this family through the snowballing method. My initial phone call was made to Widad, who was very excited about talking to me and invited me to the house at a weekend to make sure that all the children were there. The fact that Widad was the prime organiser of this interview was interesting in two ways, first it suggested that she was to the main power

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holder in the household; and second it made it uncomfortably clear that the male members of the household were reluctant to take part in the research, particularly when I first arrived. Later on, Widad's and Judith's enthusiasm in answering the questions and my persistence and probing worked to draw in the reluctant others.

Both Widad and Judith said they were practicing Moslems and, although they did not wear the traditional Islamic dress, they identified with Moslem values and traditions. The male members were less particular about their identification with Islam, instead saying that they identified as Palestinians. Both female members of the family said they did not feel integrated in Britain, with Judith ridiculing the suggestion, saying: "Never, even if we stayed for 500 years. We are friendly. We have our neighbours, but we don't socialise with them like going over to have a cup of coffee or meet every Christmas we don't...Even when at school I used to feel that the English people in my class are not the same... Politically, there is nothing in common." Bilal said he felt the same way and so did Widad and Khaled, but Sami said he was integrated.

The family has two television sets, one in the kitchen the other in the family sitting room. They have access to satellite and terrestrial television and they also use the Internet extensively. The interview was conducted at their home and lasted for about three hours. (London, April 15, 2002).

The Barhoums: The interview here was conducted with Ahlam (45), her son Maher (17) and his friend Adeeb (21). Mr. Barhoum was abroad during the interview and Ahlam's younger children Mona (10) and Nazeem (8) were playing at the neighbours. The Barhoums is an upper middle-class Moslem family. They live in a residential area in

north London that is known to have a large Jewish community. Ahlam was born on the West Bank, but went to Beirut to pursue her education. Maher is at school and Adeeb, the son of family friends who had moved back to Kuwait, is at university in London. Maher and Adeeb were born in Kuwait. The Barhoums moved to London in the early 1990s for work purposes following the first Gulf War. The younger children were born in London. The language used in the household is English and Arabic, though Maher preferred to speak in English. Adeeb and Ahlam were more fluent in Arabic and continuously moved between the two languages in the interview.

As in the previous household, the social interactions within this family were interesting to observe and it was clear that Ahlam was the key power holder in the family. She often won the argument with the younger adults. The three respondents considered themselves to be secular, having respect to religions and cultural diversity. In fact, Maher said that about 90 per cent of his classmates at his school were Jewish, which had not bothered him at all until the outbreak of the second *intifada* and what he called the negative coverage of Palestinians and suicide bombers. Ahlam said this event had encouraged her to become more active in community and public work and to take part in protests against Israeli policies. (London, February 25, 2003).

The Karims: The interview with this family took place in the second phase of the fieldwork (see previous chapter) almost towards the end of the interviewing process. I got the address of the Karims through my contacts with the Palestinian community and called Sawsan who said she would be very happy to welcome me to their home in the Enfield area on the northeast outskirts of London. The Karims identified themselves as a middle-

class Moslem Palestinian family. The family comprises Sawsan (48), a teacher, Daoud (52), a doctor, Bashar (21) and Nada (23) – Nada was not at home as she had had just started work and was out for the day. The Karims came to London from Kuwait in 1992 following the first Gulf war. Their two-storey home to which they moved two years earlier is situated in a predominantly Jewish neighbourhood, but the Karims said they had never had such congenial neighbours, though the contact with them had become minimal following the uprising.

Both Sawsan and Daoud were born in the town of Tulkarem on the West Bank, to which they plan to return when their son Bashar finishes his university education. Their children were born in Kuwait, but spent their formative years in London. Though devout Moslems – they took time out to perform their daily prayers – the Karims did not seem to be bothered by my Western style dress. As in many of the other household interviews, Sawsan was given more time to talk, suggesting that Daoud and Bashar may have considered this as more of a socialisation exercise among women. However, the male members became more interested in the conversation when we turned to the question of news and its meanings in their lives following general discussions about themselves and their media preferences. As the discussions wore on, Bashar became more animated and more expressive as he talked about his disillusionment and unhappiness about what it means to be a Palestinian 'living diaspora', noting that the news events had made him conscious of being different. "Although I like different cultures, I realised that I get along with a certain type....the type like me. Also, when the *intifada* happened and all the pictures, it became clear to me that it was important to be with people you care about and who care about you. I had Jewish friends then, but they don't care about this. The English

in general are not interested and the Arab community here is divided, lots of division. Frankly, this has made me want to get out of there. I am beginning to feel it does not work." (London, March 20, 2003)

The Asfours: This household interview comprised Randa, a 45-year-old Christian Palestinian and Raed (20), her son from her first marriage to a Christian Palestinian, at their home in central London. I arranged the interview through the snowballing method. Randa said she came to London in 1992 with her second husband, a British businessman, with whom she has twin daughters, aged 10. She described herself as upper middle-class. As her daughters are still young, Randa said she did not work. Raed was at a vocational training college in London.

Randa was born in Amman, Jordan, to Palestinian parents who left Jaffa following the Nakba of 1948. She described her parents as being typical of many Palestinians who have settled in Jordan in that they do not engage with politics. Like them, she had not been interested in politics, but said she became more involved following the second *intifada*, which in her words made her confront her own Palestinian-ness. "In the past when people asked me I used to say I came from Jordan. It was easier, but recently I feel the need to say I am Palestinian and to say that I am a Christian Palestinian to counter the image that it is an Islamic cause, it is not. It is a political cause," she said.

The Asfours have access to satellite television. Like most other respondents, Randa constantly switches between channels. In describing herself as addicted to news, she said: "I feel out of sync if I do not see what is going on. It is also essential to know to discuss with others." She was strongly critical of the mainstream media saying that it made her

helpless and angry at the same time. However, she said she also liked to watch BBC's Question Time programme because it gave her an additional insight into what was going on in Britain.

Interestingly, Raed had strong emotional reactions to news coverage and to the plight of the Palestinians. Unlike in many other interviews where women were generally more emotional than the men, Raed got agitated when we talked about media coverage and the meaning of events. "I have been feeling a lot different lately. Our generation never really cared about news, but since the second *intifada,* we have been following the news because we need it mentally and emotionally. I feel very sad. It is very sad and at the end of the day what is clear is that Israel does not want to give in or change…they just want to occupy the land. In fact, I actually support the suicide bombers." (London,

The Wafiqs: This interview also comprised mother and son. Nadwa, 55, is a middle-class Moslem Palestinian living in West London. She came to Britain with her ex-husband in the 1990s from Kuwait following the first Gulf War. Her son Omar, 35, was born in Kuwait. Omar does not live with his mother, but came to his mother's house to take part in the research during his lunch break. Nadwa has two daughters as well, but they live further away and were not available to take part. The interview, organised through the snowball method, lasted three hours, during which I interviewed Nadwa on her own for the first hour before interviewing mother and son together in the last two. The interview with Nadwa was conducted in Arabic and with the two in both Arabic and English.

Omar runs his own printing business. He is married to a Cypriot (Christian) woman and has two children under the age of five. Nadwa said she was a practicing Moslem, but that she did not interfere with her daughter-in-law's beliefs. However, she said that her grandchildren should be exposed to Islamic and Arabic traditions. "That is why it is important to have channels like al-Jazeera. They can learn Arabic easily," she said. The interaction between mother and son was interesting as it showed that Omar had assumed the position of the head of the household, which is normal when the mother is divorced. (London, January 31 2002)

Sasha and twin sister Nadia (24): Though this is not a conventional household interview, but I put it in this category because I could not put it in the individual or the group categories. Sasha ad Nadia are middle-class Christian Palestinian graduates who live in a west London suburb with their father and mother. The twins were born and brought up in Kuwait and moved to London in 2001 because their father was relocated and because they wanted to pursue their education at university. The interview with the girls took place at my house as they felt more comfortable talking to me without their parents around. The interview was arranged through the snowballing method.

Both Sasaha and Nadia said their father was not too happy about them being getting more involved with current events – this did not seem surprising considering that the family continued to live in Kuwait whose policies following the first Gulf War were seen as discriminatory against the Palestinians. Sasha and Nadia said that they had not been interested in current affairs before they arrived in London, a time that coincided with an

escalation of hostilities between Israel and the Palestinians. The interview lasted two hours and was conducted in English and Arabic. (London, March 18, 2003).

6.4 Individual Interviews:

Maha: 34-year-old Moslem Palestinian of middle-class status. She has two young children, four-year-old Wael and eight-month-old baby Ali. Since having the babies, she has stopped working to look after the children. Maha lives in a mixed middle-class neighbourhood in west London. She came to Britain in the early 1990s from Kuwait, where she was born to post-1948 Palestinian refugees, to continue her education (she has a degree in pharmacology that she obtained at Edinburgh University). She met her husband Luay in Britain. Luay was at home during my visit, but did not want to take part in the interview because he was working, though it appeared to me he was not keen on being interviewed by a female.

Maha described herself as a news addict. She has access to satellite television – she installed a satellite dish following the second *intifada* to engage with diverse news media. Maha has excellent command of English, but she alternated between Arabic and English in the interview though I posed the questions in English. Though Maha defines herself as a good Moslem, she does not wear the veil except when she leaves the house. Her talk of her identity shifts and changes according to the changing context, reflected in her constant negotiation of boundaries within the diaspora. In the interview, Maha's talk of her identity reflected how this was constructed with reference to the homeland and with reference to the diasporic space. For her, Arabic satellite television has been important

for defining her identification as a Palestinian. She watches Arabic satellite television

almost all day, though she constantly switches to mainstream media. The interview lasted

for two hours and took place in the afternoon when Maha's children were sleeping. Maha

is also interested in radio and listens to the Arabic broadcast Spectrum at night after

children are in bed. (London, February 14, 2002)

Lutfi: Lutfi is the brother of Leila (see Farah household above), whom I interviewed

separately at his sister's house after she convinced him to take part in the research. Lutfi

is a retired 65-plus Christian Palestinian who started a business in export and import that

took him to African countries and later on to London. He left Jerusalem in 1948 with his

parents and went with his family to Lebanon. Lutfi first came to Britain 1975. He is

married to a Greek national and has two daughters in their 20s. None of them were

present at the interview.

Lutfi is a self-avowed news junkie, reading most British broadsheets as well as the

London-published Jewish Chronicle to enlighten himself, in his words, about what the

Jewish press is reporting on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and then passing on what he

sees as relevant news items and analysis to his sister Leila who archives everything. Lutfi

is also a fan of *al-Jazeera,* particularly because it provides an alternative view to that of

the mainstream British media. (London, January 18, 2002)

Jamil: A retired 72-year-old Christian Palestinian businessman who lives in an upmarket

area of southwest London. Jamil came to Britain in 1964 to train as a chartered

accountant, and was forced to stay because of the 1967 war and the fall of Jerusalem. The

rest of his family is dispersed in different parts of the world. Jamil is married to a Belgian national and has two children, a boy and a girl, both in their 30s. None was present during the interview, which was arranged through the snowballing sampling method.

Jamil has access to satellite and digital television, citing his wife's need to engage with French-speaking channels and his own preference for Arabic transnational broadcasting as the reason behind the abundance of channels he and his wife can engage with. Like other older informants, Jamil's daily schedule is defined by his use of news. He reads a variety of papers, including the Arabic language daily *al-Quds,* listens to the BBC's Radio Four, then turns on to *al-Jazeera* for more detailed news on Palestine. The interview lasted three hours as Jamil spent a lot of time commuting, moving from discussions of the news story to talking about his personal life and story. The language alternated between English and Arabic. (London, May 3, 2002).

Um[2] Ali: Um Ali was one of the most colourful interviewees. She is a 65-plus widow who lives in a purpose-built apartment in north London. She describes herself as a middle-class devout Moslem Palestinian. Um Ali has four children, three of them in London and the fourth lives in Washington DC. Her life story - she spent a lot of time commuting between talk about news events and her life – is, according to her account, one of constant struggle and achievements. Um Ali came to London in 1975 with her oldest son after he was shot in the leg during the Lebanese civil war. Her three daughters stayed in boarding school in Beirut until they graduated. Um Ali was born in the town of Nablus and her late husband came from Haifa. They got married in Palestine and stayed

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[2] Um means mother of, which is a common term of reference in the Arab world. Ali would refer to her oldest son.

in Nablus until the 1967 war after which they went to Jordan, then Lebanon. Um Ali said she ran her husband's work, an advertising agency, single-handedly when he died in the early 1970s of a heart attack.

Um Ali described herself as addicted to news. Indeed, her two-room flat was inundated with diverse media. There were two television sets (she has access to satellite as well), one in the living room, which she said is on all the time and the other in her bedroom, which she uses to record news bulletins on diverse channels while she is watching the news in the sitting room or during prayer times. "I record as much as I can and then compare notes," she said. In addition, she has three radio sets, one in the bedroom, the second in the kitchen and the third in the sitting room. The television was switched to *al-Jazeera* during the interview and it was interesting to watch Um Ali's body language – she would tense up and ask me to be quiet to hear what was going on. Um Ali also reads the Arabic papers and makes clippings to give to her friends to read and compare notes and up to date. She took time to show me her fat folder of clippings, all on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Um Ali said she was only interested in political news, particularly news about Palestine. "My children laugh at me and say we are going to put you a bed and a pillow inside the television. Really, I have an obsession with television news," she said. Um Ali said she also watched the BBC, but did not always understand what was going on. The interview took three hours and was conducted in Arabic. (London March 25, 2002).

Sharif (real name): Sharif is the 24-year old founder of Arabmediawatch, an Internet group aimed to counter bias in mainstream Western media that he started in 2000

following the second *intifada*. "There was so much distortion and inaccuracies and ignorance. Not just the Palestinian conflict, of the Arab world in general. We just felt we needed to address that and since I was a journalist, |I was ready to do that."

Sharif was born in Kuwait and came to London in 1991 with his parents and siblings following the Gulf War and because of his late father's work. Sharif lives with his mother and his siblings in a house in central London. The household can be described as upper middle-class. Though he has access to diverse media, including Arabic satellite television, Sharif regularly follows the mainstream news media because of the nature of his work. His engagement with news, as he puts it, has allowed him to appreciate the meaning of identity and community and to participate in public life. The apparent ease in which he shifts between Palestinian-ness and cosmopolitanism is reflected in his views about participation and action. "I am not going to live my life being afraid of expressing my opinion because here is someone who might turn against me. You cannot go on ducking and hiding," he said. The interview was conducted in English at his home and lasted two hours. (London, April 12, 2002).

Mansour: Middle-class 58-year-old former sports commentator, who is now semi-retired. Mansour lives in a suburb in northeast London with his wife, Julia, who is Irish. They have two grown up children who are at university. Neither Julia nor the children were present at the interview. I organised the interview through the snowballing method.

Mansour said that he was an avid news user and that he needed to engage with news to know what is going on in his hometown of Asira, a village on the West Bank. He has no access to satellite television because of building restrictions, but says that he can access

the diverse reports on the Internet. Mansour was born in Asira on the West Bank and was recruited from Jerusalem in 1968 to work with the BBC's sports sections. He was in Jordan visiting relatives when the 1967 war broke out and had to stay there until he got the job offer from the BBC. (London, January 18, 2002).

Fuad: Middle-class 49-year old Moslem Palestinian living in West London. He is married to a Greek national and has two grown-up children. Fuad was born in Ramallah on the West Bank, but left his birthplace with his parents at the age of 15 following the 1967 war. He sees himself as a news addict, consuming a diverse range of news media in various forms. Fuad's accounts of his news experiences provided a good perfect example of the ways in which identity can be seen as a continuous discursive process of identification as he constantly moved between positionings and points of reference, "I am definitely a Palestinian, and the news makes me more so...But I don't feel a stranger here though. Britain is like a second home, but Palestine is the first," he said.

Fuad said that he talks about Palestine to his daughters all the time and meets his friends to discuss news on a regular basis. He told me that his parents were not refugees as his father was a teacher who found work in schools in Amman. Fuad came to Britain in 1975 for work and has been here since. He has access to different media, including satellite television. He also regularly reads the Arabic-language papers, particularly al-Quds and al-Hayat. Interview was conducted in Arabic and English in a restaurant and lasted one hour. (London, March 16, 2002)

Reem: 45-year old Moslem Palestinian living in northwest London. Reem works full time as a music teacher and is married with no children. Reem calls herself a radio person as she does not care for television – she is the only one among the respondents who said she had made a conscious decision not to install a satellite dish because "most of the programmes are silly and lightweight programmes. *Al-Jazeera* is the other extreme…it is too intellectually presumptuous, and frames everything in terms of Islam or Palestine. It becomes a bit too much as it makes you conscious that you have to confirm that you are Moslem and Palestinian." Reem also criticised the mainstream news media and the British broadsheeds for their coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict." One of the biggest problems is that these media's correspondents cover the conflict from their cushy comfortable environments of their hotels in west Jerusalem and they do not see. They do not see the Palestinian side so their coverage is not objective in the first place already it is not objective." Reem was born in Kuwait to parents who left the former Palestine in 1948 following the war with Israel. She came to Britain in the 1980s to pursue her university education and has stayed her ever since. The interview was conducted at her home in a north London neighbourhood. It lasted two hours. The language was English and Arabic. (London, May 4, 2002)

Faras: 28-year old banker who has been living in London for two years. He was born in Nablus on the West Bank, but was brought up in Jordan where his parents had gone for work following the 1967 war. Faras lives in central London, but the interview, organised through the snowballing method, was conducted in a hotel lobby as he did not want me to go to his flat. Though he has access to satellite and thus a diversity of channels, Faras said he did not like the emotional reporting and what he called the lack of objectivity in

Arabic satellite reporting. He was also critical of mainstream news media, such as the BBC, but said he liked to read the Guardian and Independent newspapers because he liked their correspondent's work, particularly Robert Fisk's. Faras was conscious of what he was saying most of the time, and it was difficult to assess whether what he was saying was because he felt a sense of duty as a Palestinian to say he felt Palestinian. At the same time, it was difficult to assess how he really felt about being Palestinian in Britain as he was clearly worried about his work status. However, Faras began to feel more relaxed as the interview wore on, yet his talk of identity remained ambivalent and confused. However, his comments were a good example of how talk of identity is related to mediated experiences. "Until I left Jordan, I never thought about Palestine. Nobody asked me about this, but when I came here people (after watching the news) ask me about it and I feel that for us living here, I need to make a statement because I need to feel I belong, I cannot just forget about it. I am becoming more conscious of my identity whereas in Jordan everyone knows my father and there is no need to assert myself." (London, March 6, 2003)

Siham: Siham was born in Jerusalem in 1948. She left Palestine and went to Syria along with her parents after the war, then came to Britain in 1964 with her parents because of her father's work. She then went back to Syria to get married, but after having her children, her husband divorced her, and she came back to Britain in 1990. I met Siham in a restaurant in the early stages of the research – she was not keen to meet at her home - and at a time of intense turmoil particularly as it was two months after September 11. Though I used a tape recorder, I had to rely on my notes as it was difficult to transcribe

the interview because of the noise interference in the restaurant. Siham is a heavy news user and has access to a variety of news media. She, however, prefers newspapers because she enjoys reading the editorials. (London, November 29, 2001).

Salem: 82-year old Christian Palestinian living in Hertfordshire in Britain. Salem came to the UK in 1959 to work with the UN as director of statistics. He is married to an English lady, who speaks Arabic and they have two grown up children who live in Scotland. Salem is a good example of an economic diasporan as he came to the UK for work. Salem said he followed the news regularly. Though he has no access to satellite television, his children fax him copies of diverse news accounts they downloaded via the Internet. The interview with Salem – he actually called me and said he was interested in being interviewed – was the longest and least productive of the interviews I conducted. It lasted about five hours (we had lunch and tea as well) and it was obvious that Salem's mind was wondering as he spent a lot of time telling me about his work and achievements. (Hertfordshire, May 3, 2002)

Daoud: 55-year-old Moslem middle-class Palestinian. He lives in southwest London. Daoud did not want me to meet him at home, citing work commitments and lack of time, so we agreed to meet in a café in west London. Daoud also did not want me to use the tape recorder, and I agreed to take notes. He is married with two children, whom he said are not interested in news or the Palestinian-Israeli conflict at the moment, but they still ask him for stories about his life growing up in Palestine, which he left with his family as refugees and they went to Jordan. Daoud keeps up with what is going on by meeting

friends and discussing news with them. He said he had no time to watch television or read the papers as his work in a restaurant in London takes up all his time. The interview was conducted in Arabic. (London, December 16, 2001).

6.5 Group Interviews:

Group interview with five asylum seekers in London: Samir, Ali, Husam, Raed and Wael. These young men are all between 28-30 years old. Ali was born in 1974 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, to Palestinian parents who migrated from Palestine. He came to Britain in 2000 as an asylum seeker. Samir also born in 1974 in Jabaliya refugee camp in Gaza. He completed his studies for medicine in Russia and came to Britain as an asylum seeker in 2001 following the start of the second *intifada*. Husam was born in 1973 in Gaza. He came to the UK as an asylum seeker in 1999 because of financial circumstances. He works as a decorator in London. Raed was born in 1973, also in Gaza, but came to the UK in August 2001 as an asylum seeker. Wael was born in 1975 in Gaza and came to Britain in 2001 as an asylum seeker. He hopes to continue his medical studies in Britain. Samir, Ali, Raed and Wael are waiting to hear about their asylum status and cannot leave the country in the meantime. All but Husam have access to different media, including Arabic satellite channels. Husam said he preferred to get his news from his friends and from the Internet. All are heavy news users, which is not surprising judging from their situation as asylum seekers and also from the fact that they are recent arrivals in the UK.

I arranged this interview through the snowballing method, though it was Samir who made the first contact upon hearing from friends that I was conducting the research. All

five group members were very interested in the research's topic and all were confident that I was not going to mention their real names. The interview, which lasted for three hours, was held in a pub in central London as the five did not feel comfortable being interviewed in their homes. The interaction between the group members suggested this was more like a peer discussion as all group members were known to each other. The fact that we were discussing sensitive issues pertaining to the informants made for heated and interesting debates. All the informants understood and could speak in English, but they preferred to converse in Arabic, though they did use some English words every now and then. The group's members' personal experiences, as asylum seekers, influenced the ways in which they talked about themselves and the community as their sense of exclusion was palpable. (London, February 1, 2002)

Group interview in Manchester: This group consisted of Mahmoud (35), wife Suha (32) and children Lama (12), Ali (10) and Deema (5); their friend Omar (36), his cousin Bassam (33), friend Ibrahim (55) and son Mohammed (25). All participants said they were low to middle-class Moslem Palestinians. This interview was arranged by Bassam, who contacted me upon receipt of my letter detailing my research plans. The interview took place in an Arabic restaurant in a suburb of Manchester as none of the informants wanted to invite me to their homes since I was a complete stranger to all of them. Once we met and exchanged formalities and greetings, the group relaxed, and the conversation provided me with some of the richest material for the research.

Mahmoud was born in Gaza. He left his hometown 19 years ago to pursue his medical

qualifications in Ireland, then came to Britain in 1994 with his wife Suha, who was born

in Qatar. Suha teaches Arabic at her children's local school. Omar is also a doctor but is

not allowed to practice as the British medical establishment would not recognise his

medical qualifications obtained in the former Soviet Union. Omar said he came to Britain

from Kuwait following the 1991 Gulf War because it was the only country that would

give him a visa – many Palestinians in Kuwait had only travel documents. He works as a

delivery man. Bassam was born in Kuwait. He came to Britain in 1990 with his family,

but could not return to Kuwait because of the repercussions of the Gulf War. He works as

a builder in Manchester. Ibrahim was born in 1947 in the former Palestine. He left with

his parents as refugees following the 1948 war, ending in one of Amman's refugee

camps. Ibrahim then went to Kuwait to work as an English language teacher. He came to

Britain in the 1990s ostensibly to obtain a Masters degree, but in reality to escape Kuwait

whose government was hostile to Palestinians because of their support for Iraq during the

invasion of Kuwait. His son Mohammed works at a computer firm in Manchester.

Ibrahim's wife and daughters did not attend the interview. He said his wife was not well

enough to attend and his two daughters stayed at home to look after her. However, it was

clear that he did not want them to come because I was not known to them. Ali was born

in Libya in 1967 to Palestinian refugees and came to Britain in 1990 for work purposes.

Of the group, Ali has yet to acquire a British passport, classifying himself as an asylum

seeker. He now works in a restaurant and as an occasional taxi driver.

All the group members, apart from the children, were very keen to talk about

themselves and their community. Suha was given as much time to express herself and the

husband and wife interaction, her intellectual capabilities and her comfort in answering the questions suggested that allowing her to give her opinion was not only performed for my benefit. The interactions among the members of this group were interesting as though they are very close and tend to socialise together, they had differences in their expressed attitudes. For example, Ibrahim, the oldest, admonished his son for what he said his reluctance to socialise with his British co-workers, saying that he needed to do so because he lived in their country. At the end of the interview, which was conducted in Arabic and lasted three hours, I was invited to join them and about 20 other Palestinian friends for a meal at the restaurant, giving me the opportunity to interact with other women and children and listen to their talk though I did not record these conversations. (Manchester, March 5, 2002)

Group Interview in West London home with four well-to-do Moslem women in London comprising Lama, Ilham, Fadwa and Mona: This interview was arranged through the snowballing method and Lama invited me for afternoon tea at her house to meet her friends. None of the women's husbands or children was present. Ilham was born in Nablus in 1950. She came to Britain in 1979 after her marriage to a Pakistani national. She has two grown up children and is involved in human rights organizations. Lama is of the same age, though she was born in Amman to Palestinian parents who fled Jaffa in the former Palestine in 1948. She went to Saudi Arabia with her husband after she got married and then came to the UK in 1990 just before the Gulf War. She has two grown-up children. Fadwa was also born in Nablus in 1950. She came to Britain with her husband in 1972 as they could not work in Nablus following the 1967 war. She has three

grown up children. Mona was born in Damascus in 1949, where she stayed until she got

married when she moved to Jordan, where her children were born. Mona and her family

came to Britain in 1978 because of her husband's work. None of the four women works,

but they all said they are beginning to be involved in charity work to raise funds for the

Palestinians in the homeland. Lama and Mona said they take part in protests against

Israeli policies, something they would not do in the homeland and which reflects their

security and confidence about their status in Britain. The interview was conducted in

Arabic and lasted three hours. (London, April 10, 2002).

6.6   Analysing qualitative data: Coding and Theme Development

The core methodological tool used in this study was in-depth interviewing of individuals,

households and groups, of the same age group or of the same socio-economic and socio-

religious background. After getting acquainted with the informants – the interviews

always started with lengthy personal introductions by the informants and by me - I

conducted semi-structured interviews that focused on their decodings and their attitudes

to news, particularly to news of the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This ongoing

story provided an excellent context within which to explore the attitudes the informants

had to the different ways the event was narrated by diverse news media because it

allowed the respondents to develop their own narrative, particularly in relation to relevant

topics, such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and other related events.

As noted in the previous chapter, the approach I followed was to get involved in the

data, almost to the degree of immersion, before starting to code the information

thematically. Coding means assigning labels or tags to the inquiry, based on one's own concepts and condensing the data into analysable units (Coffey and Atkinson 1996), similar to the procedure advanced by the proponents of grounded theory. The analysis started early – mine started during the fieldwork- because this procedure allowed for constant comparisons between new data and existing ones. I stopped acquiring new data, meaning I stopped the interview process, when I found that the new data was repeating the old ones, this is often referred to as saturation point in qualitative research.

The coding was informed by the theoretical framework, which influenced the methodology, a synthesis of theory and empirical material which suited the open and exploratory nature of the research questions. The themes I developed were a result of a synthesis of a top-down (theoretical) and bottom-up (empirical) approach, or the combination of an inductive and deductive approach. The fact that some of the interviews were carried out in Arabic meant that it was not possible to use the support of computer packages for the analysis of qualitative data (such as Nud*ist and Atlas-Ti) as these do not recognise Arabic script and even though I translated the interviews, the sequencing of the answers to the questions posed did not entirely match the interview sequencing carried out in English.

The procedure I followed for coding was a simple but tedious one as I had to deal with a large amount of paper and different coloured highlighters. The coding framework for the analysis of the interviews used standard identification variables including the method of the research (interview, household or group interviews) and while taking into account the gender, age, occupation and religion of the informants concerned.

The thematic categories I developed can be broadly identified as themes of attitudes towards news, attitudes towards mainstream news media, attitudes towards transnational news media, themes of awareness of construction of news and ignorance of construction of news, critical readings of news content, ideological (dominant) readings of news, themes related to commuting to personal experiences; themes related to references to identity, references to community, references to belonging and themes related to attitude to host country and reference to empowerment. In the following two chapters, I turn to the specific themes that emerged in the interviews while trying to give voice to the informants.

Chapter Seven

News, Ritual and Mediation

The news media have been broadly understood as a precondition for the political,
economic and cultural participation of individuals at the local, national and transnational
or global levels. Thus, the impact of news on its audience has often been measured in
terms of the extent to which it interests people in politics and/or helps them make
decisions as '*informed*' (my emphasis) and reasoning citizens.

Drawing on semi-structured interviews with the informants, this chapter reflects how
they do not engage with news for its informational values alone — indeed, the news
narratives they engage with are often already known to them through other
communicative means and channels including, among others, mobile phones and new
communication technologies as well as face-to-face communication. Paradoxically, the
interview material shows that the informants place news in their daily lives, therefore
suggesting we need to pay particular attention to the social uses of news to address its
relevance and meanings in people's lives.

This chapter will show that the centrality of the news genre to the informants is
crucially related to its social uses, which take two interrelated forms; the first to organise
everyday life and societal interactions; and the second to frame the personal and the
political, providing a point or points of reference for the informants to interpret and/or
make sense of everyday events and for managing anxieties, discussed in the following
chapter, as well as for social action and interaction. In detailing these uses, I pay
particular attention to what the informants do with news, how they react to it and what

news means for their social action and interaction, in the process highlighting the tensions that come to the fore in their preferred and oppositional readings of news.

In focusing on the uses of news, I draw on the ritual or mediational approach to media (Carey 1989; Silverstone 1994; Rothenbuhler 1998) to support the theoretical direction proposed in this thesis suggesting that news can be addressed as cultural discourse which serves to link people in their intimate spaces in ritualistic and symbolic ways to the wider public spaces they inhabit while drawing attention to matters of concern. I start by drawing on the interview material to show the different ways in which the informants engage with news while highlighting the centrality of news and its social uses. I then outline the diverse news media the informants engage with and what they do with the different narrations before exploring how and whether their engagement with news media enables them to take part in societal dialogues and/or to challenge different news frames and representations, actions that suggest that people, too, take part in the overall mediation processes either by legitimising the 'meanings' and/or 'frames' in news or by challenging these frames.

7.1 Centrality of News – Instrumental Uses

In most of the interviews conducted for this research, news was singled out as the genre that calls for particular and extra attention by individuals and by the household as a unit. News, whether in print, on the radio or television has occupied centre stage in Palestinian and Arab societies in general and has often been called the most popular drama in these spaces. Of the different news media available to the informants, television was reported

to be the most popular and most heavily used. The Internet came second and print, in its

various forms, last[1].

When referring to television, the informants' accounts showed that their engagement

with television news usually takes place within specific social settings — television news

viewing is reported as a family affair[2], involving more than one member of the

household. Informants said engaging with news is more often than not lively and active,

often interspersed with comments from family members about the news account or about

characters in the narrative,[3] emotive responses to its content and form, and discussions

about its implications to the family's well being, to the larger society as a whole and to

international relations and politics.

What was interesting, however, was that the informants' accounts of their news

engagement practices suggested that the personal and the political were inseparable.

Everyone (those interviewed for this research who was considered or self-considered as a

member of the Palestinian diasporic community in Britain) was expected to engage with

news, underlining how this activity was perceived as a national or political duty. This

came across clearly in statements such as: "Did you see what has happened in Gaza?" or

"What do you think about today's news?" and so on.

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[1] I did not carry out a quantitative analysis or survey to analyse which medium the informants engage with most, but deduced the trends and the relevance of television news from the interview material.

[2] This comment must be qualified as the increase in the number of television sets in the home means that members of the family may be viewing different programmes at the same time. That said, however, the informants suggested that The focus on news is not surprising given the open-ended nature of the narrative of and related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict — the second *intifada* (uprising) that erupted in September 2000, the September 11, 2001 attacks in the US and the 2003 Iraq war and its aftermath — and the resulting uncertainty surrounding Palestinians' lives, including those outside their homes, in times of crises, members of the household tend to view news together.

[3] Although the methodology used for this research was semi-structured interviews, there were times when I was able to witness this process of active viewing during the fieldwork, particularly when visiting households where the television was mostly turned on.

Furthermore, the respondents' talk about news often refereed to reports or incidents

that people were presumed to have seen on television news broadcasts, listened to on the

radio or read in the newspapers. In fact, in many of the interviews I conducted, the

informants would switch roles with me, posing as interviewers and asking me to

comment on a news report they had engaged with on television the day before or on that

same day, reflecting how they assumed that I, also a Palestinian, must have engaged with

that same narrative. The implications of these patterns of consumption for questions of

belonging, for being part of 'us', and for boundary-mapping, are assessed in the

following chapter, but what is relevant to note here is that engagement with news is

inscribed as a key activity in the informants' everyday lives. This comes across in the

following excerpt during the interview with the Muhsen household interview in London:

> Widad: Osama (my son) and I sit every morning drinking coffee and I ask him what
> he thinks of what had happened yesterday and so on.
> Judith (daughter): We talk about it and get upset.
> Widad: I have a sister in Palestine and I call her day after day and I speak to other
> members of the family in Lebanon to discuss what is going.
> Judith: To tell you the truth, there is a lot happening and going on. There is a lot to
> talk and argue about.

The centrality of news in the respondents' everyday lives and social interactions

manifested itself in different ways. Most of those interviewed for this study said they

engage with news stories on a daily basis, while many said they turn to news programmes

(news bulletins and current affairs programmes) more than once a day. In several

households I visited to conduct the interviews, the television was on all the time, either

switched on to *al-Jazeera*, the news and current affairs satellite broadcasting station

based in Qatar, to CNN or BBC 24.[4] The Farah household is typical of this state of

affairs. Here, Leila, a retired secretary in her early 60s, and her 90-year-old mother

constantly switch from one channel to another, highlighting the centrality of news in their

daily lives. The family has no access to satellite television[5] and hence does not receive

Arabic satellite television. Instead, they watch CNN, Sky News and BBC News 24 on a

continuous basis. Leila's brother, who lives with his family nearby, has access to satellite

television and calls his family everyday to tell his sister and mother what has been

reported on these channels. In addition, Leila daily buys the London-published Arabic

daily *al-Quds* for her mother to read:

> You will be surprised by how important news is to us. We have news on all the time.
> My mother reads al-Quds everyday. We have Dubai, the only Arabic channel we can
> access here, but we watch CNN and BBC 24 all the time.

7.2 News as Ritual

Most respondents described in detail their news consumption practices: how this usually

started early in the day, what they were doing and how this activity shaped their social

agenda for the rest of the day. In this respect, engaging with news was often reported as

the first activity or *ritual* (my emphasis) that individuals or the family as a unit partake in.

In the Mansour household, this 'ritual' comes into stark relief in the family members'

accounts of their daily routines. For example, husband and wife Ali's and Nuha's daily

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[4] The nature of the methodology did not allow me to ascertain how many television news channels the
respondents have access to, but the interview guide meant that informants needed to provide information
about the different media they use during the interviews.
[5] The Farahs said that building regulations in their apartment block prohibited them from installing a
satellite dish on their balcony.

schedule begins in the morning when they turn on BBC Radio Four to listen to the *Today*

programme. They also read the paper and turn on the television to see what is going on.

The news channels they watch regularly include BBC 24, CNN and *al-Jazeera*, which

Nuha likes more than her husband, a retired businessman who remains active in Arab

associations in London and is a member of CAABU[6]. They have one daughter Nada, 19,

who attends university in London, and who by her own admission does not engage with

news first-hand, but yet is also engaged with news in proxy through her parents'

discussions of news. Nuha, also an active member in several Arab associations in Britain,

describes here their daily schedule as revolving around different news media:

> In the morning, at breakfast, Ali and I read the Arabic papers, like *al-Quds* and *al-Hayat*. We do not buy *Ash-Sharq al-Awsat* because it is sponsored by Saudi Arabia. Sometimes *al-Hayat* is not so good (about the Palestinians). But *al-Quds* we read everyday. Ali also reads the Financial Times, the Guardian and the Independent. I also watch all Arabic channels, everything...and the English (BBC) channels. I view them all. And, of course, I watch the news on *al-Jazeera* [...] I also have Syrian and Egyptian television channels, which I watch sometimes. There is nothing wrong with them, but when it comes to news, it (is) clear that they are government mouthpieces (sic), so I like *al-Jazeera*.

Such comments, and similar ones made by other respondents, confirm that engagement

with news is not related to its informational values, but rather to its place as ritual in their

everyday lives. This further emerges in the following comment by Jamil, a retired

Christian businessman, who has access to hundreds of terrestrial and satellite channels, of

which 15 are in Arabic:

> I have all these channels for me and my wife, who wants to access the French language ones. Of course, I have no time in the day to see all of them, but I spend 45 minutes of the morning switching channels to see what is happening in Palestine and

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[6] The London-based Council for Advancement of Arab British Understanding.

also in the world as anything in the world impacts 'our' area. Recently, I have begun to watch ANN (Arab News Network) as it gives more analysis. I receive *al-Quds* every day, but I also read the Guardian, the Economist and Newsweek on a regular basis. Then there is the e-mail and websites, which I use to access the Israeli press, like *Ha'aretz* — we need to know what they are saying — and other papers in the Arab world. I do not watch the BBC anymore unless they have some programme about Islam or Palestine. And, if I am not at home for these, I sometimes record them.

Other informants tell similar stories, though the patterns of engagement with news differ as these are dictated by various duties and routines, by work schedules and variations in their lifestyles. Maha, a mother of a two-year-old boy and a six-month old baby, says her news viewing patterns changed since having the children. Rather than starting this ritual in the morning, her consumption of news is her last activity before going to bed. During the day, Maha keeps the television turned to *al-Jazeera* or the Lebanese Hezbollah-backed channel *al-Manar* "so the kids can get to know Arabic" and "so I do not miss out on anything" in between attending to her children. She has no time to read the papers or use the Internet, but keeps informed of developments in the Palestinian territories by her husband, who daily scans the different news websites, both in Arabic and English, to find out what is going on. Depending on her time, she either switches on the radio to listen to Spectrum, an Arabic radio station, or to *Newsnight* on BBC Two because of its analytical content:

> *Newsnight* is very important for me. I like (the presenter Jeremy) Paxman a lot. He is aggressive, but he brings different viewpoints. BBC 24 I like, too, because they have news on all the time and sometimes I turn to it [...]. I feel I have more opportunities to engage with news because there are a lot of news programmes and different forms of information, irrespective of whether I agree or disagree with their viewpoint. *Panorama* is good, for instance, because it gives me different angles on the news.

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Across the board, respondents talked of how news was a background in their daily routines and schedules — some talked of how they listen to news bulletins on the radio while having breakfast or watched television news while having lunch or dinner. This confirms findings in similar studies that have shown that the use of media is not always carried out in isolation. For example, some informants said they listened to or watched news and current affairs programmes throughout the day, though this was dependent on the workload and other activities, attesting to the centrality and urgency of engaging with news as ritual that punctuates their activities. This is clear in the excerpt from the interview with the Muhsen household:

Bilal: It depends on whether we have time.
Khaled: And the timing.
Sami: Well for me, I use the Internet.
Widad: I watch the news on *al-Jazeera* and *al-Manar*.
Judith: Yeah...all day if we can.
Bilal: It also depends on who is at home really.
Widad: I like *al-Jazeera* because it (sic) is all news.

Interestingly, the key differences in respondents' accounts of their daily news engagement routine were mostly related to the medium of news consumption rather than the action of engaging with news itself. For instance, some of the informants said they turn to the Internet to follow the news when they have no time to watch television news to keep informed and be aware of the diverse representations in the media. This is an excerpt from a group interview with a group of asylum seekers in London. All members were males in their late 20s:

Samir: Well, we use the Internet a lot.

Ibrahim: yeah, the Internet. It is very important in our lives because we can also read the different papers there. Besides, it is free access.

Many informants attributed their engagement with news to their need to 'keep up with reality', therefore clearly identifying news with reality. However, given the ubiquity of the news media in the informants' lives and the extent to which they are embedded in their daily practices, their need to engage with news is also related to its function as a regulator of their daily activities, pointing to the ways in which engagement with news punctuates daily life and the ways in which news provides its audiences with an almost paradoxical reassurance through ritual.

Silverstone (1994) has described this ritual as momentary suspensions of the ordinariness of everyday life, thus marking a special space and time. Like Carey (1989), he has stressed that even though rituals suspend the ordinary aspects of everyday life, rituals are *about* this ordinariness. Therefore, rituals are not detached from everyday life, but are a continuing reflection of one's place and position in it. Jensen (1995) describes this momentary suspension as "time-out [...] a separate social practice...[that] places reality on an explicit agenda as an object of reflexivity, and provides an occasion for contemplating oneself in a social, existential, or religious perspective" (1995:57). Crucial to Silverstone's and Jensen's discussions about the ritual role of mass media is that rituals and time-outs depend on establishing an attentive relationship between the text and the reader, which suggests that "the essential feature of rituals (unlike formal ideology) is that they are available to personal appropriation" (Couldry 2003:53).

Across the board, the informants' appropriation of news as ritual comes across as a form of ritualised action that is intentional, performed, created, recreated and charged

with a particular social meaning for the particular social group, or as Rothenbuhler (1998: 64) says: "Ritual becomes a communication device for uniting the ideal and the material, the general and the particular, the cosmic and the ordinary, the past and the future, the structures of history and the happenings of individual lives." Crucially, this appropriation relates to the informants' social uses of news, which I elaborate on next.

7.3 Social Uses of News

The interview material reflects how the respondents' engagement with news, particularly television news, with family members and friends symbolically integrates each member into the family as a social unit, re-confirming each member's place and position in it. These findings correspond with Lull's (1980) comprehensive framework on the family uses of television in which he identified these uses as 'structural', which refer to the ways in which television news serves to regulate, structure and accompany other activities, and as 'relational', which designate television as a medium of exchange for interaction within the households.[7]

Morley (1992), too, has emphasised the domestic nature of television, suggesting that viewing is still largely conducted within, rather than outside, social relations (except in the case of those who live on their own). The premise here is that viewing performed collectively by the family/household, rather than the individual, raises important questions about relations of power, particularly in addressing who makes the decisions about watching and how these decisions are taken, and so on (cf. Morley 1992).

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[7] In his framework, each category had a number of subcategories. For example, under structural uses, he distinguished between environmental and regulative uses (Lull 1980).

In my sample, it was clear that the social uses of news served to integrate members of the family into the unit and to re-confirm each member's place and position in it. This was reflected in the ways in which parents reiterated how they always encouraged their children to partake in the family viewing of news.

What was interesting, however, was that for most of the informants, engagement with news did not appear to a gendered[8] activity — both men and women engage with news ritualistically and discuss the narratives with family members and friends. This may be partly explained by the fact that the interviews were conducted during a period of heightened political and national anxiety. However, there are more compelling reasons to explain this — the analysis of the interviews shows that most of the women interviewed are motivated to engage with news because it enables them to take part in conversations about its meanings or to show they are news competent, thus playing an important part in their socialisation processes.

That said, gender and generational differences were more noticeable among working class families when compared to middle and upper middle class families. In the former groups, women normally turn to the head of the household for interpretations of news, reflecting embedded social and cultural norms. Maha, for example, always asks her husband for his analysis of the news because he is "better (sic) at analysing news. He really knows what is going on and is always right in his predictions…Look, he even said Iraq was the next target." These patterns confirm other findings on gendered media consumption (see Morley 1986), while underlining the relational uses of television (cf.

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[8] Though I tried to vary the sample in terms of age groups, it was difficult to interview children in their early teens, either because they were not available at the time as they were at school or because they were not considered to be mature enough by their parents to take part in the interviews.

Lull 1980), particularly as an occasion to demonstrate competence or dominance in relation to other members of the household, either through knowledge or argument.

This understanding comes across in different guises in the various interviews. In the Said household, for example, Hussein, the father has the role of interpreter and commentator on the news. He decides which channels to watch and how often, and operates the remote control and usually switches between channels to access the different 'versions', in his words, of the news report. Hussein also chooses in which language news is watched, and comments on the news programmes to his family. This pattern was also reported as being the norm in other households.

However, the analysis of the interview material also reflects that traditional power relations in families are increasingly being challenged (by women and children), though not severely contested. For instance, in the same household mentioned above, Hussein's wife Amani openly complains about his constant habit of switching channels, saying she worries about the effect of this activity on her children as the ways her children are subjected from a very early age to images of blood and violence, particularly those shown on Arabic satellite channels. Her nine-year-old son Qusai, too, says he is fed up with news and prefers to watch cartoons in English.[9] This is how she puts this concern:

> My husband wants to tell them they are Palestinian. He wants to show them that children like themselves are killed because they are Palestinian, but I am worried about this. There is so much blood and violence. They are scared, scared. Qusai has now vowed he will never go to Palestine, and that he will never go on a plane[10]

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[9] As would be expected, the interview material with other families and children confirmed that news and current affairs programmes are not popular with children.
[10] This is a reference to the September 11 events.

In many households I visited for the interviews, the television set, which often occupies a prime position in the household was often switched on to a news programme — BBC News 24, CNN or an Arabic satellite channel. Often, informants would interrupt the interview during the news bulletins or when they saw a news flash across the screen to find out what was going on. Children who happened to be at home at the time were asked to sit still and partake in the experience, reflecting how the notion of ritualised use of news is also about getting to know one's place in society. This was confirmed in statements such as *'we need them to know what is happening in our homeland'*, to understand the *'suffering of our Palestinian brothers and sister'*, thus underlining that becoming 'news competent' is seen as a crucial marker for belonging and for becoming Palestinian (cf. Gillespie 1995) that some parents believe their children must be aware of at a young age.

What was interesting, though, was that those who said they did not follow news regularly, such as 19-year-old Ruba in the Mansour household, were still well informed on current affairs and news, particularly news related to the collective or the Palestinian-Israeli conflict suggesting the continued relevance of informational networks and interpersonal communications – the constant talk about news in households and among friends, an age-old cultural practice that is an embedded feature of Palestinian and Arab societies.

7.4 Obsession or Detachment? The Paradox of News' Uses

The analysis of the interview material showed that the pattern and intensity of interacting with news changes according to what is going on and the severity and urgency of events, thus dictating to some extent the ways in which news was put to social use and drawing attention to the relevance of the political and historical context in the analysis. Many respondents said their investment in news intensified since the second Palestinian *intifada* (uprising), reflecting how the urgency and immediacy of this event influenced their news engagement patterns and experiences. This emerges in the following comment by Sasha, a 24-year-old Palestinian in London:

> When we first came here, we didn't know much about what was going on...but we began to be really involved (with news) with the second *intifada*.

Such remarks were repeated by others. This is an exchange between Husam, an asylum seeker, and his friend Raed in the group interview in London:

> Husam: It was not the same before the *intifada*. But this event influenced my life a lot as my *life became the news* (my emphasis) and the other way round. Even my daughter, who is three and wants to watch the cartoons, I bribe with a chocolate to be quiet. Now she says my father only watches news, so that the word news has become part of her dictionary although she does not understand what it means.
> Raed: Yeah. After the *intifada*, I installed a satellite (dish) because I needed to see all news broadcasts...Now I have Arabic and American and English news and programmes, also Polish and Russian[11] ones.

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[11] Raed studied for his first degree in Russia, as has Husam.

Across the board, there was a sense that this event and subsequent 'unplanned' media events (cf. Dayan and Katz 1992; Srebreny 2002), such as the September 11, 2001 attacks in the US and the war in Iraq, had turned into obtrusive dimensions of the respondents' daily news agenda. The following extract from the group interview with family members and their friends in Manchester illustrates this:

> Mahmoud: On a daily basis, I see my friend Mohammed and ask him how are you and have you heard the news. There was an operation in Jerusalem the other day and I called someone immediately on the mobile because I was in the car. I asked him to see what *al-Jazeera* was reporting. My first question to my friends is 'how are you?' and the next is about news. It is because we are part of the Palestinian community.

This comment suggests that engaging with news is considered to be an activity that every Palestinian or every member of the Palestinian community must partake in.

Furthermore, in talking about news, many respondents said their engagement with news was like an addiction or obsession, emphasising that they felt something was missing if they did not interact with news programmes at least once a day. The notion of addiction suggests an intermittent, but consistent form of engagement with news. *"If I do not listen to the news or see what is going in the world, I feel there is something missing, particularly what is happening in our homeland"* was a comment repeated again and again. Another was: *"If I do not engage with news, then I feel cut off from the others, the rest of the world" (my emphasis)*. This is how Raed (one of the asylum seekers in the London group interview) puts it:

> Raed: I have been here for 10 months and in that time I have become addicted to news. When I came here, I found that I needed to watch the news every hour of the day, just like back home, so I use the Internet to access different news websites. First I go to *al-Jazeera's* website, then to BBC Arabic, then BBC 24, then CNN. This is my routine.

Others said the television was turned on all the time[12], while some told of how they would sit in front of their television sets for hours on end, following the news of and related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, minute by minute, while switching channels from one news station to the next. Um Ali, a widow in her 60s, describes her addiction to news:

> I am obsessed with news. The television is on all the time. If there is something important on the news, then I turn up the volume. Otherwise, I turn it down while doing the housework. If I am out of the house, or if I have visitors, I record the news on *al-Jazeera*. I record everything. Even though things have happened, I still watch the news when I get back home. I do not go out of the house often. Do you believe this? I have to watch the news. I have a friend who is like me. She always follows the news and always calls me when something happens. Also, she would turn on *al-Jazeera* if I am watching another channel and then we compare news. Sometimes, she tells me there is a news alert and that I need to see it. I telephone my friends and children and tell them to turn on the television to watch this and that. I give them the news broadcast and tell them what they had missed. For instance, on September 11, I was returning home on the bus and then I saw all these people and thought why is this happening. When I arrived home, I turned on the radio. I had the television on as well, but was about to start my afternoon prayers. I was waiting for the *muazzin* to announce the call for prayers and then my daughter called from Washington to say 'mama, see what is happening.

Um Ali's news consumption practices also dictate her daily routine, while her appropriation of this ritual is reflected in her participation in social activities because it provides her with a point of entry to engage in social talk, confirming the connection

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[12] This was true in some of the households I visited, particularly those of the lower income groups.

between the ritual activity of engaging with news and its social uses – here, news facilitates communication and provides an agenda for conversations.

Not surprisingly, the interview material showed that the informants were more interested in those news narratives they can relate to or run away with (Bird 2003). Time and again, respondents referred to the centrality in their lives of the news story related to the conflict with Israel, while the analysis of the interview material showed that the obsession with news intensified during 'critical' events such as the *intifada* because such events create a degree of uncertainty in the respondents' lives[13], again pointing to the paradoxical notion of reassurance provided by news mentioned above. That said, many respondents said *all news* was relevant. '*The news is connected*' (my emphasis) was a recurring comment.

Paradoxically, a number of informants, including some of those who said they were addicted to news, also said that they could not watch the news any longer, a clear reference to visual (television) news. Omar, for instance, said: "There is a suicide bombing and you know…you just know what Israel is going to do next…what is the point?" of engaging with news, suggesting a sense of powerlessness and lack of control while pointing to the paradox between the informants' actual news viewing practices and the emotional contexts of the mediation process. The following excerpt during a group interview with four women in London illustrates this:

> Fadwa: I have got to the stage where I am not willing to watch the news any more. I get up with all the discussions and debates. I got to the stage where I really do not want to (watch) news anymore. I have come to the stage of despair, really. I prefer not to know what is going on because it makes me very miserable and depressed.

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[13] These points are expanded on in Chapter Eight.

> Mona: I am, too, fed up with watching news all over again...Sometimes, I prefer not to watch the news. The news from our country is so horrific and horrendous that we cannot endure to see what is going on any more. We have come to the point where there is so much despair that I don't want to watch or hear anything... Really, I prefer not to because it causes me misery, misery. I cry my eyes out.

However, some of the younger adult informants (between 15 to 30 years old) said they do not engage with news because of a lack of trust in journalism and the media, reflecting a critical stance of news as *form and content* rather than of news as information, which make it crucial to investigate what people say and what they do with news, or, how they use news.

The critical stance of the informants is apparent in the following comment by Adeeb, a 22-year-old university student, interviewed along with his friend Maher and Maher's mother Ahlam at their home in London:

> I do follow the news. But I have completely gone off at the moment. I find it honestly...just satirical (sic) and boring. They (the news media) are just going on and on about the same thing and it is really making you sick...I watch all channels, *al-Jazeera* included, but honestly, the way I see it is that they (al-Jazeera) are doing exactly the same thing as the others. They are just trying to influence people.

Two crucial points need to be made in relation to these aspects of the informants' news engagement practices, the first suggests that although the informants see themselves as part of a collective, they are a diverse news audience; and the second suggests that detaching oneself from news depends on both *contextual knowledge and on the degree of trust* towards the journalists and the media.

Importantly, as the informants' comments suggest, detachment or switching off can be understood as related to their awareness of the ideological *framing* of political events by

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diverse news media, including transnational Arabic television channels, which I turn to in the following section.

7.5 Which News Media?

The media landscape available to the Palestinians in Britain is one of the richest in the Palestinian diaspora, comprising a variety of print and broadcast channels with different orientations and claims on their audiences, thus providing a compelling and complex context for the audience's interaction with news. Indeed, since the beginning of the Lebanese[14] Civil War in 1976, London, in particular, has served as an unparalleled centre of Arabic-language media.

The Arabic print media, for example, includes a number of daily newspapers, printed in Arabic in London comprising, among other publications, *al-Quds, ash-Sharq al-Awsat, al-Hayat,* all of which carry a great deal of news and commentary about events from Palestine and the Arab world. *Al-Quds*, in particular, addresses the dispersed Palestinian diaspora not as a diaspora[15], but as members of a larger Palestinian nation (*ash-Sha'b al-Falastini*). Although respondents commended its pro-Palestinian stance, few buy the paper on a daily basis, citing its cost and the lack of wide distribution, resorting, instead, to reading its editorials[16] and news sections online.

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[14] Before that date Lebanon was the home for a variety of Arabic-language media, both official and oppositional.

[15] See Chapter Four for a discussion about the ethical and political problems surrounding the use of the term diaspora to describe the Palestinians in Britain.

[16] Many respondents mentioned the paper's editor Abdul-Bari Atwan as being instrumental in promoting the paper's pro-Palestinian stance and integrity.

Apart from *al-Quds*, the print media available to the Palestinians and Arabs are highly institutionalised. This is reflected in the editorial stance of the mainstream[17] Arab media, which often mirrors what their financiers want to be said. This is not an anomaly as Arab information media systems have always been closely tied to politics and have typically been monopolised by the various Arab regimes, which have controlled the Arab media systems either directly or indirectly through licensing, legal action and financial means.

The development of transnational Arabic satellite television, from and within the Middle East, began in the 1990s, a decade which started traumatically with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the deeply divisive 1991 Gulf war (Saqr 2000). The first entrants to the field were the Middle East Broadcasting Centre (MBC) and the state-owned Egyptian Space Channel (ESC), though the former differed from the latter in that it officially described itself as a privately-owned channel[18].

Interest in Arab broadcasting was spurred by a desire to counter CNN's domination at the time of Arab audiences because of its live coverage from Baghdad during the 1991 Gulf War. But it was not until 1996, when the Qatar-based *al-Jazeera* began broadcasting to the Arab world and beyond that the changing media landscape began to have an impact on the Arabs in their homeland and in diaspora. Often dubbed the CNN of the Arab world, *al-Jazeera*[19] has been widely credited with redefining Arab broadcasting. With its blend of programmes and its emphasis on giving air time to critical voices in the region, *al-Jazeera* has been hugely popular with Arab audiences long before it gained 'world

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[17] The differentiation between mainstream and oppositional media, of which there are several, is intentional.

[18] In reality, some start-up funds were provided by the Saudi ruling family via the brother-in-law of the Saudi ruler, King Fahd.

[19] *Al-Jazeera* emerged as a 24-hour channel broadcasting in classical Arabic, the language understood by everyone in the Arab world as well as by diasporic Arabs. It was founded following the collapse of the partnership between the BBC TB Arabic service and the Saudi government over conflict views on content.

fame' following the September 11, 2001, attacks in the US through its exclusive footage of video tapes of Osama bin Laden (Miladi 2003).

Most of the respondents in this research study said they have access to satellite television. The few who did not have access to satellite television said this was either out of choice, such as Reem, a 45-year-old Christian Palestinian in London who said she preferred mainstream (Western) media or because of building restrictions that prevent them from installing a satellite dish – such is the case of the Farah household. Most respondents had access to a wide range of Arab transnational broadcasting stations, including *al-Jazeera,* Dubai, *al-Manar*, MBC, ANN[20], whose programmes have changed the ways viewers receive news of their region in their own homes.[21] As Saqr (2000, 2005) points out, these channels are popular because of their introduction of interactivity. Contrary to popular perceptions, *al-Jazeera* was not the first the use interactivity – MBC had already set precedents on both counts, radically changing traditional newscasts which had relied on very long items dealing with news about leaders or short items dealing with regional and international developments. However, *al-Jazeera's* key contribution to the regional and transnational media landscape was its staging of debates[22] and current affairs programmes guaranteed to stir controversy. Programmes such as *The Opposite Direction* and *More Than One View,* for instance, have achieved high ratings because they open the floor for free debate about some of the most sensitive issues in the Arab world, including

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[20] Arab News network, devoted to news and current affairs, was set up in London in mid-1997 by a disaffected branch of Syria's ruling family.
[21] Although many Arab national channels are also broadcast on Arab satellite channels, these are not as popular as transnational television because their agenda is still seen as mirroring government agendas and earning them the nickname of 'protocol news' channels.
[22] The presenters of these programmes invited guests with opposed views to confront each other over acrimonious inter-Arab disputes (see Saqr 2005).

the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, gender equality and democracy both in the region and beyond.

7.6 Instrumental Uses of News

The interview material showed that the most popular programmes on Arabic satellite channels[23] were news and current affairs programmes concerned with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Respondents, in particular, mentioned *al-Jazeera's* hour-long programme *Under Siege*[24], introduced to allow Palestinian callers to talk about their experiences of Israeli attacks on the West Bank towns and refugee camps in April 2002 as well as al-Manar's *Palestine Resists, Palestine is Steadfast* and *They Remember (Yatathakaroun)*, a programme that allows ordinary Palestinians to tell their stories. Many of the respondents' accounts suggested they used these channels for instrumental purposes which come across in comments such as '*we need to find out about what we heard is going on at home*', or '*news, particularly satellite television's, helps transport us there*'. The references to space and its implied connection to the homeland are clear in the following exchange in a group interview in Manchester:

> Omar: To be frank, the access to these satellite channels and their news programmes, whether cultural or otherwise, really relieve the tediousness of exile and they help us to be patient about staying here. Without them life would have been very difficult. These satellites have solved a big problem.

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[23] Many Moslem respondents said they also engaged with satellite channels that broadcast religious and traditional content, such as *Iqra', al-Majd or al-Manar*, which broadcast mostly Islamic religious programming such as interpretations of the *Quran* or the *Hadith* (Prophet Mohammed's sayings and teachings).

[24] This was later renamed as the *al-Jazeera Pulpit*, under the slogan the platform for those without a platform because as attention shifted to Iraq.

Suha: For me, too, of course. They always make us feel we are close to the homeland. Also, they influence the home and our feelings, whether we are sad or happy, we are connected to these feelings and we feel that we have gone out of the inside (the homeland) without really meaning to.

As Jensen (1998) notes, the space dimension is both a mental and a socially constructed space, bounded by absolute, geographical distance, but also by an 'experienced' spatial and temporal distance from events, as noted in Suha's comments above. Importantly, the dimension of space is also implicitly linked to a dimension of time, stretching far back into the past as well as into the future. This notion comes across in comments such as '*the homeland we want to live in*', which signals the respondents' hopes for a future that has not yet been realised. In commenting on their channel preferences, *al-Manar*[25], the Hezbollah-backed station broadcasting from south Lebanon, scored high on the list of transnational broadcasting channels that the respondents said was supportive of the Palestinians because, according to some of the informants, it consistently put the Palestinian-Israeli conflict at the top of its news agenda. Some respondents, for example, noted that *al-Manar* would start a news broadcast with the statement: "This is the news at nine o'clock, according to the time in occupied Jerusalem."

Many respondents also said they prefer Arabic satellite television channels during heightened political uncertainty, a preference that points to the respondents' awareness that these television news programmes, through their choice of language and

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[25] The Lebanese Hezbollah group, backed by the governments of Syria and Iran, was founded to resist the Israeli occupation of Lebanon in 1992. In 2000, *Hezbollah* applied for permission to broadcast by satellite to 'spread resistance news' across the Arab world and beyond. *Al-Manar* increased its daily satellite transmission following the Palestinian *intifada* in September 2000 from four to 18 hours. Far from adhering to neutrality and objectivity, *al-Manar* was seen as a weapon of psychological warfare against Israel.

representations, provide different foci for discussion than their Western counterparts. The

following exchange in the Muhsen household illustrates this:

> Khaled: In general, the problem with the (Western) media is the words they use.
> For instance, why do they have always to say 'violence in the Occupied
> Territories', making people think that people there are out on the street and not
> about the causes? At the end of the day, they dictate the terms of reporting in a
> way *al-Jazeera*, for instance, does not. One has to remember that having an
> alternative source of information is still very important.
> Widad: Yeah, they *(al-Jazeera)* use the term freedom fighters when referring to
> the Palestinians.

Having said that, the interview material also reflected how the preferred medium for

engagement with news is also dictated by the attachment, often greater among members

of the older generation, to Arabic language media. Indeed, being proficient and

conversant in a language (some of the informants are more fluent in Arabic than in

English) often dictates which news media they engage with. However, that does not mean

the older generation only engages with the Arabic language news story. Indeed, some of

the older informants, who have been in Britain for more than two decades, said they felt

equally comfortable with mainstream channels, often narrating their experiences with the

BBC, in particular, with a sense of nostalgia.

7.7 The Critical News Audience

The aspects of the respondents' news consumption practices reported above are just one

part of their daily engagement processes. Indeed, the interview material shows that the

informants are also highly critical of the news, in respect to both its form and style. Most

of the criticism against the form (content) of reporting of, in particular, mainstream

(Western) news suggested that the informants were aware of the framing in news. This is

how Omar puts this across:

> There is something about the media in this country. It is very, very worrying.
> They are all really from an English point of view. If you were to watch on any
> given day, all, the BBC, ITV, Channel Four, Sky and Channel Five, you could
> almost guarantee that you will see the same, almost exactly the same. It is almost
> the pinnacle (sic) of propaganda because you ostensibly have this free, freedom of
> the press, but how it is how they are reporting the same news every night, exactly
> in the same order and exactly the same time. Obviously, the media are controlled
> by a few people. I would not say they are positively biased towards Israel. What I
> would say is that they probably on purpose leave out large sections of the news.
> They would tend to say five Palestinians were killed today…whereas, if they
> wanted to, they could show graphic pictures of those killed. Very, very powerful
> images that would be very damaging to Israel and they don't show them. They
> definitely show the Israeli images, definitely.

Reem, a 45-year-old Christian Palestinian woman in London, comments on the same

issue:

> It is *brainwashing*. People have no idea what is going on. They only know what
> they see…and being an Arab, I know more than what I see on TV, so I am not
> going to be affected by it. It does not take a genius to figure out that one side has
> the most powerful country backing it financially and with artillery and everything
> and then you have the other side, it doesn't have anything. It is using stones. So,
> come on.

Such comments reflect criticism of the ideological and informational content of news

which the informants clearly see as mis-representing what they perceive as reality.

Crucially, as suggested in the comments, these criticisms also reflect how the informants

essentialise themselves – a key process in identity work which I discuss further in the following chapter. However, what is interesting about such criticism is that it not only reflects expectations that television news should be supportive of 'our' side and 'our' story, but also that the informants believe that the *Western news media do have effects on the wider public through their ideological framing.*. Paradoxically, many informants said they constantly switched to British public service news programmes such as *Newsnight* on BBC Two, citing its credibility and depth of analysis. This is how Mona puts this across:

> I like *Newsnight* particularly when they (sic) have discussions about us and about Palestine. Two weeks ago, they had something about the US foreign policy and they had a lot of discussions about this. Someone came up from the ethnic minority here and she really lifted our heads. Of the satellites, I watch CNN because I want to find out what they are saying. I do not have a favourite. BBC 24 of course is very important as they give you different viewpoints. The image is more important than the word. If the Israelis have been affected, then the news is first, but sometimes they do not even mention it.

At the same time, many respondents were critical of the ideological framing of Arabic transnational television channels, pointing to another paradox - although these media do provide them with a shared agenda for conversation and although they are aware of these media an oppositional public sphere for discussing different and shared concerns, the informants were also aware that these media also employed frames in the news as is illustrated in the exchange below in the Asfour household during an interview in London:

> Adeeb: I find Arabic television serious propaganda. It is exactly what the Americans do. The same as CNN.

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Ahlam: No *al-Jazeera* and *al-Manar* are different.

Adeeb: Obviously, I don't understand everything because my Arabic is limited. But honestly the way I see it is that they are doing the same thing, they are just trying to influence people.

These examples of ideological criticism contrast markedly with another type of criticism, which is aesthetic in nature and which is directed at the style or format of news. For example, some of the informants said that Arabic news was sensationalist (I pointed to this in the above sections when referring to paradoxical comments about news being no longer watchable which refer to format and style of news) and melodramatic – respondents were critical of the airing of bloody images of victims on both sides of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, particularly by Arabic satellite television.[26]

Other informants criticised the style of news presentation, which they said was populist and audience grabbing – though they said it was one of their favourite programmes, some respondents were critical of *al-Jazeera's* popular show *al-ittijah al-muakes (the Opposite Direction)*, saying it resembled a live shouting match between ideologically and politically opposed people.[27] Furthermore, several informants mentioned that Arab satellite broadcasting channels, though billing themselves as independent channels that

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[26] The use of television as a sensational medium of communication has been evident in extensive and repeated images of bloody conflict. The video film about the Palestinian teenager Mohammed al-Durra shot dead in his father's arms was sufficient to attract viewers' attention and inflame anti-Israeli sentiment. Other images of stone-throwing Palestinians facing heavily armed Israeli soldiers and tanks added a great deal of drama to the events in the West Bank and Gaza. Ayish (2001) says that the sensational component in Arab television news may be to attract viewers' attention to Israeli actions against civilians.

[27] Arguing in public is not uncommon in the Arab world, but the informants' sensibilities could be attributed to the awareness of living in a Western space.

are free of government control[28], operated as *umala* (government agents). This is how

Nadwa explains this concern:

> *Al-Jazeera*, I am afraid of. There is something inside me which tells me there is something behind it. See, for example, the political stance of Qatar, which supports it financially. People get carried away about this (the fact that it can say anything and allows different voices on air). At first, I used to watch it incessantly, but then I started to feel the programmes are made as a cover for something else.[29]

Some of the informants said that even *al-Jazeera's* introduction of a particular brand of

interactivity which made people more aware of public debates within and outside the

Arab world was not fully representative of its audience because officials from

disapproving Arab government constantly refused to take part in the debates[30].

What was interesting, however, was that it was only when they commented on Western

news media that the respondents offered indications of what news is or ought to be,

reflecting their awareness of the frames in the news news. In criticising the ideological

content of news, the informants were consistently redefining and reinterpreting the

narratives offered by journalists, suggesting that despite their insinuation that these

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[28] The exploration of Arab satellite broadcasting development and civil society and democracy in the Arab world is a topic of continuing interest and requires another thesis. However, as Rami Khouri, a prominent Jordanian columnist noted, the truth is that the face on the Arab screens has not changed, which means that the new Arab media are appendages to the ruling political and economic order in the region, not challenges to it. (*Jordan Times*, 27 November 2002).

[29] *Al-Jazeera's* relationship with Qatar's government has come under scrutiny, not only because it is funded by the government, but also because its Chairman Hamad bin Thamer al-Thani is a cousin of the country's ruler. Many have pointed to the fact that *al-Jazeera* rarely discusses the emirate's internal affairs, though some studies have pointed out that the station rarely covers the internal affairs of any Arab country.

[30] Sakr (2005) notes that the interest in particular Western formats confirms that the trend towards interactivity seems to be a dominant theme in the evolution of Arab satellite channels, but also poses the questions about whose interests it serves. Though interactivity shows a more balanced relationship between producers and viewers, her study reveals the reluctance of most broadcasters to allow their audiences to be freely and fully represented anywhere in all their schedules, and least of all in newscasts and talk shows.

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media, through their ideological framing, have an effect on people, the *overall effect societies is not direct (because they know what the reality is)*.

This reflects how they, as receivers of news, become participants in the mediation processes. Indeed, the interview material showed that the informants' interpretations of news are far from random — the informants approached news with an awareness of its diverse frames and representations of social, cultural and political realities and the potential power of the mediation processes. What is clear is that their reinterpretation of the news agenda relates to the degree of their awareness of the construction and framing of news, and their media competence and literacy[31], factors that are relevant to take account of in addressing the relationship between increasing mediated access or media literacy (Livingstone 2003) to political news and participation. This emerges in this exchange in a group interview in Manchester:

Suha: How the BBC and Channel Four tell the story is what people will follow. Hanan Ashrawi came many times and spoke to the BBC and she spoke well, but her words are forgotten and there is no trace of them in the minds of the West.
Ibrahim: Hanan is allowed on the BBC once a year, but the daily news is different. They bring Hanan and they bring Netanyahu and then they bring someone neutral.
Mohammed: But it is how much time they allow each.
Ibrahim: (interrupts) No, they are not fair.
Suha: Maybe they all are given equal times, but at the end of the broadcast, the presenter throws a couple of words which are the important ones and these remain in the minds of the people. These words are always the most important. Whatever you say, they have one sentence which gives an impression and ideas to the viewers.

The most common critique of the construction of news came across in comments that the Western media are hostile to 'us' and do not show 'our' side of the story. In this respect,

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[31] I use media competence to refer to contextual knowledge, while media literacy broadly refers to the ability to interpret media texts (see Livingstone 2003).

many informants criticised what they called the 'bias' in projecting images of certain

events and what they perceived as implicit and explicit references to Palestinians as

terrorists. These notions emerge in the following two comments, the first by Husam in a

group interview in London, and the second by Omar in a separate interview:

> The media is the problem. The (Western) news says that Arafat is part of a
> Palestinian mafia and that we (the Palestinians) are all members of this mafia. The
> effect is clear. Even if you are an Englishman and you engage with your news,
> you can realise that the American and European news is biased.

> Now they are saying we (the Palestinians) are terrorists. What we see on
> television (the Arabic channels) actually opens the question of where terrorism is,
> with us or with them (sic). They are our enemies or, as they claim, we are their
> enemies, but they are harming us in a way that we are not harming them. If we
> talk exclusively about Palestine....What has made the world feel with Israel or
> show sympathy to it? It's because they always show that image. We don't have
> that image. They (Western media) show that Arabs are always the problem. This
> is our problem. Our media is not the same as theirs. Our media has ignored certain
> things. The Europeans, the Americans and the Jews, the media there is stronger
> than ours. This is because they are with Israel. They always tell us the roots of the
> Arabs and also show things that may not apply to us or be within us.

Furthermore, many of the respondents criticised the language uses in news, objecting to

the use of terms such as 'Islamic terrorists' or 'Moslem fundamentalists' when discussing

the Middle East. Many respondents drew parallels with other conflicts, such as in

Northern Ireland, where the violence had been spared religious tarring, reported as a

conflict between 'loyalists' and 'nationalists'.

Such criticism of the perceived 'double standard' of Western policy can thus be

understood as their awareness that these meanings can be mediated through language.

Few respondents, however, linked their criticism of the news to real incidents involving

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themselves or other members of their group with the media, though some said that they had heard of incidents and of the experiences of others through the media. This confirms other research findings (for example Philo 1990 on the audience interpretations of the British miners' strike) that suggest it is difficult to distinguish between experience, irrespective of whether this is a personal experience or the experience of others close to them, and interpretation of news as people draw on the former in making sense of news. What this means is that the informants' critical readings of the news texts were not only a result of their membership in a self-defined collective, but also a result of tensions between the '*cultural*' frames in the news texts and their real or imagined experiences.

7.8 The News Audience, Mediation, Participation and Context

In order to place news within the framework of mediation proposed in this thesis, the focus in this last section will be on the instances when the appropriation of news as ritual (the ritualised use of news) translates into participation in or disengagement from public life. As Silverstone (in press) notes: "Mediation requires us to understand how processes of communication change the social and cultural environments that surround them…at the same time it requires a consideration of the social as in turn a mediator, institutions and technologies as well as the meanings that are delivered by them are mediated in the social processes of reception and consumption (Silverstone 2004: 17).

The analysis of the interview material shows that news engagement patterns cut across gender, generation and socio-economic divides. Some informants said they are fed up with news because nothing is going to change. Others, however, suggest that the advent

of Arabic satellite television provides them not only with the choice of viewing, but also with the incentive to be able to negotiate, and publicly criticise news narratives, therefore confirming that the news media can act as the mediators between public institutions and private or collective interests.

Indeed, some of the women interviewed for this research study, particularly those with grown-up children, said their access to diverse news since the second Palestinian *intifada* had spurred them to take part in protests criticising Israel's and the US's policies or in fund-raising events for the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. Furthermore, many respondents said it was because of the diverse news narratives that they had become more active in organising events, such as sit-ins and protests, as well as fund-raising campaigns to support the Palestinians in the homeland.[32] This quote by Maha captures this clearly:

> ...(engaging with diverse Arabic news) allows me to have the strength to discuss things with people out there (in the British public sphere). Watching the news and the different coverage of events has given me the strength to open a debate with the British and the others...it has given me permission for entry (into societal dialogue) and to show them the double standards of coverage.

What this comment and others suggest is that the availability of diverse news media can enable more active and public participation in diasporic and public debates, or what I call *arguing out*, which means moving concerns from the private to the public sphere. The following exchange (which I report in full) in the Asfour household illustrates this:

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[32] Many Palestinians who arrived in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s shied away from any involvement in political actions. Many older generation Palestinians tended to live on their memories, and had no wish to visit Israel despite the fact that they had British passports. It was as though, for them, the place had been frozen in 1948, like a photograph — an Arab country with Jews in it, not the other way round.

Ahlam: The minute I go out and meet people and foreigners, I make sure to tell them what is going on. If I am talking to Arabs, I try to make them participate in events. I feel the sense of injustice is too unbearable. If you don't do anything, you get totally depressed. The last two years, I have become very active. I find it not only therapeutic, but it is also everyone's duty to go out there and make people aware of what's happening because they really have to know. We can make more of a difference than all the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories put together.

Adeeb: I don't dispute that, but..

Ahlam: (interrupting) Look at other people, the Jews who are supported by all their people in diaspora.

Adeeb: I understand that.

Ahlam: I hate the apathy. People ask 'so what can we do'? It is here that we make all the difference, we have legal rights we have British citizenship and we can put pressure on the British government. People's opinion makes a difference. It makes a difference, yes...we are all reading papers and writing letters and articles and they have to take consideration of our opinion. We grew up in a culture that says someone like me (a woman) cannot make a difference. It is true that one opinion may be worth a zero, but here it is different...Every week, I write a letter in response to news story and eventually they (the people in power) will think we have these British Arabs and if they want our vote they will have to listen.

Adeeb: You are talking about something different. There is the Jewish lobby and there is nothing we can do to change that. I, for one, am not going to believe that by not buying a shirt from Marks and Spencer, I will make a difference.

Ahlam: You can vouch for yourself. I will cut off my hand before I do that. I believe in making a difference...This is a media war. The idea is not to get so disgusted with news so that you just go out and club. No, you do your bit, or even think about doing your bit and then get on with life.

The comments by Ahlam clearly reflect that her engagement with news media not only show how she feels enabled to argue out, but also how she in doing so she is exercising her rights as a citizen rather than just as a user or a consumer of news.[33] Such dimensions of engagement with news go beyond the intimate spaces to the public space and beyond the use of news for informational purposes, suggesting that mediated communication cannot be understood as a one-way transmission of information.

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[33] This resembles the arguments by Livingstone and Lunt (1992) in their work on talk shows in which they refer to the ways in which talk shows can become a cultural forum in which the viewer as citizen may participate in public debate.

Other respondents, particularly young adults and those born in Britain with no real experience of the journey to the diasporic space, made a clear link between their arguing out and the increased and continuous news coverage of critical events, such as the second *intifada,* which coincided with the proliferation of Arabic transnational satellite news media. However, while their participation in public life and politics was because of a sense of duty and commitment, as self-defined Palestinians, they also related this activity to their awareness of their responsibilities and rights as citizens of the host country.

Some of the informants said they were able to engage in public life because they felt secure, allowing them to publicly challenge dominant media frames and mainstream (Western) media's representations of the Palestinian-Israeli narrative. Sharif, the 26-year old founder of Arabmediawatch, the news website dedicated to challenging the mainstream (Western) news media's representations of the Arab world in general and the Palestinian and Iraqi problems in particular, provides a good example of how notions of citizenry combine with the imperatives of belonging to a particular collective :

> We monitor the media everyday, the British media. We set up an action alert so people who don't receive it everyday get it once or twice a week. I think in terms of the things that we do, a lot of the results are intangible. I mean in terms of engaging the media, we cannot really measure the effect it has, but it is something. The Jews have been doing this for years and they are very active…Everyone was getting a sense in this country, particularly with the second *intifada,* that we need to do something and the media was the best way of portraying to the masses the Arab message. Our action is not about antagonising the others. You can reflect your opinion: if there is someone in the position of power who does not like your opinion or you, they are going to have an issue with you. You cannot go on ducking and hiding; this is the way we see it and this is the difference between our generation and yours (talking to his mother). When we started this whole media thing, all my mother's friends said we are crazy, that the Jews are in the media and that they will eat us out. I said that is exactly why I wanted to start this because they are like that and because all of you think like that

that is why I am in the media and if we always think like that then you are always gonna be like that. You have to fight them head on; you cannot always duck.

What is clear is that though such activities are driven by the interests of the informants as members of a particular collective and by their awareness of their rights as citizens in the host culture, the public expression of private interests serves to show that understanding the relationship between news and its audience must take account of the social context of production and consumption. Furthermore, these processes reflect how the role of news in societies can be best understood through the ritual model of communication which suggests participation and action and which underscores how mediation becomes a political process in so far as the meanings generated by producers and present in media texts are worked on by readers and viewers.

7.9 Mediation and Power

Before going on to detail the implications of the informants' engagement with news to questions of identity and belonging, it is worth summarising the key points reported in the sections above. First, news emerges as a dynamic component in the informants' everyday lives. Second, the activity of engaging with news is both active[34] and interactive, serving to blur the boundaries between the private and the public. Third, the centrality of the news genre to the informants is crucially related to its social and political uses which draw attention to how news can be understood as a form of cultural discourse.

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[34] This must be qualified because there is no way to certify how the informants actually engage with news. However, my experience with some of the informants – I was present when they watched television news – and my familiarity with the social and cultural background of the informants allow me to put this point across with some confidence.

The emphasis in this chapter has been on the social uses of news, which can be addressed in an audience study of this kind as it moves attention beyond the relative privacy of the act of media reception to address the "wider ramifications of opposition"(Jensen 1990: 58), thus drawing attention to how the news media, seen through these contestations and oppositional activities, provide the framework for identity and community.

In focusing on the social uses of news, or what the informants do with news, I have shown that the informants do not see news as providing information only, but also as a form of cultural discourse that can confirm their own beliefs and perspectives of the world and that can provide them with likely orientations for action while linking them in ritualistic and symbolic ways to the wider public spaces they inhabit.

The analysis of the interview material showed that the informants' engagement with news transcends the public/private divide. It also showed that the instrumental uses of the news are in constant tension with the critical dimensions of news consumption, therefore necessitating a differentiated understanding of the news audience and of the meaning of news in societies. Furthermore, the analysis showed that news media could be potentially empowering, though this cannot be fully equated with the conventional understanding of political power or without taking into account the different contexts of consumption, including the informants' increased access to diverse mediated information.

As the sections above showed, it was because of the informants' awareness of mediation as a political process, which came into stark relief in their contrasting and criticism of different mediated news accounts that they saw as denying them control and status that they began to seek more active discursive and 'participatory' roles in the

national (British) sphere. It was their awareness of the ways in which the dominant forms of imaging and story-telling could be resisted and countered and their awareness of their rights as citizens in the host culture that they could *argue out* or mobilise beyond their intimate spheres.

The interview material pointed to the tensions in the informants' discourses about news, reflecting the inherent contradiction in the power and the meanings of news – while the informants' accounts that Western news narratives do have an effect, they consistently redefined the news agenda, reflecting how media power was not direct, but diffuse, and how they were aware of the power of mediation, but also aware that they themselves could be active actors in this process. What was clear, however, was that the resources and motivations that lead people to participate or withdraw from public life, as shown in the analysis of the interview material reported above, are also linked to the imagined or lived experiences (the social and political contexts) of the people concerned. In the following chapter, I turn to the relationship between news and identity, one of the key questions in this research

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Chapter Eight

Identification: What it Means to be Palestinian

This chapter brings together the theoretical perspectives discussed in Chapters Two to Four and the data drawn from the empirical work, an audience reception study that forms the backbone of this research. The material presented below explores informants' discourses and perspectives of themselves and their community through their engagement with news rather than technological, aesthetic or other characteristics inherent in the text. The aim is to examine the different dimensions of identity construction from down-to-earth perspectives, thus grounding the research questions in empirical evidence.

This perspective goes beyond the methodological impetus informing this study. I did not define the social implications of news nor did I assume, a priori, its appropriation in the informants' lives. Rather, I set out to explore whether and how the informants use news, and whether their appropriation of news (making sense of news) can influence their thinking and discourses. In particular, I wanted to address the following questions: What is the relationship between news and discourses of identity? And do news stories allow people to adopt essentialist and/or more open positions related to their identity?

In addressing these questions, my concern is with the 'news stories' the respondents choose to engage with — these are the stories they relate to most, as individuals and as members of the wider community they associate with as well as the host country they inhabit — and with the implications of their engagement for their everyday interactions and actions. This consideration is justified empirically (see Chapter Five) and conceptually (see Chapters Two and Four) particularly in the contemporary media

environment of 24-hour news disseminated by multiple and diverse news organisations, both in terms of ideology and form.

The interview material is organised under thematic constructs that shed light on the links audiences establish between the world as represented in news discourses and their everyday lives. These themes draw on the inter-related analytic categories of comprehension and interpretation[1] and narrativity, the processes or mechanisms the informants use to make sense of news. Though interrelated, comprehension and interpretation can be distinguished; the former, as Livingstone (1990) notes, focuses on the extent to which texts, however complex, may be said to convey information, while the latter is fundamentally socially located, suggesting that the *experience and knowledge* (my emphasis) of the reader or viewer plays a central role in the act of decoding the text.

Narrativity, on the other hand, brings to attention the need to locate the meaning of 'news' events in temporal and spatial relationship to other events (Somers and Gibson 1994), while also taking into account people's affect and self-reflexivity. Narrativity relates to the analytical concept of commuting (Liebes and Katz 1993), the process whereby informants' talk shifts between reflections on the narratives of news to their own personal narratives. Narrative, in this sense, is both a form of reasoning and a form of representation; it is the fundamental epistemic means by which people organise and make sense of their experiences, and therefore, as Dahlgren (1995) argues, is a strategy that can operate within the figural mode of signification. Commuting takes place at an interpretative level, drawing attention to how people make sense of news by drawing on their personal experiences or by drawing on the experiences of others.

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[1] Interpretation focuses on the ways in which texts involve narrative or conventional frames, create cultural connections and resonances and implicate mythic or ideological meaning, while comprehension is influenced by textual knowledge (Livingstone 1998).

These analytic categories help us understand the diverse ways in which the informants use news as a point of reference for interpreting and/or making sense of everyday events, for managing anxieties, for drawing parallels with their personal narratives as well as with the collective narrative of the group as a whole, and how, through their reflection on, articulation of, emotional connection to and investment in news they narrate and experience their identities. These narrations and experiences, this thesis argues, change over time and *in* (my emphasis) time, these are the mediated moments and times (contexts) during which people are propelled to think about who they are and why it matters to be who they are.

By analysing the various discourses that news stories, particularly those related to the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, trigger among the respondents concerned in this study, this chapter examines the tensions in the project of identity construction, which, as argued in Chapter Two, involves continuous processes of identification that serve to underline the dialectic relationship between cosmopolitanism, which means an acceptance of the otherness of the other and Palestinian-ism (Palestinian national consciousness) which implies particularity. This relationship, as Beck (2002) says, relates to how nations (the collective) and our connections to them are discursively produced and reproduced in the era of globalisation, and to the significance of both *events and collective memory* in these productions and reproductions (my emphasis).

In highlighting the themes (these are deducted from people's attitudes to news) that weave through the informants' discourses about their worldviews - these concern the fundamental assumptions about the nature of the world as expressed in their philosophy, ethics, ritual and beliefs (Wallace 1970 cited in Ayish 2003) - my narrative takes into

account the cultural, political, spatial and temporal situatedness of the informants in order to understand the contested dynamics and relations of power they grapple with when making sense of symbolic products, including news, and to emphasise the tension between real and narrated experiences, the private and the public, the self and the other, the past and the present, and the personal and the political. The chapter begins by examining the implications for identity construction of the main thematic constructs that inform the analysis of the interview material — crisis, boundaries and belonging — which come across as interrelated themes in the informants' talk about news stories of and related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

8.1 Imagined Community in Crisis?

The first analytical construct, the theme of crisis, weaves through most of the informants' accounts of their engagement with news stories, though the news events they talk about, the second Palestinian *intifada*[2] (uprising) that began in September 2000 and the unrelenting violence since then, the September 11 attacks in the US, the US-led war on terror and the war against Iraq, do not involve them personally.[3]

In making sense of these news events, many informants voiced concerns about themselves and their families, concerns that pertain to the ways in which news draws attention to events and concerns about them, thus bearing on people's sense of 'ontological security' and prompting questions such as: 'Am I safe? Is my family safe? Is the nation that I belong to safe?' (cf. Giddens 1984). Silvio Waisbord (2002), writing in

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[2] This event is often referred to as *al-Aqsa intifada* as the protests erupted after Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon visited the *al-Aqsa* mosque in Jerusalem, considered as one of the holiest Islamic shrines.
[3] Of course, these events pertained to the Palestinian nation as a collectivity.

the context of the September 11 attacks, has explained trauma, from a mainly psychological perspective, as unbinding the sense of self, thus affecting how "individual and collective actors come to terms with their identities. By ripping [...] existing boundaries, trauma destabilizes [...] the self and creates the need to re-instate a sense of order." (ibid. 205)

The interview material shows that these 'unplanned' media events[4] (cf. Dayan and Katz 1992; Srebreny 2002) caused instability in the informants' lives, triggering notions of instability and insecurity among a majority of respondents, irrespective of their age or gender, resulting in an increased preoccupation with their own and their family's security. This is how Nadwa explains this:

> Look at the situation we are in. We do not feel secure anymore. Look at what the UK government is doing, can you trust them as every minute they come up with something new, some new law. I cannot explain to you how I feel, because what you see is totally impossible. This is beyond our imagination.

Discourses referring to the continuous crisis were articulated across the board, but women respondents were generally more emotional and agitated in discussing these concerns as they tended to focus on the human facets of the news and on how their own families, children and friends might be affected by these accounts, thus pointing to a degree of gendered discourse. This comes across in the following comment by Amani:

> The news and the images have affected our lives. My eldest boy, who is nine, is now scared, he is talking of joining the British army. Leith (who is seven) is so worried and is always asking what is happening to the Palestinian children and asking "are they going to kill us, too.

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[4] Although these are not media events in the sense that Dayan and Katz referred to in *The Live Broadcasting of History* (1992), they are media events in the ways they brought audiences and communities together.

Male informants, on the other hand, were more circumspect in their reflections on the sense of crisis, concerning themselves with attributing blame and guilt, analysing the evolving situation and proposing solutions to the continuous conflict. However, what was interesting was that in reflecting on concerns about the self and their families, both male and female respondents' narratives shifted to voice concerns about the collective, encompassing the Palestinians in Britain and in other diasporic spaces and the Palestinian nation as a whole, thus serving to underline the continuous tension between and the interweaving of the personal and the political (national) and the personal and collective memory that come into play during such moments.

The respondents' talk reflected how right from the beginning, these 'connected[5] mediated events' had a powerful emotive impact on them, setting off moments of discovery that they linked to other memories, real and imagined, individual and collective, in precise ways, confirming that overall processes of mediation are involved in this interplay. This emerges in the following exchange during a group interview in Manchester:

> Mahmoud: …*We* (the Palestinian nation) are at the centre of the mess now, not isolated. The impact on *us* and on politics has been huge. *We see this at our own level because we are Palestinians.* The reason that we speak a lot about politics is that what we watch on television has an impact on us. It is a direct impact really. We have families in the Occupied Territories and when we travel, we also suffer. We feel it in our everyday lives
> Suha: Yes, this mess has made others become anti-Palestinian, anti-Arab and anti-Moslem. *The whole world now does not see our side of the story.* Sharon has done all

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[5] 'Connected' refers here to the ways in which these events were portrayed as linked both in journalistic and political discourse as well as in the informants' narratives of the news.

his deeds and there is not a single word of protestations against it. Before, it was different. Now everybody is silent.

Mahmoud: Even the average American person. His bias has increased so now we cannot see the difference between the Americans and the Israelis.

Bassam: There is no doubt that these events and the way they are covered (in the Western media) has influenced politics. America is now discussing the possibility of finding an alternative Palestinian leadership. This is really dangerous...and they are illogical. How can they blame Abu Ammar[6] for an operation in Jerusalem when he is surrounded, cannot come and go.

Ibrahim: Well the problem is that under this big banner of fighting terrorism, the US could intervene anywhere, in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Somalia. Even Saudi Arabia is under threat.

Mohammed: Yes, this news event has been negative to us (the nation). People look at you and you know that the news is against you...All my colleagues are now saying poor Israel, and I am getting very upset and worried. (My emphasis)

What emerges from these comments and similar others is a sense of an 'imagined community in crisis' (Anderson 1983), welded together by notions that its members, whether in Britain, other diasporic spaces or in the homeland, imagine themselves as facing a continuous crisis, and constructed through 'a wider ideological, discursive consciousness' (cf. Billig 1995). The discursive consciousness of the 'imagined community in crisis' emerges in the following comment by Ali, a 30-plus asylum seeker, during a group interview along with five of his friends:

> The news story (of the *intifada*, the suicide bombings and September 11) has an effect on *our* cause as Palestinians and on *our* lives. It has a comprehensive effect on all fronts. Those who wanted to get visas to Britain were not able to anymore. So it is not only from a personal level, but also from a general level as it affects people's views about *us (the imagined nation)*. (My emphasis)

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[6] This is the popular nom de guerre for Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

8.2 Perceptions of Power and News

Notions such as *"the whole world now does not see our side"* and *"the news is against us"* reflect, as argued above, the respondents' concerns about themselves and the collective, but also to their perceptions that news is powerful in that they link to the various and specific ways in which news mediates and represents reality and which they see as excluding them from the 'national (British) public sphere'.

Suggestions of exclusion from this sphere were prominent in respondents' comments on mainstream (Western) media's news narrations of events of and related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, narrations they saw as reflecting cognitive scripts and models of behaviour shaped by the experience and narration of previous events (cf. Karim 2003), or, put differently, shaped by traditional journalistic 'frames' that have been employed to make sense of violence, terrorism and Islam. This emerges in Maha's comment:

> Why should the world stand with 'them' (Israel) and support them...this is because they (the Western media) give this picture of us as the 'baddies' [...] for instance, they are now saying we are terrorists. Where is this terrorism they are talking about? Is it with them or with us? There is a lot of difference in telling the news. They (Western media) always use the wrong language — I hear the word fundamentalist, I hear the word terrorist...always referring to Islamic and Palestinian groups. When you think of the Irish problem, they did not say terrorist Christian groups. They called them the IRA.

As does the following remark by Lutfi, a retired Christian Palestinian businessman, during a separate interview in London:

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> It's very clear, they (the Western media) don't know how to go about it and they are doing their best to target the Palestinians.

The use of frames (cf. Giltin 1980) is a common journalistic practice and is often manifested in the predominance of 'crude binaries' in news reporting particularly during times of trauma as journalists, as an interpretive community (see Zelizer 1997, 1993)[7], make sense of events and attempt to lend authority to their narrations. Such frames, which Gitlin (1980) refers to as dominant frames that are taken for granted by media practitioners, were particularly noticeable in news reports of and post-September 11. The term dominant does not to refer to a monolithic or static set of ideological and cultural frames, but following Hall (1979), to show how these frames structure events they signify in a manner that reproduces given ideological structure in an almost unconscious way, even for the encoders.

What is of analytic concern are the ways in which such frames served to focus attention in the national (British) sphere on discourses that tended to establish essentialist and polarised news accounts relying on 'us' and 'them', the 'West' and the 'rest' dichotomies, belying complex realities and creating conflicts of identification for the Palestinians in Britain. It was in this polarised context that most informants, irrespective of gender and age, tended to question the mainstream (Western) media's representation of events[8] which many said bracketed them within such categories as 'Islamic

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[7] Journalists refer to these practices as short-hand journalism that is used to convey meanings to their audience through the use of cryptic and often stereotypical language.

[8] Many respondents were emotional and angry in commenting on the repeated use of images (by CNN, for example) of Palestinians celebrating on the streets of Gaza following al-Qa'eda's attacks against the US, suggesting these images were fabricated and used intentionally to sully the reputation of the Palestinians.

fundamentalists', and 'supporters of terrorism,' a double-categorisation[9] that served to

catalyse dogmatic modes of thinking[10] about the continuous crises, bringing to the fore

discourses emphasising the informants' political and religious identifications. This comes

across in the following comment by Judith during a household interview involving

herself and other members of her family in London:

> The news affects us in many ways. I do not think there is a lot of discussion about
> the background. For instance, if we talk of the intifada, they (the Western media)
> rarely give any explanations. The only one thing that is said is that we are Islamic
> and terrorists and that we are brainwashed...The mainstream media does not want
> to say anything else. It makes me feel different.

Indeed, even those informants who described themselves as having a secular orientation,

i.e. neither allied to Islam nor to Christianity, engaged in discourses that reflected their

identification with particularistic positions. In this context, their making sense of news

suggested they were involved in ideological processes of thinking (Billig 1987/ 1995), or

in strategic articulations that they used to challenge hegemonic discourses and the status

quo. Lutfi's comment illustrates this:

> The problem with the Western media is that they portray the Israeli-Palestinian
> conflict as a conflict between Israel and Moslems. This is wrong. The media have
> no idea what they are talking about...Up to 25 years ago, you could not tell who
> was Christian and who was Moslem, but they have made it a religious conflict.

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[9] This draws on Billig's (1987) critique of categorisation literature that sees categorisation as a cognitive
imperative, thus giving only a one-sided view of human action. Billig suggests that human understanding
always occurs in a context of argument or conflict. In this sense, even our private thoughts arise out of an
internal dialogue in which we pit different positions against each other, so we take positions to counter
other positions. That said, self-categorisation theory places emphasis on the cognitive aspect of social
identification and collective action, that is, the point at which people begin to act as a group is the point at
which they begin to identify themselves in terms of the group.
[10] I follow Billig (1987) in noting that thinking in this context does not happen in a simple one-sided way,
which means it has to be examined within social contexts and factors, including linguistic ones.

And in the following comment by Sharif in a separate interview:

> The (news) coverage changed things on this side of the world, definitely. It changed
> things in the Middle East, kind of, but not so much on the street level, but in terms of
> diplomatic circles and upper levels. You know, after September 11, everyone is afraid
> of flying across the Atlantic. I think there is an ignorance in the sense that the way the
> (media) put themselves in the shoes of the people in the Middle East...they were
> saying that the Palestinians did not cry enough. I think if you just put yourself in the
> position of someone who has had some relative killed by an American weapon and
> has spent decades under occupation with the support of America, I don't see how
> such comments would change things for them. On the street (in the Occupied
> Territories), things have not changed. For me, too, it has not changed anything, but in
> terms of media coverage and how it affects the Middle East, that is a different thing.

8.3 News as Cultural Discourse: Content and Form

There is little doubt that the thematic construct of crisis and the emergence of notions of

the proposed 'imagined community in crisis' discussed above, relates to the specific

temporal conjuncture of this research — the fieldwork coincided with an intense

escalation in violence and acts of reprisal between Israelis and the Palestinians since

September 2000, when the second Palestinian *intifada* erupted. Indeed, many respondents

reiterated the priority and sense of urgency they specifically gave to news of and related

to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, often linking the changes in their news viewing patterns

such as constant switching between different television news programmes as well as the

use of the Internet as an alternative source of news, to this event and others, including the

September 11 attacks and the increasing violence in the Occupied Territories and Gaza

Strip in the early months of 2002[11] as well as the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

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[11] Veena Das (1995) has referred to such events as critical events in that they can propel people's lives in
new directions as well as encourage new kinds of thinking and feeling.

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While taking this temporal conjuncture into consideration, in their making sense of the news of the continuous crises, the informants' news consumption practices took on a sense of urgency that was manifested in different ways; many respondents said they had become obsessed with news, many said they were eager to find out what was happening next[12] in order to make sense of the unfolding drama, while others said they were constantly switching channels to assess the different mediations and representations in the news. This is how Maha explains this:

> I switch channels. I change from Arabic channels to English ones to see what they are reporting and what they are saying. In the end though, I turn to the one news programme that meets my needs and moves me, or leaves an impact.

Some respondents even suggested that news coverage of *the intifada* was the catalyst that propelled them to install satellite dishes to access Arabic transnational channels, such as *al-Jazeera* and the Lebanese Hezbollah-supported *al-Manar*, specifically because these channels provided them with alternative ideological narratives that countered the ideological content of mainstream news media, for example, the BBC and CNN. These points are discussed extensively in the previous chapter, but for our purposes here, these actions suggest that the informants were involved in making 'active' choices about the news they could use, active choices that relate to both the *what* and the *how* of news, or, to content and form. This is reflected in the following short excerpt from a group interview with five young asylum seekers in London:

> Raed: After the *intifada,* I installed a satellite dish because all the news you see on BBC, etc. is not the same. Now I watch all channels in different languages.

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[12] In some interviews, respondents would often ask me what was going on, whether I knew, being a journalist and a researcher myself, anything they did not know.

Husam: For me, too, it was the *intifada*, too. Even now after September 11, that was the first and one news event that made me turn to news.
Ali: You cannot separate one event from the other really. The narrative is connected, irrespective of its relevance or not

Three implications of such discourses are relevant for understanding the relationship between news and processes of identification; the first relates to the fact that the informants did not engage with news for its informational values alone. Rather, they used news to help them 'stay alert' to immediate and distant threats, conflicts and other events that were perceived as implicating the informants and their families as well as threatening their individual and collective identity. In this context, the regularity and ritual characteristics of news programmes can be seen as serving as a form of reassurance in times of change and trauma (see Silverstone 1994). The second, as exemplified by Maha's comment: *"In the end, I turn to news that satisfies my needs"*, reflects how the respondents choose which news story they can run away with, this is the news narrative that provides them with a point or points of reference (the ideological and cultural frames) to make sense of events, to manage anxieties, to draw parallels with their own lives and to take part in social interaction and action. And the third is that this choice is influenced by both media form and content, drawing attention to the ways in which mediation processes can play a role in the informants' engagement with or disengagement from symbolic material. In this context, *how* something is said becomes as relevant as *what* is being said. Both of these are central to the understanding of news as cultural discourse proposed in this work.

While there is little doubt that the availability of diverse news sources — these events coincided with a proliferation of alternative news sources — provide the respondents

concerned in this study with different contexts and diverse frames for identity work and for engagement in public life, it crucially brings to analytic scrutiny the centrality of this access to the tense, contradictory and polarised dynamics surrounding these informants' experiences with and around news. Most of the respondents said they engaged with diverse news media, including mainstream Western media, such as English broadsheets and terrestrial television channels like the BBC, as well as with Arabic language media, particularly Arabic satellite broadcasting channels, pointing to the relevance of the form of telling, the *how*, to their making sense of news. This comes across in the following comment by Hussein in the Said household:

> I am not only satisfied with just hearing the news as it is. This is not enough. It is important to hear the news from different viewpoints and then you decide. There is a big difference. When it comes to the Palestinian story, Arabic channels, particularly *al-Jazeera*, show us exactly what happens, even showing us pictures of dead Israelis (from suicide bombs). But *al-Manar* is the best really because it is the only Arab station focusing on the Palestinians.

At the same time, however, many of the informants suggested that their consumption practices were also dictated by *what* (my emphasis) was being said — 'what' here points to the ideological and cultural frames in news, suggesting that the informants' processes of thinking about and reflection on news may be interpreted as struggles for *authenticity*[13] and *recognition*, particularly because Palestinians in Britain have for long been media invisible or misrepresented[14] in the British public sphere. This comes across in two

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[13] The struggle for authenticity has been a key element in the Palestinian and Israeli versions of events as each party claims authentic claims to territory and existence.

[14] Like other minorities in Britain, the Palestinians in Britain do not often appear in the mainstream media, and when they do, it is often through stereotyped images.

separate comments in different interviews, the first by Maha, and the second by Omar, and which illustrate the contrasting of narratives and their importance:

> Maha: The Arabic channels have served us by putting the Palestinian story at the forefront, after all this is the cause of the Arab world. Most of their news is about our homeland, though they also talk of the war in Afghanistan. This is important for us.

> Omar: The (Western) media are basically indifferent. I would not go as far as to say they are positively biased towards Israel. What I would say is that they probably leave on purpose large sections of the story. They would tend to say five Palestinians were killed today on the West Bank, whereas, if they wanted to, they could show graphic pictures of those five people, etc. Very, very powerful images that would be very damaging to Israel and they don't do so. They obviously have access to those images, but they show the Israeli images definitely.

These comments, particularly Omar's, also show that in making sense of news, the informants relied on *common sense* — this is the process by which people find themselves repeating assumptions that confirm existing modes of power and domination as well as ideology, thus pointing to how even commonsense processes of 'thinking and arguing' are also influenced by ideology (Billig 1987). Evidence of these processes was particularly apparent in the informants' criticism of Western news media — here, as exemplified in the above comment, the criticism of news accounts was made to counter hegemonic arguments — and in their often favourable comments on alternative news narratives, particularly by Arabic transnational broadcasting channels, suggesting that news can act as a symbolic forum for thinking and arguing, while confirming the notion of news as a form of cultural discourse adopted in this work. "We find in *al-Jazeera* a way to vent our feelings and emotions. It is the most objective and balanced of all the

channels," was one recurrent answer. "As Palestinians, we feel there are people who care

for you," was another. This is how Nuha puts this:

> I like to watch *al-Jazeera* and *al-Manar*. The news is very interesting and [...] you
> feel that they say what is in my heart and express what is in my mind. Most of their
> news and images...even when they have intervals or adverts, they put pictures of the
> *intifada a*nd music and Arabic songs about Palestine. *Al-Manar* does not even report
> on south Lebanon as much as it does on Palestine.

What emerges from these and similar comments is the sense that the audience members

concerned here do not turn to news for information only, but also because it confirms

their ideological consciousness of nationhood particularly in the ways it represents a

complex set of themes about 'us', 'our homeland' and 'nations' (ours and theirs) (cf.

Billing 1995:4), their own frames of reference and their foci of identification.

Though I did not carry out a content analysis of the representations of news on Arabic

transnational television, the informants' talk suggests that the ideological consciousness

of nationhood is reflected in the political stance[15] of these channels and their adoption of

the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as the consensus narrative[16] of Arab society, a narrative

that resonates with the respondents' own and collaborative readings of news. These

readings are informed by, and inform, their everyday experiences and are made possible

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[15] Although *al-Jazeera* claims to be politically neutral and that its staff are diverse, its coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, its representation of the news and its use of language, point to its critically pro-Palestinian stance. For example, *al-Jazeera* treats the Islamic group *Hamas* as a legitimate resistance movement, and allows its representatives a voice in its coverage of news. *Al-Jazeera* refers to Israel as an occupation force and to the West Bank and Gaza as Israeli-occupied territories, while it has described the war in Iraq as an invasion and an illegal occupation compared with the BBC's choice of the demure "the war in Iraq" and Fox's more partisan 'Operation Iraqi Freedom'. Though I did not carry out a study on the production policies *of al-Jazeera or al-Manar*, there is a general consensus that its stance that supports Palestinian nationalism and pan-Arabism is related to the fact that many of its members and employees are Palestinians themselves or reflect pan-Arab ideologies. *Al-Jazeera* rose to prominence following the September 11 attacks in the US, attracting criticism from Western governments, but it was popular with Arab audiences before that because of its focus on news and current affairs programmes that have given voice to people other than government officials or those in power.

[16] Even Osama bin Laden, in the early tapes broadcast following the September 11 attacks, linked the fight against the United States with the Palestinian struggle for statehood and independence.

because the subject of the news stories is one they are familiar with, thus giving them some form of 'discursive' power, while also suggesting that making sense of news is tied to some form of ideological resonance (Lewis 1991).

The ideological resonance comes across in the informants' reflections on why they prefer Arabic transnational television channels, which suggest that this preference is linked to these channels' modes of representation, the what, and the language and style they use in making these representations, the how. For example, many of the interviewees said they preferred to watch *al-Jazeera* and *al-Manar* because of their choice of language — their news refers to suicide bombers as *shuhada* (martyrs). Many of the respondents reflected on the melodramatic content of news broadcasts and current affairs programmes on Arab satellite television channels, such as *al-Jazeera* and *al-Manar*.[17] The following exchange in a group interview in Manchester illustrates this:

> Mohammed: The news story...well, you have to remember that people are mature (sic) and they know when the story reflects certain viewpoints. People know what is going on.
> Ibrahim: There is really no way to lie. You have studied journalism and you know this...the format. I can use any sensational way to write or tell a story. But using words makes a difference. It is the way the story is told that makes us suffer; it is the language. This is sometimes on CNN or the BBC, the way they tell the story hurts because we know where the average American and English person comes from. The use of the language itself, for instance, when they say that Israel used rockets in response to a Palestinian *amaliya* (operation), they forget to tell the chronological events. The story always starts with the assumption that the Palestinians did something and Israel responded. This is where the difference (with Arabic channels) lies. These are specific issues that hurt us, the place of the story, the format, their use of language and the fact that they never explain the reasons why.
> Suha: I may convince some English people that we (the Palestinians) have been oppressed, but after two weeks, they will forget my words and will follow what the big powers will say. How the BBC and CNN tell the story will be followed by the

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[17] Iskander and el-Nawawy (2004) have described the journalistic imperatives dictating news production strategies of al-Jazeera, particularly in the case of the war in Iraq, as contextual objectivity rather than the broadly used objectivity.

people. Look, Hanan Ashrawi (the prominent female Palestinian politician and spokesperson) came and gave her opinions. She spoke in their terms, but her words are all forgotten and there is no trace of them in the minds of the West…you see maybe in their minds (CNN and BBC), they think they are giving people equal times. But at the end of the day what the broadcaster says at the end of the programme is what remains in people's mind. One sentence can make the difference.

There is little doubt that other salient factors can explain the informants' preference for certain news programmes; these include class and education; politico-religious orientations and personal experience of exile and deprivation. Class and education are important in that they can explain some informants' preference for Arabic-language media rather than Western media because of language competence. This was evident during interviews in lower- to middle-class families where women (mothers and wives) normally stay at home, which means their interaction with non-Arabic speaking people and the wider society is curtailed to a certain extent. Amani, a 34-year-old mother of four, who did not speak English when she arrived here in 1992, says: "Arabic television is really important as we can use our own language. They are our link to the homeland. Now there is news that the children can also watch as we speak Arabic at home. When I came here ten years ago, I had no access to news. Now, I am in Palestine, Jordan, Iraq and Syria at the same time as here. That is the link."

Furthermore, politico-religious orientations can explain this preference. For instance, some Moslem respondents said they preferred to engage with al-*Manar* (allied to the Lebanese Islamic and Iranian-backed Hezbollah group) and the Saudi religious channel *Iqra'* because their news and their presenters and broadcasters, particularly women, conformed with and adhered to Islamic values and traditions. Political considerations and

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affiliations[18] can also explain why some informants eschewed news programmes that were seen as politically dubious. For instance, some said they did not watch MBC (Middle East Broadcasting Corp.) because it was supported by the Saudi government.

8.4 Identity Construction as Relational

The second analytical construct that came across in the interview material is the theme of boundaries, confirming that discursive processes of boundary-mapping remain key and common frames that informants use to construct their identities. Such processes, which involve the active maintenance and negotiation with others of guiding frameworks for inclusion (Southerton 2002), were reflected in informants' discourses of othering that dominated many interviews, suggesting that in making sense of news, the respondents, both as individuals and as members of a 'real or imagined' collective group, were constructing symbolic boundaries to negotiate notions of inclusion and exclusion.

Across the board, symbolic boundaries were generated and maintained in the informants' talk about which news they watch, emphasising the continuous and shifting discourses of 'self' and 'other' that draw attention to the tension between notions of ordinariness, meaning an acceptance that one is the same as everyone else, and notions of difference and uniqueness (Billig 1995), confirming the central theoretical framework in this thesis — that the project of identity construction can be better explained as involving a continuous process of identification.

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[18] Most respondents said they did not belong to political organisations, but the pervasiveness of politics in Palestinian and Arab lives means that people are normally politically savvy.

Notions of ordinariness, reflected in remarks such as "*we are like everyone else*", but, more importantly, of difference and uniqueness, came across in an 'us and them' dichotomy that was present in many accounts, pointing to how the informants were involved in constructing *essentialist* discourses about themselves and others which served to confirm that the process of boundary-mapping is both an *ideological and discursive* construction. However, the analysis of the interview material showed that it was in their contrasting of Western media and Arabic transnational broadcasting[19] news narratives (of the same event) that questions relating to what these respondents perceived as their distinctiveness, as members of a particular political and national group, were brought into central focus. In other words, it was through their engagement with the sometimes polarised accounts of the same narrative that they were forced to adopt 'defensive' and 'oppositional' dialogical positions as members of a Palestinian 'political' community. Um Ali puts this plainly: "I consider myself different from other Arabs, politically."

More often than not, such discourses of othering were made in their making sense of mainstream (Western) news narratives, such as CNN's and the BBC's, which the informants interpreted as exclusionary. In this sense, many respondents expressed a dominant or ideological perspective about the news presented on mainstream media, adopting an 'us and them'[20] dichotomy position that was essentialising. This emerges in the following comment by Omar:

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[19] Arabic transnational broadcasting channels, such as al-Jazeera, constantly repeated stories that wove images from the past into the present and flagged images of Palestinians' suffering and humiliation. Though the national feelings invoked by these practices are not banal, their arousal links with Billig's (1995) argumentation about nationalism in modern nation-states.
[20] 'Them' was usually a reference to the Other, Israel, or multiple others, including the United States, Britain and the Western world in general, while 'us' refers to the collective Palestinian nation.

They (the Western media) basically are indifferent to us. I would not say they are positively biased towards Israel. What I would say is that they probably on purpose leave out a large section of the news story. They would tend to say five Palestinians were killed today on the West Bank and they could, if they wanted to, provide graphic images — very, very powerful images that would be damaging to Israel.

It is in such contexts that identity construction can be seen as relational, as it is *in relation to* mainstream news discourses and the breakdown of trust in dominant discourse that assertions of a 'communal and political identification', a hardening of divides and the construction of frames of 'us' and 'them' became more prevalent. This comes across in the following comment by Lama:

You see, when we watch the foreign news channels, it makes us really mad. They twist the truth sometimes. We have always said that the foreigners (the West) are straight and honest people and we looked up to them. They are not, especially when it comes to the Palestinian problem.

Indeed, the informants' different news engagement patterns, yet similar interpretation of the news, reflect the ways in which in a highly-mediated[21] news environment characterised by wall-to-wall news, the presence and availability of mainstream media must be seen as crucial in any analysis about what the audience does with news because they define empirically, through the experiences and practices of their audience, the contexts within which alternative media narrations have to be understood (cf. Silverstone 2003).

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[21] It is worth mentioning that different media systems had been available in different countries before the advent of satellite television. Some of the older respondents said they had always accessed different media, particularly radio broadcasts. Salem, an 80-year old Palestinian who has lived in Britain since the 1940s, for instance, recalled in detail how he and his family would gather round the radio in World War II to listen to the BBC news service accounts of events.

In their discussions about the different ways the same news event was presented and re-presented, the informants displayed a degree of media competence and literacy[22] which allowed them to construct their mediated world as well as a degree of reflexivity that is common to many migrants' experiences particularly as they become exposed to more and more transnational symbolic products. Put the other way round, diverse news may be credited for opening up these reflexive processes by offering different and sometimes rewarding material for people to exercise reflection and critique of tradition and of institutions (cf. Thompson 1995).

The interview material showed how the informants exhibited competence in their talk about their news consumption practices — some informants, for instance, suggested that their intense focus on Arab satellite television did not mean they had to stop engaging with host country symbolic and cultural products. In elaborating on these processes, many respondents told of how they constantly flicked between channels to "find out what *they* (my emphasis) are saying about us," pointing to the argumentative meanings of opinion while suggesting that counter discourses arise when the original discourses are misunderstood. The following exchange in the group interview conducted in Manchester highlights these dilemmas:

> Mohammed: If I watch the news, I watch the local (English domestic) news or al-*Manar* and *al-Jazeera* or CNN. I like *al-Manar* because it is against Israel. In addition, it is a family channel, one that you can leave your children watching

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[22] Livingstone (2003) makes a crucial distinction between media literacy and competence. She says media literacy concerns mediated communication, while the other terms, such as competence, human capital, cognitive skill, etc., neglect the textuality and the technology that mediate communication while encouraging a universalist perspective that neglects the important that ignores the historical and cultural contingency of both the media and the cognitive and social knowledge processes that interpret them.

without getting worried.

Ibrahim: For me, I like to engage with different news and viewpoints. In my opinion, it is not enough for me to get excited about *al-Manar* or another Arabic channel, because I am already excited. I do not need this. When things escalate, I try to find what is going on from CNN. Then when things escalate I turn to the BBC for analysis. I am keen on Newsnight and their analysis because if the events are very important sometimes they are objective depending on the person giving the report and depending on whether the person is capable. I want to think how others think here. I want to put myself in the place of the English person and think how he thinks because we (Palestinians and our media) are perhaps failing in how to even address British people because we have always talked amongst ourselves without paying attention to the outsider(s).

Comments similar to Ibrahim's above referring to the importance, sometimes expressed *as a duty* (my emphasis), of engaging with different viewpoints came up again and again in the informants' accounts, pointing to the ways in which the informants were reflexive about their choices. That said, this reflexivity often turned into an essentialising 'us' and 'them' dichotomy. The following comment by Lutfi points to these contradictions:

I read the Financial Times, out of preference... I also read the Jewish Chronicle regularly. I pick it up from the newsagent because I want to see what they write and how they report the news. I find it very interesting, but what really grabs my attention are the editorials and letters to the editor. I myself occasionally write letters to the editors to complain about something. And, of course, I have the Arabic satellite channels. Really television is on all the time, *al-Jazeera*, Sky, BBC 24, the terrestrial channels though they concentrate on domestic issues.

8.5 The News Audience: Competent and Emotional?

In talking about the varied and polarised news representations, many informants, particularly, though not exclusively, women, became emotional and angry, suggesting

that their engagement with news is not a passive activity, but rather an expressive[23]

activity that had a significant relevance on the ways in which they negotiated processes of

identification and boundary-mapping. This emerges in Mona's comment:

> I am fed up with the words they (the Western news media) use...sometimes even
> on Arabic channels. The other day I heard them referring to a Palestinian attack. I
> am so cross that if I have a chance I will go there and pull the presenter's hair
> because she said 'Palestinian attack' and this totally wrong particularly when you
> have a class of society watching the news with little background about the
> conflict. It gives them the wrong ideas, that we are the attackers.

Referring to the news audience as affective and emotional brings to attention the need to

think of the news audience as diverse and the need to address the different contexts that

impinge on the news audience's level of investment in news – these notions challenge the

conventional notions of news as the resource the 'rational' citizen uses to address issues

related to political processes and participation.

Though the study of emotion has often been reduced to its psychological or

physiological dimensions, it is useful to take account of in socio-cultural perspectives

because emotional discourse can acquire special meanings as a communicative

performance in particular contexts. As Abu-Lughoud and Lutz (1990:11) argue, 'emotion

and discourse should not be treated as separate variables, the one pertaining to the private

world of individual consciousness and the other to the public social world.....emotional

talk must be interpreted as *in* and *about* social life' (emphasis in original). Van Zoonen

(2004) extends a similar argument in relation to emotion, pointing to the similarities

between participating in a private leisure-based group, such as the fan community, and in

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[23] This should not be confused with notions of the active audience, discussed in Chapter Three.

a public group, such as the political environment, while Boltanski (1999) uses a

philosophical argument in which he argues that the media-staged emotions are close to

fictional emotion, which people, or audiences, counter by maintaining "an orientation

towards action, a disposition to act, even if is this only by speaking" (Boltanski 1999:

153). Indeed, what was interesting was that the informants' emotional discourses were

accompanied by a hardening of divides and assertions of difference, suggesting that the

informants were also aware of the power frameworks of society, their own limitations

and their "belief that *speaking is acting*" (ibid: 154) (emphasis in original). The following

quote from Mansour illustrates how talk reflects the symbolic hardening of divides:

> Mansour: September 11 had affected everyone socially and emotionally. We cannot
> deny that...I sympathise (with the victims and with the perpetrators), but not to the
> extent that I become extremist. I was affected personally because I am convinced that
> the West and the US are trying to harm the reputation of Islam and the Palestinians.

There is little doubt that the use of emotional discourse is contextual — what I mean by

this is that it can be influenced by the particular contexts within which it is produced,

both spatial and temporal. The spatial context is important as it refers to the fact that

many respondents' emotional responses to news were not made in private — they were

made in households, with friends, in cafés and other public places, confirming how these

interactive processes reinforce 'normative and regulative mechanisms' such as the

'shared' understanding of contextual codes and social practices (cf. Livingstone 1998)

and also because of pressures of being part of a self-defined group. This shared

understanding of contextual codes and practices suggests that these codes and practices

do not need to have been experienced - 'experience' here has two meanings, as illustrated

in the following extracts from different interviews. The first comment is by Um Ali, who

is obsessed with news:

> I live with the story. I am with it, with the event. I imagine myself a lot, running, being hit, being killed. I imagine my son (who was shot in Lebanon) all the time, all the time. I remember this young girl who was killed. This girl was killed in Ramadan. She will never go from my mind and, of course, Mohammed al-Durra...we are living with him. They always show his picture and in the songs. The songs...this girl, I can never forget and the mothers. Never, never. I dream about them. I imagine I am the mother and that something has happened to my children...god forbid.

The following comment by Ruba (19) who does not engage with news on a regular basis,

shows how news still shapes her understandings and sense of self, her community and her

surroundings because she consumes it through her family and friends.

> The news I grew up with (are) from my father's stories about his life and exile and how he built himself. There is no way to use common sense when you think about this because as far as Palestine goes (sic) it (the story) is very emotional. But then the Western part of me comes in by thinking why should someone have to give his home to someone else? What you hear from the news just...just doesn't fit and anything or with common sense.

At the same time, emotional discourses relate to temporal dimensions. Indeed, the

drawing of boundaries was particularly evident in the informants' reflections on their

engagement with news following the second *intifada*. This is illustrated in the following

quotes, the first by Fadwa, and the second by Ibrahim, in separate interviews:

> When we first came here in 1976, we did not say we were Palestinians. There was no awareness of that amongst the host population. After the second *intifada*, things have changed. What makes you wonder is that the average English person is beginning to ask you questions about yourself and you start wondering...what does it all mean?

The news has affected our cause and our lives...it had a comprehensive effect on all fronts...from a general level as well as from a personal and collective level, it made people change their views about us.

8.6 Loss of Critical Distance

Fadwa's comments, expressed with anger and emotion, suggest that the process of

boundary drawing could not be undertaken from *a critical distance*[24], or ideological

distance, as it forced into the open questions of her Palestinian-ness[25], or what it means to

be Palestinian, which for her and others who had considered themselves integrated with

British society, had never been a crucial marker of difference. This notion emerges in the

following comment by Maha:

> Now they are saying we (the Palestinians) are terrorists. What we see on
> television (the Arabic channels) actually opens the question of where terrorism is,
> with us or with them (sic). They are our enemies or, as they claim, we are their
> enemies, but they are harming us in a way that we are not harming them. If we
> talk exclusively about Palestine...What has made the world feel with Israel or
> show sympathy to it? It's because they always show that image. We don't have
> that image. They (Western media) show that Arabs are always the problem. This
> is our problem. Our media is not the same as theirs. Our media has ignored certain
> things. The Europeans, the Americans and the Jews, the media there is stronger
> than ours. This is because they are with Israel. They always tell us the roots of the
> Arabs and also show things that may not apply to us or be within us. For instance,
> now they are saying that we are terrorists. What we see on television raises the
> questions of where terrorism is, with us or with them.

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[24] This is related to the notion of critical audience (see Lunt and Livingstone 1994; Leibes and Katz 1992). Leibes and Katz say the audience critical abilities refer to the ability by audience members to distance themselves from the spectacle itself in order to make inferences concerning the media makers' intentions and to impute intentions to the media producers other than those presented by the media programmes.

[25] This is based on common attributes of this identity discussed in Chapter Four.

It is within such contexts that the informants' thinking about their position in the host society can easily become frozen as they resort to rigid templates that subordinate their thinking about themselves to a defensive scheme. Importantly, it is during their making sense of 'mediated' news accounts that the respondents' normal positions of reflexivity and ambivalence about their cultural and social identification in the diasporic space become closed down, bringing out rhetoric of dogmatic resolution. This is how Raad (20) puts these notions across:

> I watch the news and I get very, very sad. I used to discuss it a lot with my
> friends, including Jewish friends. I am actually surprised at myself now, because I
> am touched by the Palestinians and what had happened to them. All their lives,
> the West has been using the word terrorism to describe them and to give Israel the
> excuse it needs, but how can the world continue watching. At the end of the day, it
> is clear that Israel does not want to give in or to change and they just want to go on
> occupying the land. I actually feel with the suicide bombers and support them
> now.

And the following comment by Wael in a group interview with four of his friends in London: "It is sad to see all the killings, but if I was there, I would do the same. I would not go to the extent of becoming a martyr. But I feel that they have no option."

These processes of dogmatic thinking can be partially explained by Herzfeld's[26] notion of 'cultural intimacy' which draws attention to aspects of identity that are considered as sources of external embarrassment[27], but nevertheless provides insiders with an assurance of a common sociality. At the same time, they can be explained by the continuous tension

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[26] Herzfeld has argued that the boundary-making processes that engendered nationalism and prejudice in the first place remain a pervasive character of human society.

[27] Indeed, Palestinians are often embarrassed by references to them as Islamists or as terrorists, though they do not want to admit that in public.

in the project of construction of collective (national) identity, where struggle for recognition and participation is necessary when the self-understanding of a group is not reflected in the understanding by others. This lack of understanding of the self by others emerges in Hussein's comment:

> I personally believe that people are guided by the information they receive. So, you cannot restrict yourself to the stories on British news channels. It is clear, when there is a suicide operation and when they (Israel) attack Palestinian homes in retaliation, the coverage is totally different. They show you blood and people carried away (in the attack), but they definitely do not focus on this when it comes to the Palestinian story. Arabic television shows you what happens.

8.7 Between Palestinian-ism and Cosmopolitanism

Crucially, it was in the informants' contrasting of different news narrations that the tension between the personal and the collective or the particular and the cosmopolitan was played out in the interviews, and it was within such contexts that comments such as "now, I am Palestinian" or "I am becoming more Palestinian" were voiced by various informants, irrespective of their age, gender, socio-economic status or religious orientations, making it possible to understand them as reflecting defensive, emotional reactions to perceptions of exclusion, non-recognition and non-visibility in the British public sphere, including in the mainstream media. Judith (28) is clear about this:

> The news has affected *us*, also *me* personally. If we talk of coverage of the *intifada*, the only thing that is being said is that we are Islamic terrorist and that these people (the suicide bombers) are brainwashed and you feel the mainstream

media does not want to talk about anything else or tell the story. There is not enough analysis of us or awareness of the problem...This is why *I* feel different, that *we* are different. (My emphasis)

And in the comment by Maher, a young adult during an interview with his mother and a friend: "The news (on the BBC and CNN) makes me anxious or angry. Sometimes, without intending to, I develop anti-Jewish attitudes even though you don't want to really. But when you see something on the news, about Israel, for instance, you cannot but become like that."

These comments suggest that although the process of identification in itself suggests fluidity, people's identifications can "feel essential and natural" at the level of experience (cf. Ang 2000) and at the level of emotion. Indeed, as argued in Chapter Two, essentialising discourses about identity remain crucial to boundary-making processes as they operate to naturalise (rather than problematise) the construction of a politically categorised group as being identifiable and characterised by a core essence, whether real or imagined, thus resulting in impasse and closure reflected in hegemonic discourses of Us and Them, which on the face of it appear to render the differences within and between the informants invisible. Bashar (22) says:

> I did not feel this way (as a Palestinian) before, but when the *intifada* happened and all the (television) pictures, it became clear to me that it was important to be with people you care and to care. I had Jewish friends then, but they don't care about this. Also, the English in general are not interested and the Arab community here is divided, lots of division. Frankly, this has made me want to get out of there. I feel there is no real community and I feel a stranger. Everybody keeps to themselves and I am beginning to feel it does not work.

The ambivalent relations between the 'I' and the 'we' was a consistent feature of many of the interviews, drawing attention to the tension between the two, as well as their co-existence while pointing to how the rhetorical appeal of the collective or the particular, the "self" is given meaning through its relation to the collective. Indeed, the rhetoric of belonging came into clear relief in the informants' accounts of what it means to be Palestinian – most said this meant an identification with an entity called Palestine (irrespective of what and where the borders of this entity are, or what political structure it has); that Palestinians in diaspora have the right to return to that homeland, that the struggle against Israel is justified and that Western policy and Western media are biased towards Israel, repeating rhetorical language of collective dispossession, struggle and return which has come to index Palestinian-ness and which has found voice in Palestinian political mythologies and nationalist discourses.

Such discourses of 'Palestinian-ness' imply that being Palestinian is a taken-for-granted attribute, one that people acquire through kinship and family ties, thus pointing to essentialist aspects of identification that presume identity as a fixed, given entity. This is how a woman in her mid-50s put it: "I am Palestinian. It is something inside me. I feel connected. It is in your blood."

Interestingly, however, while most of those interviewed for this research identified themselves as Palestinian, many said that being Palestinian meant being different and/or unique, that being Palestinian meant being the underdog or the victim, but also resisting and struggling, conforming with public and nationalistic discourses about Palestinian-ness. Some even suggested that being Palestinian meant being different from other Arabs,

pointing to how identification with this core essence is dictated by political rather than by ethnic[28] considerations. This emerges in the following comment by Wael (28):

> I was born a Palestinian and I have memories. In Palestine, you are with your family so what can I tell you. I do not depend on the community or the idea of the community. When I see a Palestinian, I feel very happy. To be honest with you, there is a problem with the Arabs and the Gulf people. We have our own culture and our own dialect even. Even though we were born outside Palestine and live outside it, we still feel Palestinian, Our thoughts are Palestinian, everything, our customs our traditions and even our food and the way we bring up our children we tell them we are Palestinian.

The following excerpt during a group interview with four 50-plus women in London also brings across the notion of distinctiveness:

> Fadwa: I am ashamed to say I am an Arab, but not ashamed to say I am Palestinian.
> Mona: It is not a cultural thing, when you are talking about Arab culture, of course there is a lot in common, but perhaps not politically.

8.8 Tensions of Belonging

Such particularistic (exclusionary) dimensions of what it means to be Palestinian weave through most of the informants' accounts of 'belonging and longing', the third interrelated theme that threads through the informants' narratives. As suggested in previous chapters, the concept of belonging remains problematic because it constitutes a political and cultural field of global contestation that highlights a range of pertinent issues concerning relations between individuals, groups and communities (Hedetoft and Hjort

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[28] Palestinians share with other Arabs some of the key distinguishing features of ethnic groups (cf. Smith 1983) — for example, language, culture, religion, geographic territory in the broad sense and customs.

2002). These contestations become more pertinent when connections between people and their homeland are threatened as it is under such conditions that 'identities' are thought of and constructed as related to space. This is reflected in Mahmoud's comment in a group interview in Manchester:

> I was born in Palestine, but left when I was five. So to talk of memories is perhaps not appropriate in my case, and yet there is a feeling of something like nostalgia for the street and the homeland. There are no personal memories, but when you live in Kuwait and Britain and whether you are rich or poor, you remain a Palestinian and a refugee and you remain not accepted in these societies and you have to resolve these problems. What do you when you have this feeling of longing and this notion that you may 'never' go back?

The tensions between longing and be-longing also come across in Jamil's comment below:

> I feel part of the society here, but I am not here out of my own choice. Perhaps that would be different if I have the chance to go back. You can say this is my adopted country, but even with adoption, one has a choice. I simply don't and I feel strongly about this because I would like to go back.

However, despite (or along with) these essentialising notions, respondents were reflexive about longing and belonging, suggesting that where people feel they belong (the cultural or ethnic home) may not match objective ascriptions of membership (to the political or civic home) and that belonging separates into its two constituent parts: 'being' in one place, and 'longing' for another (Hedetoft and Hjort 2002: ix). Maha, for instance, says that she feels integrated in British society and that is reflected in her 'social' interactions, but still makes the crucial distinction that her 'feelings' are Palestinian: "Psychologically,

I cannot be but Palestinian." While Omar, a 35-year-old middle-class businessman, is

more reflexive in his assessment of belonging and the tensions involved:

> London is an extremely cosmopolitan city and it is difficult to define exactly who
> is a traditional British person here. The standard definition of what it means to be
> British is blurred. This country is my home now and I feel integrated in as much
> as I am capable of doing anything in this country that anybody purely British can
> do. At the same time, however, I have my political identifications and attachments
> to Palestine…I guess it is because I also feel comfortable when I go back.

Before bringing up the instances where the contestations inherent in the concept of

belonging come across in the interview material, it is relevant to outline, albeit briefly,

the diversity of the respondents in terms of how they place themselves in the diasporic

space. First, there are those informants who say they are fully integrated into British

society. These are generally the first generation migrants who arrived in the UK for

business and trade reasons. Second, there is the category of more recent arrivals into

Britain, such as the political asylum seekers, who for different reasons remain more

involved and in touch with what is going on in the homeland. Then there is the category

of the young adults and children, those mainly born in Britain, who see themselves as

British, but whose sense of belonging has been disrupted by the intensity and severity of

events, making them more aware of the diversity of positions they are invited or able to

choose to take up, in varying contexts, and prompting questions such as "Who am I?",

"Where do I speak from?" and "Who is speaking for me?"

Many of the informants in this study said they were not members of, or involved in, the various Palestinian organisations in Britain,[29] noting that these were overtly political and factional, or too Moslem-centrist. Most respondents, irrespective of the categorisation outlined above, talked of being influenced by a variety of cultures, emphasising that their sense of belonging cannot only be related to ethnicity or nationality. Ruba, the 19-year old London-born Palestinian, is eloquent in articulating how her beliefs and lived experiences all influenced her identification:

> It is always difficult being in a place where people don't really know about you and their minds are filled with media and what they see on the news. Then, I know I am not really English. I was born here, yes, I was brought up here, my education was here. Some of my friends are English, but the people don't look at me and say she is English. I don't look it, I'm always going to be different. It's difficult…when you were kids you knew that children don't know much. So if they say something bad about me it is because of that. But when you get older and you still hear people saying something bad about you, then you start defending yourself. You just start, you know. You get into a flap and you probably use the wrong arguments and then you start using your mind. You start realizing that there's gonna be people who don't like you and there's gonna be others who do and then you just go along with people that like you. That's all right. There are plenty of people in the world…it is not a big deal.

Other informants said they were comfortable being in Britain and that their experience of living in Britain was positive in many ways — their accounts reflected a sense of belonging to the cosmopolitan, or identification with the cosmopolitan aspect of living in Britain. This was particularly evident among respondents living in London. Such is the case of Mansour, who has been living in London since the late 1960s: "I feel I am integrated with the cosmopolitan aspect of Britain, of London. Living in London reminds

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[29] Many respondents were wary about talking of their political affiliations in the open. This is not surprising considering that many felt anxious about their position in the host country as well as about their relations with other Arab states and the homeland.

me of the Palestinian hara (neighbourhood). I have no problems in Britain. Whenever I

come back to London (after a trip), I feel it is home." Similar notions of what it means to

be a cosmopolitan emerge in Reem's comment:

> I am integrated with the cosmopolitan aspect of British society. Probably more
> than I am with the Palestinian society, the diaspora or whatever. I am not
> integrated with it or with the total absolute English side, but the cosmopolitan
> side. I like it here on Portobello road, with the Jamaicans, Spanish and
> Portuguese. We are all foreigners here and even the English are foreigners. This
> place reminds me of the *hara* (the neighbourhood). A couple of the guys who sell
> the strawberries shout and say 'look, these are from Palestine.' They get so
> excited about it and they sold me a box for one pound. I like this. It is home.

Many of the informants said they identified with Western values, saying they were loyal

to Britain not only for giving them a home and a refuge, but also because of its legal

systems and respect for human values, identifications that were in stark contrast to the

emotive and affective identifications and discourses of belonging to the collective.

Husam, a young political asylum seeker, illustrates this:

> We have to remember that Britain has treated us differently. It is not because the
> British like us, but because they have a law and this is good because I feel
> protected. Unfortunately, you do not find this in the Arab countries, where you are
> treated like a second-class citizen.

As does Ahlam in her reflections on what it means for her to be a global 'citizen': "It

(what it means to be Palestinian and what it means to be a cosmopolitan) is a fine line

really…But the chances are that in Britain I feel more protected and I identify with the

human element of my identity, where I feel an equal *citizen* of the world." Beck (2003),

in his definition of Europe as cosmopolitan, notes that …"in the face of growing transnational interconnections and obligations, Europe is turning into an open network with blurring boundaries, where the outside is already inside" (Beck 2003: 238). In this respect, cosmopolitan citizens of Europe can be defined by their capacity to internalise the other, as individuals who incorporate otherwise global cultures into their own sense of themselves.

The informants' discourses suggest that they are often comfortably cosmopolitan in the exact sense that Beck's definition of the term implies, while suggesting that they are also sensitive to the presence of the other, or as Beck puts it that the outside is already inside. This sensitivity to the other was evident in their discourses about the World Trade Centre attacks in 2001 and their expressions of sympathy to the victims as well as in some informants' criticism of Palestinian suicide bombings and sympathy to Jewish victims as well. Mona, for example, discussed how upset she was about the death of innocent people, including Jews, in the attacks, but then went on to say how this was also harmful to the Palestinians.

In their reflections on belonging and home, some of the informants said belonging meant they socialised with some others, thus pointing to how they construct real boundaries along with the symbolic ones they construct through discourse, others said there was also a need to integrate with and share the cultural values of the host culture, suggesting that the attachment of Palestinian diasporic communities to a particular place is shaped through the never-ending dialogue between communities and cultures, through the multiplicity of these members' experiences and the interrelation of the multiple identities and their members (cf. Hall 1992; Gillespie 1995; Georgiou 2001). However,

there was a sense that it was because they felt secure in Britain that some respondents felt confident enough to talk about themselves and their concerns in times of crises as well as to take part in societal action, which may not have happened in another place, therefore attesting to their comfort with be-longing and with being in British society. The following exchange in a group interview with four women in London illustrates this:

Ilham: To be honest with you, I am grateful and happy to be living here, to be given a chance. This country has given me the freedom of speech which we do not have back home. And, this has helped us to see *ourselves* as equal because *we* know that the law is superior.
Lama: I would like to add another point here. It is true we can acclimatise with English people, but we prefer to be with our own people.
Ilham: of course, of course.
Lama: Even Arab Jews[30], I have some friends like that, and I prefer their company to the English because I understand them.
Mona: But as women we have developed in a way different than if we were in the homeland. This means we have developed as human beings. Of course, at the end of the day we like to be together and speak to each other in Arabic and talk and laugh at the same time. We suffer together and feel the same pain when we see the news. When it comes to women, I consider myself to be the fortunate one.
Lama: This is not a question about women only. It is more than that. This morning, I woke to a phone call from my mother in Jordan telling me off and asking me why was I calling for a boycott of Israeli goods on television. My mother is worried because she has been taught to be a coward. So I told her that there are also Jews and British people with us protesting and that I was not alone, but she insisted that I was doing something wrong, simply because I was (filmed) on Arabic television and (filmed) speaking in Arabic which everyone can understand . She was worried and told me not to get involved, but to stay at home with the kids.

Importantly, it was in their reflections on and talk about the diverse news narratives of the continuous crises related to the conflict with Israel that modes of identification with the collective, what I call a Palestine-centred identification, became prevalent. This was a

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[30] She was referring to Iraqi Jews.

discursive identification that gains a double meaning; as excluding others and as demanding recognition[31] and visibility in the national public sphere[32], resulting in the respondents' active engagement in the process of drawing boundaries within which they differentiated between who is Palestinian and who is not, who is a member of the in and who is not. Fadwa illustrates this clearly in her comment: "Now I am becoming more Palestinian". Such particularistic notions, the interview material showed, were clearly linked to the intensive and extensive flows and counter-flows of information and analyses of events by diverse news media, which served to disturb the informants' normal 'cultural' and 'political' reference points, contributing to closed and exclusionary narrations of their identification. Randa also makes this clear:

> In the past when people asked me I used to say I came from Jordan. It was easier, but recently I feel the need to say I am Palestinian and to say that I am a Christian Palestinian to counter the image that it is an Islamic cause, it is not, we (Christian Palestinians) have a big presence. I sometimes wear a big cross to emphasise that. I never used to say where I came from, but after the *intifada* and what is going on, I am saying I am Palestinian as I feel very strongly about this issue particularly as people and the media stir things up.

These discourses were not exclusive to women, as the following comment by 22-year-old Bashar confirms:

> I feel Palestinian because my identity is under threat. I do not feel that I can assert myself. I am in a state of limbo which is why it is hard for me to stay here. There is no way to solidify my identity, nothing. I don't have a group to turn to. So I am practicing my Arabic to go back. I have felt a big change since 2000.

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[31] These notions of recognition/non-recognition and belonging/non-belonging have been rendered problematic by the social changes of modernity and the increasing mediation of everyday lives.
[32] It was in this sphere that the US binary logic of 'you are either with us, or against us' were hammered home incessantly through the mainstream media, bringing into question the possibility of cosmopolitan identifications.

As detailed in Chapters Two and Four, it is not unusual for people such as the

Palestinians to have multiple identifications. What comes across in the interviews,

however, is that their discourses of belonging to or identifying with the cosmopolitan

aspect of everyday life in Britain *cannot* (my emphasis) be seen as a substitute for or

alternative to natural assumptions of national rootedness and homeness, but *rather as an*

extension or complement to the national (my emphasis). This is how Maha puts it:

> I am 90 per cent Palestinian. Psychologically and emotionally, I cannot be but
> Palestinian. But I also feel integrated in this society for the social aspects. Living
> here has rubbed off on me. For instance, I have learned the importance of keeping
> appointments. This is not a Palestinian custom. It is here and in some other
> aspects of living here that I feel British, but not in others. I cannot and never will
> be.

The notions of what it means to be Palestinian outlined above may suggest that the

informants' accounts of Palestinian-ness reflect a homogeneous 'we' and 'us'. However,

the interview material showed that despite projecting themselves within the contours of a

'we-centred' or a 'Palestine-centred' identification, informants differed in how they

conceptualised this identification within the framework of their everyday experiences in

diaspora, including their engagement with news. Some simply said they were Palestinian,

some emphasised the Moslem component of their identifications (here, they also

identified with the Islamic nation as a whole), while others said they were British

Palestinian or British Arabs.

Such discourses suggested that they were engaged in *creative ambivalence* about belonging and community as they alternated between rational and emotional talk of what it means to be Palestinian (Palestinian-ness) and what it means to feel Palestinian (Palestinian-ism), reflecting how negotiating identity is a continuous process of identification.

What was clear was that negotiating this creative ambivalence is a complex process as it involves continuous movement and tension between self-reflexivity and a group — and/or nation-awareness and reflexivity. Indeed, this tension came up in contrastive and reflexive discussions and thinking about belonging and community, not only as part of a specific group, but also as members of the host society and as citizens of the world, reflecting how the construction of a national or collective identity remains a problematic concept whose meanings remain contested. This emerges in the following comment by Adeeb:

> I define myself as Palestinian, but there is no particular reason for that. However, I have never felt anything but. I used to say I am Lebanese to people because I don't want to have the whole discussion about Palestinian and Israel...It may be because I have a lot of common with the Palestinians. I cannot find anything really to relate to the English. Not that I have anything against them. Funnily enough, I also have a lot in common with Jews in London. There are a lot of them who live around here. But I always felt, I don't know, it is the old cliché, stuck to my own group.

8.9 News and Memory Work; Past and Present, I and We

The informants' discourses reflect how the taking up of particular boundaries and positionings is not random, but involves reflexive and thinking processes about the self[33] and about the collective that provide the dimensions through which people can experience a sense of *oneself and the collective as located in a temporally extended narrative.*[34] Drawing on the interview material, this thesis suggests that news, particularly television news, is a suitable genre for understanding this location within an extended narrative because of its constant mediation of the past in the present and between personal and collective memories. The past intrudes in the present by acting as a carrier of symbolism and connotative force (see Hoskins 2004). The following comment by Hussein Said shows how news mediate these processes by constructing a view of the world as a perpetual and pervasive present:

> What come to my mind (when watching the news on TV today) are images from the past, Sabra and Shatila[35] and the exile of the Palestinians. These will never be wiped out of my mind. When you see Mohammed al-Durra[36], you are reminded of the past and you start hating Israel even more. Something like this makes me really angry. These stories bring back memories. Of course, they do. But it is not a news story itself, it is when you follow a story every day, it becomes a *life story, connected to your life* story. And this happens every day. (My emphasis)

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[33] Although individualism (the self) remains a central value in the traditional and still prevalent Arab-Islamic worldview, unlike its conception in Western culture as a unifying concept that may set a limit to group involvement, individualism among Arab people and in Arab cultures is composed of both group and individual identifications, thus reflecting the sense that each complements the other (Ayish 2003).

[34] See Chapter Four for a discussion on memory and representation.

[35] This is a reference to the 1982 massacre of Palestinian refugees in the Lebanese-based refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila.

[36] The 12-year-old boy killed by gunfire in the arms of his father.

Hussein's comment illustrates how news can provoke memories in different ways, confirming that it can serve as a 'framework' of memory for its audience through its reproduction and repetition of past events and its mediation of the past in the present. Nowhere is this more apparent than in informants' discourses about their engagement with Arabic transnational channels' news programmes. The following two excerpts, first during an interview with Sawsan her husband and son Bashar, at their home in North London, and the second with Hussein:

> Sawsan: The news on these (Arabic) channels reminds *us* of what has happened to *us* and to our families. ...the memories are very clear and do not go with the loss of the homeland. *Deir Yassin*[37] I always remember.
> Bashar: All the recent events also make me think of Palestine. When I switch on the TV, there are the 15 year old bombers and the children stone throwers and you know the Palestinians are defenceless and this is what we have to do against the military might of Israel.

> Hussein: News is about memories. Of course, but it is not the story itself because the story is there every day and in this way, it becomes a life story. In addition, and this is particularly important when talking about Arabic current affairs programmes and analyses, the presenter starts with something like 'On a day like this', so and so happened...of course, this brings things back.

In talking about news, the informants often began their stories in the present then worked their way back to the past, before going back to the present again.[38] The constant weaving of the past into the present and the private into the public (the singular I into the plural we) brings into analytical focus the centrality of event time (cf. Giltin 1980), or the

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[37] This is an important date in the Palestinian national calendar and refers to the killing of hundreds of Palestinians in a village.

[38] This contrasts with the work of Rosemary Sayigh (1998), who in her study of life histories of Palestinian women in the refugee camp of Shatila found that the starting point of narratives was invariably 1948, not only among those who have experienced the events of expulsion, but also among the younger generation who would have been too young to remember ("Palestinian Camp Women as Tellers of History," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27, 2.)

'experience' of time in processes of mediation and which draw attention to the ways in which news can "operate as a framework of memory[39] as it assists in the continuous reconstruction of the past by dominating the present" (Hoskins 2004:110). Indeed, the informants' discourses, but particularly those by the older generation, appeared to move constantly between different historical registers. At times this would take the form of simple comparison, like comparing their life now with how it used to be in the past, and at times it would be moving between events that had significance in their lives.

Importantly, it was in this sustained interweaving of present and past that they tended to use the plural 'we' and 'us', reflecting how the personal can become political. This comes across in the comment by Husam in a group interview with his friends:

> One day I brought a friend to my house and we watched *al-Jazeera* together and he started crying. But this is normal for *us*, for him he had no idea. For me because of living the first *intifada* (in 1987) in real life, it was normal…and the news brings back those days a lot, a lot…*news is me, my life, my past and what I see now I used to see in real life.* When I see the martyrs, the killing, the shooting, the destruction, there is *no doubt in my mind that it is me.*

Comments such as "*the news is us*" or "*the news is me*" were repeatedly used by the informants. The use of the pronoun 'us' is not only indicative of the 'us and them' dichotomy that evokes notions of segregation and difference, according centrality to 'our story rather than theirs', but also crucially points to how the *experiences* of 'here-and-now' lose their immediate spatio-temporal references as times of distances are 'plugged in' to the present time system of television news. Lash (2002) has identified these

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[39] Andrew Hoskins (2004) has argued that the time and speed of mediated events have greater applicability and meaning today because the blurring of the public and the private, and the personal and political domains become part of the loss of context.

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experiences as shifts in mediated experience, whereby the "mass media and the new

media are media of not representation, but of presentation....The newer media of

presentation come to you. They turn up in your house and present themselves...in real

time" (Lash 2002: 71).

This notion of the collapse of the past in the present reflects how informants'

narrations can be seen as being 'mediated' by news,[40] where the meanings of news

extend beyond the moment of consumption, and where news does not only provide a

shared agenda for discussion, but also a 'shared media experience' (Couldry 2000:35).

This comes across in the following excerpt during a group interview in London:

Ibrahim: The news, what do you mean....I AM the news. I have been here for 10
months, but my dreams at night are still of the camps. I see myself running and the
Jews[41] (what he means are Israelis) are running after me. This is my life. The first
thing I do is to turn on the news in the morning because it is my life. We have been
moulded this way.
Husam: Before the intifada, it was all the same for me. But the news of the intifada
was different, because it is part of me, because I was there in the first intifada. The
news brings this back to me. When I see the martyrs, the killing, the shooting and the
destruction of homes, it is me, of course, there is no doubt.

And also in the following comment by Maha in a separate interview:

Television news tells you *our* story. The images clearly show you the agony and the
sadness. Sometimes, they show you old people wearing the Palestinian headdress and
it is here that I feel my heart singing. But also the news pulls at my heart and makes
me cry, particularly when a peasant woman is shown using our dialect and talking
about how the land was stolen. But as much as I feel sad, I also feel happy because
this is *the story, our story*. The old woman and the homeland and the orange groves
and I can see and imagine how this woman is going through...*You start thinking*

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[40] Frith (1996), writing about music consumption, has argued that symbolic products can construct
mediated experiences that can be made sense of by taking on both subjective and collective positionings.
[41] It was interesting that many respondents often referred to Israelis as Jews, reflecting how the political and
the religious are sometimes intertwined categories.

about the stories that your mother had told you, the stories of the past. Really, you
remember everything from home and you remember even if you did not actually live
there.

8.10 Interpretation and Commuting- Uses of News

The processes that the informants drew on to make sense of the news of the crises and the

diverse representations were interpretative — informants built on and contrasted the news

event with their own experiences and the experiences of others known to them, thus

allowing them to negotiate the most important sources of tensions in their everyday lives,

including tensions about their status in the host society and about their personal security.

At the same time, in making sense of news, respondents moved between the news stories

and their own lives, serving to blur the boundaries between real and mediated experiences

while also drawing analogies between themselves and the news stories — analogies are

relevant because they point to shared elements and shared and/or collective memories

that the informants may use to either prove or disprove the credibility of a news story.

Commuting[42] often involves an activation of roles — cultural, professional and

ideological, whereby the implications of general social issues for particular roles and

situations can be considered and weighed against experience and knowledge.

Commuting, as Livingstone (1998) notes, takes place at an interpretive level because

people relate to news through their personal experience or through the experiences of

others, but also at the narrative level because it is through story-telling that people

understand and make sense of what is going on around them. Narratives thus emerge as

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[42] The process of commuting, as Liebes and Katz (1993) see it, refers to the ways in which reception of
symbolic products involves a continual shift between the story and the viewers' lives.

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people actively move between the private and the public, the personal and the political, the past and the present, as well as between the rational and the emotional.

Commuting took up a lot of narrative space in the interviews, reflecting how the informants' personal and collective memories were continually projected onto the news. Mansour, for example, commuted to his visits to his uncle's house in the West Bank village of Aseera to describe how he experiences his identity today:

> When you ask me about my identity…I go back to my relatives in the Occupied Territories. My identity is my memories of my life with them. It comes from a picture hung in the main living room in my uncle's house. It was a picture of Deir Yassin that my uncle had framed. You cannot escape it. It has shaped my vision…but it (my identity) also comes from the daily reminder in the news. There is no escape. You feel it is never ending.[43]

The respondents' switch from the past to the present and from one event to another suggests that the news these respondents interact with offers them an entry point, or the green light, to think and talk about their own narrative, and to locate these narratives in a time dimension that extends into the past and future, what Hoskins (2001) calls extended present. What was interesting, though, was how some respondents' narratives appeared to be contingent, accentuating a sense of suffering as deriving from chaotic forces and without meaning. This is clearly conveyed in the comment by Um Ali:

> I watch the news and live with the story. I live with it. I imagine myself there and feel as though they (the Israelis) have hit me, killed me. Those children are like my children. I am always there (in Palestine). I start to cry. This little girl who was martyred and Mohammed al-Durra…we live with them, with him. They (Arab satellite channels) always show his picture dying in his father's arms. But these children, their images, I cannot forget. I dream of them all the time. You see, I

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[43] This narrative, as well as others', come across as disconnected fragments where accounts of the personal narrative are often absent from the story.

imagine myself. I am a mother. God forbid I have a son or daughter and this happening to them, but I imagine myself there, with them.

This particular respondents' narrative reflects an identification that is a psychological process whereby the viewer projects herself on to the characters and their dilemmas. It is during these processes that we can think of identity as an experience, particularly when sense-making is a process of negotiating one's place in society that is enacted through the process of intepellation, or summoning whoever is listening as a secondary witness in what Hesford (2004) has called the "rhetorical space of intersubjectivity".

These processes come into clear relief in the ways in which the informants made use of news to narrate their story and to socialise with others - though news is mostly consumed in the informants' homes or in the intimate place, talk about news takes place outside the home with friends, over the telephone or during visits, with acquaintances at work or in public places, therefore completing the process of communication. In retelling what they have watched on television newscasts, what they have heard on the radio or read in the papers, the Palestinians interviewed for this research, become storytellers themselves, inflecting stories gleaned from their news interaction in ways relevant to their own lives, thus moving concerns from the private to the public domain (see Hobson 1989).

This interactivity is a two-way process — people often call their friends to alert them about something going on, bringing the home to the community and vice versa. This is Um Ali again:

I have a friend who is like me. She also follows the news stories and always calls me when something happens. We coordinate sometimes. For instance, she would turn on

al-Jazeera if I am watching other another and calls me when something happens. Sometimes she calls me on my mobile (if I am out) to ask me to go home and turn on *al-Manar* because there is a news flash.

That said, interactivity is not peculiar to the respondents. Indeed, communication, particularly in the form of oral expression, has always been a valued practice in Arab societies and talk (in families and with friends) is a practice that has roots in embedded social and cultural practices. Palestinian social life, like that of many other Arabs, depends on endless socialising and visiting. People visit and spend hours in each others' homes and it is not unknown for people to turn up at somebody's home uninvited, yet to expect to partake in that household's daily practices. As news media saturate the private and the public, media and news consumption practices are also influenced by this extended sociality, which blurs the boundaries between the private and the public; media are communally consumed and news talk becomes an everyday bonding experience, not only between family members, but also between friends and work colleagues.

Though telling one's personal stories always occurs in the present (although their content may refer to the past, present or future), what makes narrativised accounts interesting for the researcher is the ways in which narrations serve to locate any one event in relation to other events, thus making them meaningful. This location of the event in relation to others comes into relief when the informants, irrespective of gender, shifted the discussion to issues close to their own existence, particularly developments in the Palestinian-Israeli narrative, life in Britain, as well as their anxieties and fears, conversations that reflect the complexity of their everyday cultural experiences, and the

ways in which themes of crisis, boundary-making and belonging are interrelated and mutually constitutive dynamics in people's everyday lives.

Most of the informants became more comfortable when diverting from the interview questions to discuss politics and personal experiences, which allowed them space to personalise and narrativise news stories as they linked them to personal and collective experiences. This is an excerpt from the Karim household interview:

> Widad: You see, for me, my life is the same as others. When we left Palestine, I was a child and my parents suffered. My mother did not have enough milk to feed me and the situation was very bad. They left their homes and their lands and slept under trees for a while until we arrived at ein el-hilweh camp in Lebanon. I left the camp when I got married in 1966, but I did not leave it totally…that is why my children feel connected.

Crucially for the understanding of news as a mediating framework for the durability of collective memory and political mythologies, the informants' talk suggested that what Gitlin (1980) called 'event times' are the defining moments that propelled them to think about and articulate their identity. Though there is reason to believe that these accounts may be articulated differently were the interviews conducted following the 1993 signing of the peace accord between Israel and the Palestinians, I argue that the processes that media audiences tap into to make sense of the news and define their identities would hardly be different.

The interview material shows these processes, commuting, narrativity and story-telling, are key to making sense of news events, confirming Ricoeur's (1984) theorisation of time and narrative in which he argued that we understand our own lives — our own selves and our own places in the world — by interpreting our lives as if they

were narratives, or, more precisely, through the work of interpreting our lives, we turn

them into narratives, and life understood as narrative constitutes self-understanding.

Importantly for my argument, what emerges from the interviews is the sense that

audiences make use of news as 'ontological narratives' not only to make sense of their

lives, but also to act. In this sense, ontological narratives are used to define who we are;

which, in turn, is a precondition for knowing what to do (Somers and Gibson 1994). This

'doing' will, in turn, produce new narratives and hence new actions, thus underlining the

ways in which the relationship between narrative and ontology is processual and mutually

constitutive as both are conditions of the other; neither are a priori. This notion of doing

(also see previous chapter) comes across in the following comment by Maha:

> The news has given me the impetus to discuss it with foreigners...I have a lot of
> English and foreign friends and the news has given me the entry point to show them
> that they have double standards.

Ontological narratives process events into episodes during which processes of

identification become embedded in spatial and time relations. This comes into clear relief

in the ways in which respondents' accounts shifted from discussions of news stories to

representations of those stories, to the realities of their own lives, thus moving from past to

present to future and playing a significant role in processes of self and collective

identification as well as providing a context and a resource for people's experimentation

with private and group definitions, or, in other words, drawing boundaries — the subtle,

shifting and active recognition of the self and the other, and the marking out and

maintenance of the sense of who belongs and who does not.

8.11 News, Events and Identity Work

Chapter Four discussed the centrality of events in the shaping of what it means to be Palestinian (Palestinian-ness) and what it means to feel Palestinian (Palestinian-ism). This chapter has shown that events - in socio-speak, the political and social contexts - are central for understanding the ways in which the informants define themselves as individuals, as members of a diaspora and as members of a collective.

In summary, two key points need to be made in conjunction with the findings presented above: the first suggests that the relationship between news and talk of belonging and community can be causal at times of crises, and the second is that news can contribute to the creation of a symbolic communicative space.

Through the thematic analysis of the interview material involving a continuous movement between the data and theory, this chapter has shown that it is through their engagement with the continuous, and, in particular, the televised news stories, of and related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, that a sense of an 'imagined community in crisis' emerges in their talk about news. This consciousness, or what I call a Palestine-centred identification, is clearly related to the timing of the research as well as the cultural and social positioning of the informants.

At the same time, the interview material shows that it is in their talk about the diverse and polarised accounts of the same events that the informants were engaged in creative discourses about themselves and the collective, which served to confirm how their talk of identity involved movements between closed and essentialising thinking about

themselves and their community and open thinking that allowed for the otherness of the other, confirming how identity is not a thing, but a continuous discursive process of identification.

In making sense of news, the informants used commuting processes that served to weave the present in the past and to index particular sites of new trauma[44] as trajectories of a continuous time, where perceptions of time, post-1948, are forged through dialogical imaginations of particular events, *al-Nakba, al-Naksa*, the first and second *intifada*, the September 11, 2001, attacks in the US, and the war against Iraq, that all served to produce narratives of Palestinian-ness as a constantly re-engendered condition of suffering, struggle and resistance.

Paradoxically, while the interviews revealed deep-seated ambiguities and contradictions regarding the diverse news narratives of the same events, intense emotions expressed in the interviews, such as shock, disbelief, anger and mistrust, were tied up with a sense of being compelled to engage with news continuously. Though it is difficult to draw a line between whether the sense of being compelled to engage with news on a regular basis is dictated by the emotional content of news or by the expectations of other members of the 'imagined community' to participate with such intensity, there is little doubt that both of these factors have a profound impact on the ways in which people talk of themselves and their community.

The data presented above illustrate the sense of the informants' ambivalence and cognitive dissonance regarding the ways in which events are mediated by news, while also pointing to flexible thinking and 'cosmopolitan' modes of consciousness that eschew

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[44] Some talked of the trauma of exile, the trauma of living in Britain and the trauma of the Palestinian people as a collective.

narrow, particularistic patterns of thinking and belonging. That said, there is little doubt that the informants' capacity to be flexible also depends on linguistic, intellectual and cultural competences — those able to converse in English, for example, were more reflexive in their thinking about themselves and their community — and depends also on perceptions of cultural diversity and individuality as assets. What this means is that living in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society like Britain can allow people to tap into diversity and interaction with different cultures and for 'alternative' imaginations that stretch our thinking about the national 'imaginary' that is so central to the Andersonian model.

Chapter Nine

Conclusions

The struggles occasioned by identity politics need to be understood not as simply between those who claim different identities, but within each subject, as the multiple and contending discourses of our era challenge any or our efforts to attain stable self- recognition or coherent subjectivity (Calhoun 1994:19-20).

This thesis has examined the significance and dynamics of news to members of the Palestinian diaspora in Britain. I chose news as the media genre for investigation because of its assumed centrality for the political, economic and cultural participation of individuals at the local, national and global levels and because the news media have largely been neglected in the burgeoning literature on migrant and diasporic groups. I focused on the Palestinians in Britain as the subjects for this research because their long-term media invisibility in the British public space and their assymetrical power position vis-à-vis Israel have been crucial to the ways in which they make sense of news and use it in their social actions and interactions.

In this study, I have shown that news, particularly television news, emerges as a significant (social) resource in the informants' everyday lives, and a crucial media genre around whose consumption the informants' talk of identity, of belonging and community and of citizenship are fraught with tensions between the personal and the political and between the collective (particular) and cosmopolitan (universal). These tensions were impossible to discount in the analysis of the interview data, highlighting that *identity politics* continues to matter in certain contexts. Yet to say that the informants become

more Palestinian or that they become more nationalistic and more politically and/or socially active because of their engagement with news would be misleading. Indeed, a core argument in this thesis is that a proper understanding of the ways in which people make sense of and use mediated representations necessitates situating meaning-making processes within their broader social, cultural and political contexts that eschew the media-centrism prevalent in much media research and that provide a holistic picture of how a variety of factors can shape mediation processes.

What emerges from the synthesis of the top-down approach (drawing on various inter-disciplinary theoretical paradigms) and the bottom-up approach (an audience study of the informants' attitudes to and talk about news) is that news functions (1) as a cultural and political forum that provides people and/or members of a particular political or cultural community with self-legitimation and (2) as a resource for participation in public life by its making people aware of and concerned about a range of issues pertaining to themselves and the collective. Though the findings related to this work are specific to the informants, I argue that they can contribute to our understanding of contemporary mediated cultures, diasporas, the meaning of news and its audience, and the processes within which identities are formed and transformed in contemporary cultures.

In this concluding chapter, I bring together the theoretical underpinnings informing this research and the empirical data to summarise its contributions. Before doing so, I use the next section to summarise each chapter's key points, then I move on to the key arguments and limitations of the thesis. I conclude the chapter by outlining this study's contribution to media and cultural studies, political communication literature, nationalism and collective memory and proposing new avenues for future research.

9.1 The chapters in context

The focus in much of the recent literature on diasporas and their media use in the context of globalisation has been on hybridity (Bhabha 1994; Brah 1996), a notion implying an arrived-at point between the local and global. By contrast, this research started with a rejection of the global and local binary which tends to obscure the interdependence and interweaving of these processes. This direction was also adopted in the analysis of the informants' uses and talk of a variety of news media, allowing me to move beyond the bipolar models of power versus resistance and active versus passive popular in much audience and reception research, and focus on the *cognitive and interpretive* processes the informants use to make sense of news media they engage with on a daily basis.

This approach informed the theoretical frameworks adopted in this study. The first, detailed in Chapter Two, sees identity as a continuous discursive process of identification, a notion that captures the different and continuous negotiations of meanings articulated as people navigate various tensions and points of reference in their lives while taking into account the historical, socio-political, economic and discursive contexts within which these processes take shape. The second, proposed in Chapter Three, draws on the theoretical framework of mediation to argue for understanding news as a form of cultural discourse which allows us to examine through a bottom-up analysis how it remains a key media genre for contestations of culture and ideology. The third, detailed in Chapter Four, draws on Srebreny's (2000) notion of looking around to suggest that diasporas must be understood as social formations in the process of becoming, which

means they are responsive to local, global and transnational symbolic and material products.

In order to situate the informants in this study, Chapter Four built on a wide range of scholarship on Palestinian history, on national identity and communication, collective memory and political mythology to provide a historical account of the Palestinian diaspora that underscores the centrality of the twin narratives of Palestinian-ness (what it means to be Palestinian) and Palestinian-ism (Palestinian national consciousness). Chapter Five detailed the methodological rationale behind this study, a synthesis of a top-down (theoretical) approach and a bottom-up (empirical) analysis, and its drawbacks, while Chapter Six provided demographic and descriptive details of the informants and the modes of the analysis, which used the tools of thematic analysis to make sense of the data as well as a continuous recursive process that facilitated the interpretation by constantly moving between the theoretical arguments and the evidence.

In the second part of the thesis, Chapters Seven and Eight, I presented the analysis of the empirical work, based on the informants' attitudes to news, their identity and community. Chapter Seven focused on the informants' social uses of news, its centrality in their lives and its potential role in societal action and interaction. The chapter also provided a brief review of the different news media, including Arab satellite television that the informants engage with ritualistically and obsessively – their talk showed how these news media provide reference points that reinforce their ideological consciousness of nationhood and distinctiveness and also enable them to challenge dominant news frames as well as participate in public life, confirming that they represent alternative communicative spaces where citizenship and community can be practiced and

experienced. Chapter Eight discussed the informants' talk about themselves, community and belonging while paying particular attention to the processes – narrativity and commuting – that the informants make use of to take up different positionings. In highlighting the contexts within which the informants' discourses become essentialising, the chapter revealed the continuous tensions between the self and the collective and between the national and cosmopolitan. To pull these chapters together, I now turn to the main findings to address the relationship between news and identity and between news and social action.

9.2 The Arguments in Context: Identification, Mobilisation and Participation

I started this thesis by talking of the Palestinians' intimate or private sphere, a space where the Palestinians in Britain, like many other minority or diasporic group, talked and argued amongst themselves, i.e. within families and among friends, about their place in their community and in the host society. The intention was not to poke into the inadequacies of the Habermasian (1989) normative principle of the unitary public sphere - these have been eloquently addressed by many others, particularly within feminist literature. Rather, the aim was to explore whether and in what ways news can enable participation in public life and whether this participation is purely a matter of marking boundaries – these are the common frames that people use to negotiate positions between the familiar and unfamiliar and between the local and the global - and of challenging real and imagined perceptions of inclusion and exclusion rather than a matter of formal citizenship.

The context of the empirical inquiry was the continuing conflict between Israel and the Palestinians and other related events mediated by a diverse array of news media, including the mainstream (Western media) and transnational (Arabic satellite broadcasting) varieties. The period of investigation, November 2001 to June 2003, saw the most serious escalation in hostilities between Israel and the Palestinians since the beginning of the second Palestinian *intifada* (uprising) in September 2000. It was also a period that can be described as involving intense grassroots political communication, a form of transnational connectivity, between the Palestinians in Britain and similar others in other diasporic spaces and in the homeland.

Though it goes without saying that the informants' awareness and use of this transnational connectivity had been enhanced by the proliferation of and easy access to diverse news media, this thesis has shown that the intensification of conflicts in the Middle East and beyond and the uncertainties these create must be understood as having exacerbated a deep collective identity crisis centred on what it means to be Palestinian (Palestinian-ness) and what it means to feel Palestinian (Palestinian-ism) that has its roots in *al-Nakba* (the catastrophe) of 1948, an event that has been re-narrated, re-imagined and re-contextualised in subsequent unplanned 'media events'.

In analysing the informants' talk of news, I have shown that the global reach of news media, the immediacy of news and the live coverage of events mean that diasporas, such as the Palestinians, remain largely focused around nation-specific news dramas. At the same time, the analysis has shown that they are involved in negotiations of the parameters of citizenship and belonging in the host culture. Indeed, in the interviews conducted for this research, the informants' talk of news and of themselves suggested a

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continuous negotiation of positionings between what it means to be Palestinian (or the particular) and what it means to be cosmopolitan (or the universal) in the diasporic space. In other words, while their conversations claimed distinctiveness and particularlistic imaginations of the collective, they also appealed to universalistic principles of human and citizen rights, suggesting that while they are retreating into essentialising positions about themselves, their community and the 'other', they were reaching out to participate in the larger British public sphere.

Crucially, the informants' talk of news reflected their awareness of the co-existence of two competing discourses about themselves (in mainstream and transnational news media) and which functioned as interweaving discursive variations rather than as polar opposites. This interweaving was reflected in the informants' talk about and attitudes to news, which, this thesis argues, pointed to the *co-existence* in tension of open and closed or essentialising discourses. These closed discourses cannot be simply seen as discursive reifications of the distinctiveness of the community, but must also be understood as a means to mobilise for action, demand recognition and negotiate parameters of cultural and political citizenship in the host country.

This argument is supported by the analysis of the data in Chapter Eight where I suggest that the informants' discourses reflect a consciousness of what I call a Palestine-centred identification, a *discursive imagination* that has a double meaning, as excluding others and as demanding recognition and visibility. While these two strands of consciousness or imagination are not irreconcilable, there is a sense that what is foregrounded in their talk is not collective harmony or a political identification with an

increasingly metaphoric Palestinian nation, but a longing for self-respect and individual possibility and agency in the country of their residence (Britain).

The analysis of the interview material resonates with other findings in reception and audience studies, which have demonstrated that media audiences are neither totally passive nor totally active, but that they maintain a level of critical interpretation (cf. Livingstone and Lunt 1994). However, this thesis has also shown that the critical interpretation of news does not necessarily end at the moment of reception in the domestic space, but goes on to link everyday micro questions, such as those related to personal media preferences, who dictates these preferences or with whom one engages with media, to broader 'macro' questions of power, inclusion and exclusion in the public.

This interlinking came across clearly in the informants' active 'identity work' through dialogic engagement (cf. Billig 1991) as well as through participation. Evidence of this active engagement in identity work was apparent throughout, but came into stark relief particularly in the informants' contrasting between diverse mediated news accounts of the same event. It was in these contexts that questions relating to what these respondents perceived as their distinctiveness, as members of a particular political group, came into central focus, drawing attention to the ways in which news can play a role in the coming together of the audience members as a distinctive collective.

It was also within such contexts that comments such as *"now, I am Palestinian"* or *"I am becoming more Palestinian"* were voiced by various informants, irrespective of age, gender, socio-economic status or religious orientation, suggesting that their engagement with identity politics can be understood as defensive and emotional cognitive reactions to

perceptions of exclusion in the British public sphere as well as attempts to exercise citizenship.

It is commonly accepted that the experiences of migration and settlement themselves can require different orientations to the narratives through which identities are claimed orientations that are contingent on age, gender and reason for migration, but this thesis has shown that there were few generational or gender differences in the uses of news, suggesting that what was at stake here were claims to collective identity and community rather than claims to individuality. These findings, I argue, must be understood as contextual, and also in conjunction with the changes in the news media environment brought about by new technologies, 24-hour news and the prevalence of news of attachment rather than detachment (human interest as opposed to serious news), which have served to blur the boundaries between the private and public and between the personal and political.

The analysis of the informants' uses of news shows how news can facilitate communication with others, confirming similar findings in previous media research on the socialisation aspect of media use, and how the appropriation of news as ritual legitimises its centrality and relevance for the informants. However, I have also shown that the centrality of news does not relate to its informational values only, but also to its importance as a means of surveillance as it helps them 'stay alert' to immediate and distant threats.

Importantly, the analysis showed that most of the informants were competent in making sense of news and its status as *cultural discourse,* therefore suggesting they were aware of its potential power. The respondents consistently redefined and reinterpreted the

journalistic and political agendas, making critical comments of news content and media

practices as well as informed decodings of the largely ahistorical[1] mainstream (Western)

news reports. They were also critical of the cultural (ideological) framing of Arabic news

media irrespective of the fact that these news media provided them with supportive

frames of reference (I called this the consensus narrative of Arab societies). That said, the

analysis showed that the informants' conception of news as a specific resource for social

action varies according to the political and other social contexts in which they find

themselves and in which they put it to use. On the one hand, some of the informants,

though addicted to news, said they switched off because of their frustration or

disillusionment with the communication processes, while others made use of news to take

part in social action and to challenge dominant media frames.

Significantly, the analysis showed that the informants' access to different mediated

accounts of the same news event (particularly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict) enabled

them to *argue out*, meaning taking their debates about themselves and their community

outside their intimate and private sphere. However, to say that engagement with diverse

mediated news accounts on its own provokes societal action and participation would be

misleading.

Indeed, as suggested by several informants in their accounts of their engagement with

news, their ability *to argue out* was made possible because they lived in Britain and

because they felt secure enough to participate and to achieve a sense of civic individuality

and agency as understood in the Western perspective and which, according to liberal

theory, cuts across class, nation, gender and ethnicity. Sharif, the young and articulate

founder of Arabmediawatch (see Chapter Seven) has achieved this individuality in his

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[1] These reports were seen as lacking context and background.

assuming a *civic role* of responsibility by challenging the dominant media frames. In this respect, his assuming this role, fulfils the notion of the "pre or non-political that becomes actualised at particular moments when politics arise...the key here is to underscore the processual and contextual dimension; the political and politics are not simply given, but are constructed via word and deed" (Dahlgren 2003: 155).

These arguments notwithstanding, I do not underestimate the limitations of the research, which chiefly relate to the particularity of the case study, the Palestinians in Britain. The fact that the context of the research was the continuing conflict presupposes that the informants were engaged with the news narrative on a continuous basis. However, I tried to overcome these limitations and problems by adopting a reflexive research methodology that allowed me to constantly move between the empirical data and the theoretical framework.

The orientation of the research remains primarily qualitative, but the use of a simple quantitative data – based on the analysis of the interviews – offered additional material for understanding the interactions between the informants. The sample, achieved through a snowballing non-probability sampling technique, may not be representative, but the quantitative data based on the interviews appeared to offer an adequate representative sample of the population under study. To bring this study's contributions into focus, its five main insights are in order:

(a) *News as site for contestations over culture.* The fact that in making sense of news, the informants acted as social agents who had their own critical interpretations of news, but who nevertheless gravitated to those cultural texts that catered to their

ideological and cultural perspectives (worldviews) suggests that news is conflictual, not neutral, and that its meanings are the products of contestations and inter-relations between cultural worldviews, ideology and relations of power. This supports the notion of news as cultural discourse, meaning that although news can be interpreted in different ways, it does provide markers for likely patterns for doing and thinking, though never directing action and thinking automatically. This conjecturing corresponds with Schudson's (1995) notion of how news can function like ideology and how it can potentially be a social force.

(b) *Diasporas as social formations.* The informants' coalescing or mobilizing as a particular collective while at the same time "looking around" and probing (Srebreny 2000) suggests we can understand diasporas as social formations in the process of becoming. Thinking of diaspora as a social formation in the making provides a good analytical basis to discuss when diasporas can be addressed as *social movements* that can challenge dominant media frames and promote their own concerns in the media. This notion becomes particularly relevant to address in the context of the complex set of linkages that contemporary transnational dynamics make possible and sustain and which can provide alternative spaces of communication in which the meaning and boundaries of diasporic identity are continually constructed, debated and re-imagined.

(c) *Essentialism/social constructionism as interweaving, rather than binaries.* This thesis has shown that informants' discourses about themselves suggest that identity is not a thing, but a short-hand description for ways of talking about the self and community, while means it is constructed across diverse and sometimes

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antagonistic discourses, practices and positions. Given that this notion, informed by social constructionism, assumes the human being as the agent, then it is worth discussing the process of becoming, and addressing how people think of themselves as agents and as participants. The question becomes even more relevant when discussing the contexts under which claims to collective and essentialising identities become prevalent. Though it has not been fashionable to talk of identity politics, it is important to acknowledge that claims to basic, primordial identities can be invoked particularly when these identities have been repressed, de-legitimated or devalued in dominant or public discourse. This understanding, this thesis argues, means rejecting the simple binary between essentialism and social constructionism and thinking of them as interweaving as this allows us to address how social terms we use and take for granted, such as identity and community, are the discursive products of ongoing debates and political struggles.

(d) *The historical context and memory work.* This thesis has shown that it is not possible to understand the relationship between news, memory and identity without considering its historical depth. As shown in the empirical work, in talking about news, the informants framed their personal narratives about identity and community in a historical context, invoking different historical trajectories to make sense of the present-day realities. This suggests that making sense of news activates a process where the past and present are used to mutually make sense of each other, therefore highlighting the fact that identities are contingent. This came across clearly in the ways in which the informants held onto previous cognitive

and/or interpretive frameworks and unique value systems or worldviews grounded in the collective narrative of dispersal starting with *al-Nakba* (the catastrophe) of 1948 in their making sense of news.

(e) *The audience and mediation.* There is little doubt that transnational news media have altered the understanding of political dynamics and the notion of the active audience. The dynamics of the ubiquity of and people's dependence on media is sometimes taken for granted. However, as this thesis has shown, media use requires us to understand the processes of mediation which go beyond discussions of media influence or effect to a focus on the social and political context of production and consumption and the processes of mediation in which meanings are generated by producers and are negotiated by consumers. This has implications for addressing the notion of the audience and particularly the active audience. This thesis argues that it is no longer credible to discuss the active audience as an audience that makes choices or has different media preferences but that the active audience must be seen as an audience that understands that communication is a symbolic process in which reality is produced, negotiated and mediated not only by media producers, but by consumers as well.

9.3 Ways Forward

Though this thesis is situated within the media and cultural studies discipline, the nature of the investigation has been inter-disciplinary, drawing on scholarship in nationalism, collective memory, social psychology, political science and political communication. In

this respect, this thesis offers some modest contributions to these various disciplines, though its main contribution is to the field of media and cultural studies. Furthermore, although this study is about the Palestinians in Britain, its theoretical frameworks can be extended to studies of social uses of mediated information, while its findings are relevant to other empirical contexts, particularly those dealing with the audiences. Though its arguments about inclusion and exclusion and the processes through which informants draw boundaries pertain to the news genre, but can be used in discussions of different media genres.

The findings resonate with a variety of cognitive theories and empirical studies on how audiences may approach media by analogy to perception and cognition of everyday phenomena outside the media – studying the audience is particularly useful as it allows for exploring individual uses of news and their interpretations of and responses to media frames. That said, the focus on the audience intends to complement, not replace, other perspectives to understanding the meaning of news.

By concentrating on the audience uses of news, this thesis has provided a bottom-up analysis of the processes of mediation, participation and influence that differs from others relying on the traditional and often narrow conception of politics and power. By focusing on the audience talk of and around news, this thesis has shown how talk, in households, between family members and groups, blurs the boundaries between the personal and political because the language of this talk is a 'public' language.

Though broadly born out of media and cultural studies, this thesis makes a modest contribution to the political communication literature in proposing a differentiated understanding of the meaning of political news and its uses. In addressing the audience's

use of news understood as cultural discourse, this thesis raises questions about whether more attached, emotional, contextual and engaged journalism may have different implications on political life and participation. Furthermore, it raises questions about the use of aesthetics and emotion and the relation between them and rational political discourse. The key question is whether emotional involvement is important for political and social action and in what ways can emotion appeal to the ways in which people may act.

This work's exploration of increasing access to mediated information and diverse political news media could be useful in addressing whether more access to mediation communication may enable more participation in societal processes, which has implications for multi-cultural agendas in democratic societies. And, its exploration of the contexts under which the news audience cannot purely be seen as a news audience normatively understood to participate in public life as a reasoning public, but as an addressee called to coalesce as an engaged and emotional collective means we need to re-think our understanding of the news audience. Finally, this work's rejection of a simple dichotomy between social constructionism and essentialism serves to focus on how we need to re-address how individuals, as social agents, may engage in identity politics and how this engagement may relate to mediated accounts of cultural and social exclusion and marginalisation.

The local and the global, the personal and political and the intimate and public have occupied centre stage in this study of the uses of news among members of the Palestinian diasporic community in Britain. In focusing on the audience, my intention was not to

celebrate audience, but to provide a bottom-up perspective of the news media framing processes and to address the question of media influence.

This study can be complemented by studies of news media production that would provide important insights on how the social and historical consciousness of collectivities are mediated and constructed transnationally and locally, while addressing the various organisational and framing strategies in national and transnational news production. Furthermore, this inquiry could be complemented by an ethnographic study of journalistic practices and strategies, allowing for a differentiated understanding of global and transnational news production and output and an understanding of how news practitioners may be 'cultural intermediaries' (Featherstone 1992) framing and re-organising international information for domestic and transnational audiences, therefore helping promote cultural/political change and/or re-confirming the status quo.

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