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Review: Palestine Online: Transnationalism, the Internet and Construction of Identity
Palestine Online: Transnationalism, the Internet and Construction of Identity by Miriyam Aouragh

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HIGH TECHNOLOGY AND PALESTINIAN NATIONALISM

**PALESTINE ONLINE:
Transnationalism, the Internet and
Construction of Identity**, by Miriyam
Aouragh. London and New York: I. B.
Tauris, 2011. XX + 234. Appendix to
p. 236. Notes to p. 248. Bibliography
to p. 264. Index to p. 272, n.p. cloth.

Reviewed by Magid Shihade

In *Palestine Online*, Aouragh discusses the use of Internet technology among Palestinians based on fieldwork in three different locations: Palestine in 2001–02, among Palestinian refugees in Jordan in 2003, and in Lebanon in 2003–04 (p. 30). Along with participant observations, she interviewed academics, Internet café customers and owners, and some of those who lead the

Magid Shihade, an assistant professor of international studies at Birzeit University, is the author of *Not Just a Soccer Game: Colonialism and Conflict among Palestinians in Israel* (Syracuse University Press, 2011).

implementation of new technologies in Palestine.

In the book, Aouragh discusses how Palestinians use the Internet while living in Palestine under Israeli colonial rule or, having been expelled by the Israelis, in exile. It shows how the Internet is used as a source of mobility to overcome the Palestinians' state of immobility, and how the Internet as a space and instrument links the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza with those in refugee camps in Jordan and Lebanon, despite their physical separation by state boundaries and travel restrictions. For Aouragh, it is about space and technology, which helps maintain and strengthen communication not just among Palestinians, but also with other global audiences.

The book is divided into six chapters and an epilogue. Chapter 1 is focused on the role of the Internet in Palestine, and how it is used to communicate with the rest of the world as a tool of a specifically Palestinian media. Chapter 2 highlights the tension between this virtual mobility and physical immobility on the ground. Chapter 3 discusses how Palestinian immobility created pressure for the emergence of Internet initiatives to overcome immobility, occupation, exile, and forced migration. Chapter 4 examines the relationship between virtual space and territorial place as they relate to national identity and nation state in the absence of sovereignty, and how the events of 1948 structure memory and identity. Chapter 5 is a study of Palestinian websites, and chapter 6 is a discussion of everyday use of Internet technologies and Internet cafés.

These "multi-sited ethnographies make clear that Palestine, as one nation, effectively exists in multiple states; it . . . also propagates the narratives of discontent, contrasting the false portrayals" (p. 2). Not only does this technology strengthen connections among Palestinians in different localities, but it is also able to counter Israeli and Western media misinformation and propaganda about the Palestinians. In this

way, new technologies help to democratize and humanize the mainstream narratives, which often work in line with Israeli propaganda to dehumanize the Palestinians and repress the facts of criminal Israeli practices, while denying the Western-backed Israeli role in Palestinian repression, dispossession, and displacement.

One of the drawbacks of the book is the large number of theoretical references, which are more akin to name-dropping than actually grounding those concepts in the work and do not add to the issues discussed. Furthermore, there is much repetition throughout the book that makes it tiresome to read. Another issue is how the category of Palestine came to represent only those in the West Bank, Gaza, and refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan, without discussing the linkages these Palestinians have with their fellow Palestinians in Jerusalem, in the Galilee, and elsewhere. In a sense, this limited application strengthens the already widespread understanding that Palestine only denotes the territories colonized by Israel in 1967 and the refugees. Finally, the author, by speaking on the uses of Internet among Muslims and how Islam and Muslim clerics look at this technology, while partially relying on work done on the Gulf, contributes to the particularizing of Islam and Muslims' attitudes toward Internet use (see, for example, on p. 220), and generalizing from studies of Gulf Muslims to Muslims in other parts of the world, while similar debates on the benefits and costs of the Internet take place all around the globe.

Despite these drawbacks and the need for a more reflexive anthropology, the book is useful in its reflection on the use of Internet technology by Palestinians and the proliferation of mailing lists, news blogs, and websites in the face of Israeli wars, dehumanization, and denial, and how this technology has been used to counter this reality and provide an alternative source of information and build linkages among the Palestinians.