

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

*AL-TAGHRIBA: A MEDIATED PAST OF A
DISPLACED NATION*

by

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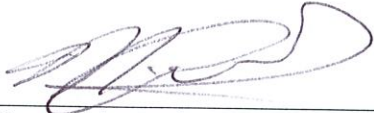
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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This thesis explores the possibility of *Al-Taghriba*, a Syrian produced televised docudrama that addresses Palestine before, during and after the 1948 Nakba, in providing a way for contemporary Palestinian refugees in Lebanon to remember their nation amidst the absence of historical teaching about Palestine at schools in the country. I explore the meaning third generation Palestinian refugees make from watching and engaging with this serial through individual interviews with people who had already watched *Al-Taghriba* before, in addition to focus group discussions with participants who watched select episodes of the serial for the purpose of this research project. Analysis of both the interviews and focus group discussions demonstrated that the serial registered a unique aspect for the informants as it provided insights about the everyday life in Palestine besides the events of the Nakba and the suffering that the Palestinian people went through. I extend my analysis to examine not only the context of events of the serial itself, but also the context of viewing that my informants had while watching the serial, which informed their process of making meaning out of the serial. I also suggest *Al-Taghriba* as an interactive tool that holds possibilities of prosthetic memory and pedagogy, which has the capacity to impact their identity and affect their present and future.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I am a third-generation Palestinian refugee born and raised in Lebanon. As a child, I was enrolled in a Lebanese private school, where we used to study history from a book approved by the Lebanese Ministry of Education and Higher Education. There has been a long debate in Lebanon about the curriculum of History to be taught in Lebanese public and private schools and, to date, this has not been resolved. For example, the current history curriculum covers a timeline that ends a few years after Lebanon gained its independence in 1943 and, as such, does not address the Lebanese Civil War (BouJaoude and Ghaith 2006). In a similar vein, the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, who were first displaced by the Nakba¹ (the catastrophe) and, in many cases, also went through the Lebanese Civil war, also lack a history book. While schools administered by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) used to teach the history of Palestine, they stopped a few years ago, as a Principal of an UNRWA school tells me. Amidst the absence of historical teaching about Palestine at schools in Lebanon, how do Palestinian refugees remember their nation?

¹ The Nakba, also known as the Palestinian catastrophe, occurred in 1948 when Israel announced itself as an independent state and after the expulsion of approximately 700,000 Palestinians from their homes and the ethnic cleansing of their villages.

In point of fact, I know of Palestinian parents who have withheld their Palestinian nationality from their adolescent children because they believe that the children will not be able to understand what it means to be a Palestinian, and being unable to explain why they are living in Lebanon and not in Palestine. So, those parents believe that it is hard for them to present the case of Palestine to their children. In a similar vein, I am a third-generation Palestinian refugee who did not live in a Palestinian community. I did not live in a Palestinian refugee camp and I did not enroll in an UNRWA school. I did not grow up to be well-versed in my nation's history and the only way I remembered my nation was through news shows and some stories that my grandmother used to narrate about her life in Palestine. A few years ago, I watched *Al-Taghriba Al-Felestiniyyah*, “الفلسطينية التغريبة” (Arabic), *The Palestinian Exile* (English), a televised Syrian docudrama that aired during Ramadan of 2004 on the Middle East Broadcasting Center channel (MBC). The docudrama traces the life of a rural Palestinian family shortly before the 1948 Nakba, during it, and after that until the 1967 Naksa². For the first time, I was able to visualize what my grandmother had told me about what happened during 1948 and I will never forget what I saw and felt: the suffering, the torture, and the inhumanity. As a result of watching this serial, I was able to learn about Palestine and its history, which I had not learned at school or home. Moreover, it was only after watching this serial that I was intrigued to know more because the serial left a lot of unanswered questions that made me think about who I am as a Palestinian and about the Palestinian people, the community of people that I identify with,

² The Naksa, also known as the setback, occurred in 1967 after the armies of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria were defeated by the Israeli army which resulted in the occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, Sinai, and Golan and thus the displacement of more people.

have common bonds with and belong to. I say this in reference to Stuart Hall's notion of maps of meaning (1995). According to Stuart Hall, culture is closely related to shared maps of meaning because he believes that "sharing the same 'maps of meaning' gives us a sense of belonging to a culture, creates a common bond, a sense of community or identity with others." (1995, p.176). As such, he considers the shared maps of meaning as a cornerstone for the construction of an identity. Thus, in this research, I will be exploring *Al-Taghriba*'s possibility of providing a map of meanings that the Palestinian refugees can share; a map that enables them to understand who they are as a collective and where they belong, thus informing their understanding of their own identity.

I studied a sample of the third-generation Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon, including both those who have watched the serial and those who have not. Through individual interviews and focus group discussions, which I will elaborate on below, I was able to gain more access to how people from this sample react to and make use of this serial. In this research project, I also explore whether this serial has a pedagogical dimension and see the extent to which this serial might lend to its viewers what Alison Landsberg calls a "prosthetic memory".

The media object I am studying, which I will be referring to throughout this research as *Al-Taghriba*, is a television serial that was produced in the year 2004 by the Syrian Art Production International (SAPI). It is directed by Hatem Ali, who is Syrian, and written by Walid Seif, who is Palestinian. The cast of the serial is made up of famous and prominent Syrian, Palestinian, Lebanese, and Jordanian actors and actresses whose work has long been admired within the Palestinian community in Lebanon and beyond. The serial was shot in Syria on land that resembles Palestine, given the proscription on shooting

on Palestinian land. It is composed of 31 episodes. As per online articles and blog posts written in Arabic and interviews done with the writer and the director of the serial (Al Jazeera), the serial is considered by the public as a docudrama that succeeds in documenting life in Palestine shortly before, during and after the 1948 Palestinian Nakba (Al Qaderi, 2005).

Though *Al-Taghriba* came out in 2004 and is recognized within the Palestinian community for its portrayal of history, there is little scholarship addressing the serial and its role in fostering either historical or national sentiment among this community. In a book titled *The War of 1948: Representations of Israeli and Palestinian Memories* (2016), Mustafa Kabha writes about this “historical drama”, provides a synopsis and brief analysis of its characters, and concludes by claiming that this serial plays a role in shaping Palestinian national identity and contributes to the collective memory. This is important against the backdrop of a situation where an increasing number of Palestinian refugees perceive their nationality as a burden and feel that they should have nothing to do with what has happened to their grandparents (Abu-Lughod and Sa’di 2007). In their discussion of the aftermath of the 1948 Nakba and its traces in the Palestinians’ memory, Abu-Lughod and Sa’di (2007) acknowledge this status quo but argue that they “see strong evidence that making memories public affirms identity, tames trauma, and asserts Palestinian political and moral claims to justice, redress, and the right to return” (p. 2-3). I argue that, when considering a situation such as the Nakba and its aftermath, a right to return will not be possible without a right to memory which “has arisen out of a concern with the ways in which communication and culture play a part in establishing identities and citizenship within transitions to democracy after conflict” (Lee [2010] as cited in Reading 2011).

Therefore, it is important to study the dimension of representations this serial manifests and what it evokes in the viewers in terms of memory.

Given that *Al-Taghriba* is a Syrian serial, I intend, through my research, to fill a gap in the academic literature that falls short on addressing Syrian media that tackle and discuss the topic of Palestine. In an essay titled “The continuity of Trauma and Struggle: Recent Cinematic Representations of the Nakba”, Haim Bresheeth (2006) chooses six Palestinian films in which to “examine the Nakba and its construction in, and of, Palestinian memory and identity” in those cinematic representations. He says, “Many other Palestinian films have similar concerns but this small number of better known films represent well the gamut of expression on this topic” (Bresheeth 2006, 163). Accordingly, I particularly intend to fill a gap regarding the historical fiction on Palestine delivered in the serial format, which fosters a very different kind of engagement from cinema. While cinema touching on this issue has been well-studied, TV has not, and this is particularly interesting since viewers spend far more time with a serial than they do with a film (at least 30 hours, generally, rather than 2) and, thus, have different opportunities for establishing affective bonds, identification, and learning more about the version of the past presented there. In short, this research project interrogates the possible maps of meaning that *Al-Taghriba* offers to contemporary Palestinian refugees in addition to exploring whether prosthetic memories are part of this mapping process and, if so, what uses viewers make of such memories.

A. Mediating the Past through Memory and Media

Is it possible to access and remember other people's memories? Maria Hirsch (2001) using the concept of "postmemory"—a memory passed from one generation to the other and accessible through representation rather than recollection—tells us that it is possible. Alison Landsberg (2009) also suggests something similar when she introduces the concept of "prosthetic memory", which is an artificial and empathy-generating memory that results from a media engagement with representations of an event from the past, that one did not live, often through narrative film. As such, viewers can have vivid, audiovisual memories that they can feel in their bodies of past historical events which they did not directly experience or take part in. I am particularly interested in Landsberg's notion of prosthetic memory, believing that, since it is a type of memory that occurs on the personal level, it can, later on, contribute to the collective memory of the Palestinian community. To complement her concept of prosthetic memory, in more recent work Landsberg (2015) introduces the concept of "affective engagement", which is when one's body is touched, moved, and provoked upon engaging with a medium. Furthermore, she argues that when one's body is affectively engaged, he/she will be able to better acquire historical understanding and knowledge. In her book *Memory and Media*, Joanne Garde-Hansen (2011) argues for the inseparability of media and events of historical importance. She considers media broadly as crucial devices that help in informing our understanding of historical events in the past. Observing the popularity of the history documentaries, heritage centers and costume dramas, Garde-Hansen comments that "It seems we are not able to understand the past without media versions of it" (2011, p. 1). As such, she conceives of media broadly as recording devices that are "creative, manufactured and artificial

techniques for making emotional connections with visualisations of the past” (2011, p.60). So, combining Landsberg’s concepts of prosthetic memory and affective engagement, we arrive at a conception of memory much in line with that offered by Garde-Hansen, as “emotive, creative, empathetic, cognitive and sensory” (7). I would like to build on the work of Landsberg and Garde-Hansen in order to explore the viewer’s reaction to the docudrama.

Landsberg (2013) speaks about the migrations of several people, such as Europeans and African Americans, and how this has caused a disruption in the modes of memory transmission that may be transformed by “cinema and technologised mass culture” (p. 146). These questions of disruption and displacement are relevant to the case of Palestinians who sought refuge in different countries all over the world after the Nakba, the “catastrophe”, which also disrupted established modes of memory transmission. Whereas Landsberg provides ample discussion that prosthetic memories open up opportunities of political alliances and solidarities across the lines of group identity, it is worth exploring these prosthetic memories to see what other opportunities they can open up for the Palestinian people. Consequently, prosthetic memories may not only play a role in making possible the alliances amongst politically, racially and economically different groups, but they may also facilitate an indirect experience and a communal identity for a group that is geographically dispersed, such as the Palestinians.

In addition, it is important to address the sensor potential of transmission and particularly the different possibilities of the auditory vs. the audiovisual. Through the interviews she has done with Palestinian refugees who were expelled from their homeland. Rosemary Sayigh (1979) shows how important the oral narrations of stories are in order to

understand one's identity and subjectivity. This tradition has come to be known as Palestinian Oral History and it is closely linked to the auditory sense. In this mode of transmission, listeners hear the stories of those who experienced the expulsion, but they do not see such stories. To further explore the relationship between oral history, media and memory, Garde-Hansen (2011) emphasizes the dependent relationship between media and memory and argues that "personal and collective memories rely upon media for their production, storage and consumption as they become so complex and differentiated that the passing down of oral histories may not be adequate to conserve them" (p. 60). She says this to support her broader argument that media act as aids to the memory. Pierre Nora (1989) highlights the degree to which memory is visual for individuals: "Ours is an intensely retinal and powerfully televisual memory" (p. 17). Indeed, this notion of memory being visual has also been argued by Thomas Elsaesser (1999) as he poses the following question: "What more appropriate instrument to record and preserve memory than sight and sound?" (¶ 5). Ultimately, audiovisual stimuli may offer a potential for forging memories that outweigh those of oral transmission.

Given that *Al-Taghriba* is an audiovisual docudrama that is written based on testimonials of the first generation of the Palestinian refugees (oral history), in what ways does it affectively engage viewers? Furthermore, to what degree do such memories *become* history in contexts where official history and the institutions for its transmission are limited? It is true that there are attempts, such as what the Palestinian Oral History Archive at the American University of Beirut is doing, to digitize the oral history, but to what extent is watching a video of someone narrating a story effective and affective when compared to watching the same story performed on a screen? In this project, I will explore the

audiovisual dimension of the Palestinian oral history of *Al-Taghriba* and examine its role in relation to memory.

I am interested in exploring the above in accordance with Pierre Nora's (1989) *Between History and Memory*. Nora speaks of the notion of "les lieux de mémoire" or the "sites of memory". He discusses how literature, sculptures, architecture and buildings, museums, and archives can function as sites of memory. However, where does a televised docudrama such as *Al-Taghriba* fit? Can *Al-Taghriba* be considered as a site of memory, given that it was created with a will to remember? In this research project, I will attempt to explore *Al-Taghriba* not only as a possible site of memory by drawing from Landsberg's concept of prosthetic memory, but also as a site of learning and pedagogy based on Abu-Lughod's idea of national pedagogy.

B. Media and Nationalism

Discourses of memory and media are closely related to the concept of globalization. Arjun Appadurai (1996) discusses globalization and the phenomenon of modernity and how it is something inevitable. He suggests five categories that he calls "scapes" that would inform our understanding of the world we live in today, given the rise of deterritorialization/migration and media, which are prevalent everywhere in the globe, and must be accounted for. One of these is the category of "mediascapes", which involve the circulation of "narrative-based accounts of strips of reality", images, texts, and other forms of media that allow the spread and dissemination of information to a great range of audience (p. 36). Indeed, it is these "mediascapes" that have allowed the young adult

Palestinian refugees in Lebanon to learn about what is happening in their homeland and to become acquainted and connect with fellow Palestinians living there (Farah 2015).

Given the fact that the Palestinian people are deterritorialized and dispersed all over the world, how do they come to think of themselves as a nation beyond geographical borders? Benedict Anderson (1983) has coined the term “imagined communities” to describe how members of a nation who will never meet or know their fellow members can still imagine their union and develop as a nation. The occurrence of the latter became possible due to the rise of print-capitalism and technologies (Anderson 1983).

As a matter of fact, we can see traces of what Anderson discusses through the work of Rashid Khalidi (2006) when he speaks about Isa Al Isa, who is a Palestinian who knew the crucial role of the press, along with his cousin Yusuf Al Isa who founded together a newspaper called *Filastin* (Palestine in Arabic). Isa found the newspaper in January 1911 and the newspaper managed to be “the country’s fiercest and most consistent critic of the Zionist enterprise” (Khalidi 2006, p.93). Believing in the newspaper’s role as public service, Isa implemented a policy where a copy of each issue was sent to the peasants of every village in Jaffa. Isa’s policy was to ensure that all of the Palestinians are aware of what is going on in their country, especially the extent to which their lands were being sold and taken by the Zionists. Indeed, Isa was able to raise awareness and remind those people of their right to their land as Palestinians. It is worth noting that Isa’s newspaper was distributed mainly in the city but, because his mission was nation-based, he ensured that he catered to the different constituents of this nation no matter where they were and through the means that they can comprehend.

In addition to the role of the press in the construction of a nation, it is also important to take into consideration Lila Abu-Lughod's *Dramas of Nationhood* (2005) when addressing the aforementioned questions. In Egypt, despite the differences in class, gender, and geographical location (urban or rural), Egyptians were imagined as an audience and a project for national modern citizenship. Viewers also used the television as an instrument to help them imagine themselves as part of the broader national community of Egypt and to foster their nationalism and sense of belonging. Abu-Lughod highlights the importance of the television, as a medium and an institution, and the televised melodramas and soap operas in shaping the national identity and culture of Egyptian citizens. Similarly, Purnima Mankekar (1993) has studied the crucial role that television plays in constructing the national identities of citizens of India. Likewise, May Farah (2015) has explored the role of television, among other media, as it helps the Palestinian refugees in learning about the Occupied Palestinian Territories and establishing a connection with their fellow Palestinians there. As such, we see how a medium such as television can be effective in shaping the collective imagination of a nation. My research builds on this work and extends it by adding the particular case of a docudrama that is Syrian but addresses the Palestinian cause—not only a different case, but one that is unique and rarely discussed in academic literature.

As an extension of this issue related specifically to the question of history, in her book, Abu-Lughod has addressed the question of the availability of the nation to the Egyptian citizens, which is something I am also interested in in the case of the third-generation Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. In Egypt, as per Abu-Lughod, an understanding of the history of one's nation and loyalty to it are two key messages that

become available to the Egyptian citizens through schools and television. Moreover, Edward Said (2000) also highlights how the teaching of history, which he considers to be an “underpinning of memory”, in schools and universities facilitates one’s nationalism and loyalty to his/her country (p.176). However, this is not the case with the third-generation Palestinian refugees in Lebanon as they are not offered this national pedagogy and history in their schools; what they are left with is media, whether books, newspapers, docudramas or films etc.

Abu-Lughod’s discussion of reactions to popular television points to another area of interest. In her discussion of a famous Egyptian serial called *Layali Al-Hilmiyyah* or *Al-Hilmiyyah Nights*, she notes that one critic thought that the scriptwriter of the serial was being biased for writing about the era of Anwar Al-Sadat from the perspective of the Nasserites (2005, p.15). The very existence of such a reaction is premised on a level of nationalist education that may well be absent among third-generation Palestinian refugees, who would hence be less likely to react as the Egyptian citizen did. This is important as I examine my sample’s experience of watching *Al-Taghriba* in chapters three and four where I look carefully for the times that viewers accept or reject representations from the serial.

C. Methodology

Permission to perform this research was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the American University of Beirut. Oral consent was obtained from all participants and they were provided with a written document of the consent form.

To conduct my research, I used focus group discussions and individual interviews. The guides for both tools can be found in the Appendix.

Four focus group discussions were conducted with six (three females and three males) third-generation Palestinian refugees from various areas of Lebanon whose ages ranged between 20 and 23 years old, who had not watched the serial and who were recruited via email and convenient sampling. Focus group discussions were conducted over the period of two weeks and took place in the conference room of the Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Media Studies at AUB. The first focus group discussion aimed to assess the participants' knowledge or familiarity with Palestine and its history where I asked them a set of questions about Palestine as both a conversation starter and a gauge of their level of knowledge and investment. During the other four focus group discussions, the participants watched a total of three complete episodes and selected scenes from five episodes. During every meeting with the participants, we screened the serial and then we discussed the events of the episodes/scenes. This allowed me to assess some aspects of how the serial affectively engages viewers with regard to various incidents from and aspects of Palestinian history.

Morgan and Margaret Spanish (1984) argue that focus group discussions are of great value as they allow the researcher to “come into direct contact with the points of view of the intended objects of the research” and get a chance to go through what the participants experience (p. 268). Moreover, Birgitta Höijer (1990), who studied the reception of television programs, refers to Morley (1980) and Richardson and Corner (1986) to show that focus group discussions are recommended methods to study how social interactions play a role in constructing interpretations of media products (p. 33). Similarly, in studying

the media effect of AIDS messages, among other factors, Jenny Kitzingy (1994) concluded that focus group discussions give room for an interaction between the researcher and the participants which allow the former to “highlight the [participants’] attitudes [...] and frame-work of understanding and document how facts and stories operate in practice - what ideological work they do.” (p. 116).

During these focus groups, I was able to explore and study the participants’ experience while watching the episodes and gain more insight about their impressions, emotions, bodily feelings, knowledge and how they have contextualized what they have watched. Kitzingy says “focus groups are particularly suited to the study of attitudes and experiences” (1995, p. 302) which is what I am going after, taking into consideration Landsberg’s prosthetic memory and affective engagement. One of the limitations of conducting those focus group discussions was the fact that it was hard to organize them, as it was difficult to find a date and time that would suit all of the participants. Also, it is important to note that the participants did not have the chance to watch the entire serial, so that is why only selected episodes and scenes were screened as per the participants’ time and availability.

In addition to focus group discussions, I also conducted six in-depth individual interviews with third-generation Palestinian refugees (four females and two males) from various areas of Lebanon who had previously watched the serial and who were born between 1991 and 1998. These interviews were important because they enabled me to understand, first and foremost, how these viewers came across the serial and knew about it and why they decided to watch it. Through the analysis of these interviews, I was able to look for repeated discursive themes or tropes with regard to Palestinian history and the role

of the serial in fostering a relationship with this history. Adding to that, these interviews, as per Höijer (1990), helped me explore how the interviewees communicated and expressed their perception and understanding of the serial and if they have contextualized it into their own experiences.

D. Road Map

This research project consists of five chapters including an introduction and a conclusion. The second chapter discusses *Al-Taghriba* vis-a-vis other Syrian series that tackle the Palestinian cause in addition to the different reasons that allow this serial to form its own public. The third chapter discusses the factors that shaped my sample's context of viewing *Al-Taghriba* and how those factors contributed to my informants' overall engagement with the serial. Last but not least, the fourth chapter discusses the possibility of *Al-Taghriba* offering a prosthetic memory and engaging the viewers affectively, in addition to examining pedagogical dimensions this serial might encompass.

CHAPTER II

AL-TAGHRIBA'S PUBLIC AND REALISM

In November 2004, one month after the broadcast of *Al-Taghriba*, Al Jazeera interviewed Dr. Walid Seif, the writer of the serial. Most of the questions that the writer was asked revolved around the Palestinian cause, its history, politics, humane aspect and about logistical and technical matters of the serial. The interviewer even asked Dr. Seif about how the first few episodes of the serial might negatively affect the sacredness of the Palestinian cause. So, a media news outlet such as Al Jazeera was very much fascinated with the political aspect of the serial right after the broadcast of the show. However, sixteen years later, what makes the *Al-Taghriba* so rich that people watch it today? Simply put, it is its depiction of the everyday life of the Palestinian people before, during and after Nakba. I elaborate more on this idea as I move through the chapter. It is interesting to note that the general narrative when talking about Palestine nowadays is inevitably connected to the country being a warzone, the Israeli conflict and notions of occupation, terror, and oppression. Accordingly, I zoom in, in what follows, on the presentation of Palestine in Syrian TV productions, realism, women and education as the mechanisms behind the *Al-Taghriba's* discussion/portrayal of the everyday life in Palestine and its dynamic. Ultimately, the viewers with whom I spoke, whether focus group participants or interviewees, distinguished that the serial sheds light and delivers a message about the social issues that were present in Palestine before the Nakba and during the British mandate.

A. Syrian TV on Palestine

For the purpose of understanding the place of *Al-Taghriba* within Syrian televised drama, it is essential first to examine the history and rise of this genre. Christa Salamandra, a specialist on Syrian media, has long studied the Syrian television drama. She acknowledges the fact that Syria has a preeminent production of dramatic series and highlights the various techniques that the creators of these series use in order to reflect on political and social matters (Salamandra, 2019). Furthermore, in her description of the proliferation of the Syrian televised drama, Salamandra points out how Syrian directors who received cinematic training did not, in reality, have any chance to employ what they had learned, as there was no film industry in Syria. Instead, they had to put their learning to practice in televised serials (2019). As Salamandra notes

Since the rise of pan-Arab satellite stations in the 1990s, Syria has become the Arab world's leading producer of the wildly popular dramatic miniseries, or musalsal. Private production and the rise of satellite technology converged in the early 1990s, producing what has become known as the Syrian "drama outpouring" (*al-fawra al-dramiyya*) (Salamandra, 2011).

In this section of the chapter, I am interested in tracing the most known Syrian televised dramas that tackled the topic of the Palestinian cause. One of the first serials that revolved around the Palestinian cause was "عز الدين القسام" *Ezzedine Al Qassam*, written by Ahmad Dahbour and directed by Haytham Hakki, which was broadcast in 1981. The serial was dedicated to showcase the biography of the leader Ezzedine Al Qassam who is Syrian in origin and was an influential figure in Palestine who fought against the British mandate and Zionism during the 1930s. After *Ezzedine Al Qassam*, "نهارات الدفلى" *Naharat Al Dafla*, written by the late Palestinian poet Fawwaz Eid and directed by Ahmad Zaher Sulaiman,

was broadcast in 1995. It is true that this serial discusses the Palestinian cause, but it does so until the year 1948 only. Later on, in Ramadan 2003, a serial titled *Al Shatat* “الشتات” – which means diaspora – was broadcast on Lebanese TV: Al Manar. This serial was directed by Nathir Awwad and written by Dr. Fathallah Omar. *Al Shatat* was highly political and historical as its storyline revolved around showcasing the formation of the Zionist movement starting from the year 1812 and its history. As reflected via online blog posts, news articles, and YouTube comments, much of the public thought the serial was problematic in terms of the sources that were used to write the story and the script and, due to its hot topic, only 18 episodes were aired out of 26. On the one hand, the Arab audience objected to the fact that sources such as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* were used to write this serial. On the other hand, a much bigger objection came from the American and Israeli side. In fact, in referencing an article published on AlJazeera’s website, Abunawaf.com, which is an online entertainment website, published a blogpost that discusses the American and Israeli reaction to this serial. After the airing of episodes that show that the Zionist movement is the one who planned for the genocide of the Jews to happen in addition to other massacres and unfortunate events that the Jews went through, the Israeli press campaigned against the serial. Moreover, the US diplomatic representatives objected to the airing of the serial to the governments of Syria and Lebanon and imposed pressure on the latter countries to stop the broadcast of the serial. Last but not least, *Returnee to Haifa* “عائد إلى حيفا”, which is based on the novel of the celebrated and distinguished Palestinian novelist, journalist and activist Ghassan Kanafani and directed by Bassel Al Khatib, aired during 2004 just before *Al-Taghriba*. This serial discusses the fall of the city of Haifa in Palestine during 1948 and focuses on the story of

one Palestinian family who unintentionally left their child behind in Haifa. The child is later adopted by a Jewish family, and the serial traces the story of how a reunion between the family members happened in addition to shedding light on the hardships that the Palestinian people had to go through because of the Zionist attacks and expulsion. It is interesting that three out of the serials I mentioned were broadcast roughly within the years of 2003-2004. During 2003, the US war on Iraq was taking place so it is plausible that such serials were used as a reminder for the Arab people that any war on an Arab country comes as a result of the fact that the Palestinian cause is still unresolved, given its importance as the central cause and at the heart of the Arab world. Another possible dimension of this is the Syrian government's stance regarding the Palestinian cause, which could be reflected in such productions as a sign of loyalty and support of the Palestinian resistance. Syrian serials that discuss the topic of Palestine were still produced up until 2010, which is significant because after that, the Syrian government had to deal with its own crisis, and thus the serials produced after that revolved around the Syrian crisis itself.

It follows then that up until October 2004, those were the serials that have had their storyline discussing the Palestinian cause, directly or indirectly. Each serial covered a specific time period and revolved around a particular character. *Al-Taghriba* entered the scene in October 2004. This Syrian televised drama documented the life and events in Palestine over the course of around thirty years from the 1930s until the Naksa in 1967. Online news articles, reviews, and blog posts written in Arabic suggest that the serial was considered by much of the public as a docudrama that best succeeds in documenting life in Palestine shortly before, during and after the 1948 Palestinian Nakba. In what follows, I will provide a brief outline of the serial's plot. First, it is important to note that the viewers

come to see the events of the serial through the experiences of the family of Al Sheikh Younes, who was a poor family living in a rural Palestinian village. Throughout the serial, the characters of the Sheikh Younes family unfold, allowing viewers to go through a different journey with every family member. Thus the plot is ultimately comprised of a variety of stories. Accordingly, I will discuss the characters of the Sheikh Younes family members, with a focus on the children, who viewers watch develop over the course of the serial. In the first part of the serial, we follow the clashes that take place between this unfortunate family and individuals from the upper class of the village. The eldest son Ahmad, plays a very important role, as he eventually becomes the leader of the village after forming a band of armed men as a means of resistance. He participates in the 1936 revolts and strikes that first started for economic reasons and labor rights but was then motivated by national and political reasons, such as reacting to the killing of Sheikh Ezzedine Al Qassam. I will be discussing Ahmad's character in more details later on in this chapter. The second son, Massoud, is not as involved in the resistance as; he is more business oriented and is the most pragmatic family member. Since the family is poor, they cannot manage to send both young children Hasan and Ali to school. So, Ahmad, Massoud, and Hasan receive only basic schooling, whereas Ali is the only child to receive education. He eventually leaves the village to continue his education in the city, and receives a scholarship to study at the American University of Beirut. Hasan, on the other hand, joins the band of his brother Ahmad and becomes a martyr. Khadra, the only sister, receives no education and marries one of the men in Ahmad's band, with whom she has a son. After the death of her first husband, she marries a greedy man who distances her from both her son and her family.

While the characters' stories bring *Al-Taghriba* to life, the most celebrated aspect of the serial, at least in online reviews, blogposts, and articles, is how it demonstrates the ways in which the Palestinian people and some national leaders fought Israeli oppression. On that note, I would like to highlight the fact that the serial focuses on the internal Palestinian conflicts and the struggles the Palestinian people went through at the time of both the British mandate and the Israeli occupation. As such, and unlike other productions on the Palestinian cause, *Al-Taghriba* does not display many of the events that were happening at the Israeli end, such as meetings of army leaders. Instead, the times the viewers see the Israelis are during the armed clashes and the assaults that the latter used to initiate against Palestinian villages and people.

B. *Al-Taghriba's* Public

According to Michael Warner (2002), a public is “a space of discourse organized by nothing other than the discourse itself... It exists by virtue of being addressed” (p. 413). Warner is specifically interested in the kind of public that “comes into being only in relation to texts and their circulation” (Warner, 2002, p. 413), and it is in this sense that his formulation is especially useful for talking about *Al-Taghriba*. I will hereby argue that publics have formed around *Al-Taghriba* for two main reasons. To begin with, this televised drama has a unique appeal to the viewers, which helps broaden their sense of what Benedict Anderson called an imagined community. I have listed earlier the most known Syrian televised series that tackled the Palestinian cause. Now, I want to focus on one particular serial in relation to *Al-Taghriba*, which is *Returnee to Haifa*. The role of the latter

is distinct because it overlaps with *Al-Taghriba* in several ways, where both serials talk about the expulsion of the Palestinian people, the occupation of their lands and houses, and the terror and violence used against them. This was indicated by my interviewees; however, this overlap only goes so far. I choose to treat *Returnee to Haifa* as a distinct serial because it was the only Syrian serial that tackled the Palestinian cause that the interviewees mentioned during the interviews, other than *Al-Taghriba*. I noticed a pattern in the interviewee's answers: where when they started talking about *Al-Taghriba* and wanted to compare it to another serial, they directly turned to *Returnee to Haifa*. However, they acknowledged that, although the Palestinian cause unites both serials, they still differ in three ways. First, as noted by the interviewees who had watched both serials in their late childhood, *Returnee to Haifa* displays the Palestinians as rather passive recipients of attacks and oppression by the Zionists. On the other hand, the interviewees perceived *Al-Taghriba* as a serial that shows the Palestinians as proactive and, most importantly, sheds light on how they were resisting and not merely succumbing to the circumstances forced onto them by the Zionists. Second, interviewees noted that *Returnee to Haifa* showcases the Palestinian cause in a way that appeals to people's pathos as opposed to reason. In fact, one of the interviewees addressed this aspect with a deep belief that focusing only on the loss and sadness of the Palestinian people in an emotional way has become the traditional way to speak about the Palestinian cause, and *Al-Taghriba* broke this tradition and offered a different "realistic" view of the cause. Last but not least, one interviewee considered the two serials to be different from a geographical point of view, comparing one particular city to a whole country with a sense of comparison in terms of inclusivity, as she noted,

This serial [*Al-Taghriba*] talks about all the Palestinians. There are other series such as *Returnee to Haifa*, but it was only about those from Haifa; however, *Al-Taghriba* was more inclusive of all the Palestinians and the problems they have all faced.³

Similarly, another interviewee shared his opinion about the timeline covered and says

Al-Taghriba, specifically, talks about the beginning of the conflicts in Palestine. It was before the British and the Jews expelled us from our homes. Other serials talk about a later stage where Jews' settlements were already present. They talk about the life there and about people who went to Jordan, Syria, and those who stayed in their hometowns. They talk about those who stayed and are suffering.

Hence, we observe that people have connected with *Al-Taghriba* for several reasons and on different levels to when compared with other series: not particularly for the location of the events of the serial, because it is characterized by any village, nor primarily for the serial's emotional appeals, but for the complex reality it depicts, and for the inclusion of the everyday. Here we see how the viewers have formed a public around *Al-Taghriba* that helps them apprehend it and interact with it in relation to other texts, which in this case is *Returnee to Haifa*. Here, it is vital to take into consideration Benedict Anderson's (1983) concept of imagined communities. He introduces the idea of imagined communities and how it is dependent on print capitalism; however, it is interesting to see, based on this interviewee's feedback, how even with the rise of later media such as cinema and television, there is still this sense of unity and thirst for inclusivity. As per my interviewees' and focus group participants' feedback, I have observed that even without knowing one another and without having anything else in common, the moment they watched *Al-*

³ All interviews and focus group discussions were in Arabic so this quotation and all subsequent quotations are my translations.

Taghriba, they somehow became connected. They became a collective that, as per Warner, is being addressed by the same medium, which is the serial. As mentioned earlier, Warner states that a public exists “by virtue of being addressed” and by following the same logic, *Al-Taghriba*’s public exists by their attribute of imagining which enables them to participate in the circulation of this audiovisual text actively and thus belong to a collective although they might never know or meet each other.

1. On the presentation of the everyday and the social

The second reason that has allowed *Al-Taghriba* to form a public is the way it presents the everyday across several categories such as class, education, and gender. Before delving into the discussion of these categories, it is crucial to become familiar with some information about the setup of the serial.

The director, Hatem Ali, did not choose just to recruit a cast of Palestinian actors and actresses to narrate the story of the Palestinian people; on the contrary, he carefully chose his cast to include several actors and actresses who are not Palestinian in origin but were celebrated and loved by audiences. This observation was noted by one of the interviewees who watched the serial when it originally aired, as she said: “What I like is that the actors are Syrians and not even Palestinians and yet, they were able to perfectly enunciate the Palestinian accent and I actually learned some [Palestinian] vocabulary from them.” Another interviewee shared her opinion about the actors saying: “Some of the actors mastered the accent. For a second, I forgot that they were Syrians.” Upon asking about the “realist” image the producers tried to reflect through the locale and set, including accent, clothing etc, one interviewee shared the below.

They indeed did reflect a real image. The acting was very realistic. The script was realistic. How each character evolved and had its own realm in the story was realistic. For me, the Syrian actors are the greatest Arab actors. They hit the accent right. Clothing was not that major for me but now that you mention it, yes I can think of it and how it differed between the city and the village, but it was a minor thing for me and my parents did not mention it to me.

So, it is clear how this informant was convinced and affected by the dialect, quality of acting, and development of characters and he is aware of it.

In addition, the director chose to narrate important critical historical and political events and shed light on social matters in Palestine through the lens of the family of Al Saleh Sheikh Younes. So, although the show is documenting life in Palestine, it does that through the events and circumstances that this fictional family went through. This is interesting because the diverse family invites the audience to experience events from the varied perspectives of each of the family members who had their own circumstances and take on in the serial.

Al Saleh Sheikh Younes' family comes from "a Palestinian village" – this is how the director intended to characterize the village without actually naming it, which can be read as an effort to show that this is something collective that happened at all of the Palestinian villages and not just this one in particular. The family is made up of seven members: Abu Ahmad (the father), Em Ahmad (the mother), Ahmad (eldest child), Massoud, Khadra, Hasan and Ali. Their house, just like any other house in that village, was an open stone house, and only one room had a ceiling. In the middle of their house, there was a water well. The family was not privileged, and they were not considered amongst the nobles of the village. As a matter of fact, they were very poor, and the father used to take his eldest two children, Ahmad and Massoud, with him to harvest and cultivate the land

that an investor had trusted them with. The mother and Khadra, the lone daughter, usually stayed at home to cook and perform the household chores, but they also used to join the men in the field as needed. Last but not least, Hasan and Ali used to go to a humble primary school in their village.

2. *Narrating Al-Taghriba in Fus'ha Arabic*

The serial is narrated by Ali, the youngest member of the family who grows up to be the only son educated with a university degree. Although the dialogue in the serial is in the Palestinian dialect, Ali's narration is in Fus'ha Arabic, and comes in the form of flashbacks and memories. This is particularly significant for two reasons. First, Fus'ha Arabic imbues the narration with a sense of authority, especially when contrasted with the spoken Arabic in the rest of the serial. When Ali narrates the events in Fus'ha, it establishes an implication of an authoritative account of history, seriousness, formality and representation. In his narration, in several instances, Ali speaks in the collective as if he is representing all of the Palestinian people. Second, it is also possible that Fus'ha was used to facilitate reaching the Arab world, given that each Arab country has its own dialect, but Fus'ha is what unites those countries. Moreover, back at that time, the Palestinian cause and the freedom of all of Palestinians was the ultimate goal and uniting factor for the Arab countries. Therefore, Fus'ha Arabic could have been used to touch on this matter of Arab unity. As important as the language, though, is the question of why Ali was chosen to be the main character, and the one narrating the story of the family and the events that happened. In fact, there is an article published on Al Jazeera that discusses the life discourse of Dr. Walid Seif, the writer of *Al-Taghriba*, which shows how Seif based the

character of Ali according to experiences he personally went through (Kanaan, 2018). So, in addition to the fact that Ali is the only educated member in his family who knows how to speak Arabic Fus'ha, the writer might have chosen Ali to be the main character because of the personal connection he has with this character.

3. Lifestyle and living conditions: clothing, housing, and food

According to the American Psychological Association, the measurements that are usually used to assess someone's socioeconomic status are education, income, occupation and family size/relationships. In addition, the most prominent factors that were used for assessing social differences in qualitative studies that I worked on, in my capacity as a freelance researcher and focus group facilitator, included, but were not limited to, home/shelter, clothing, food, and education. Having said that, the serial demonstrates the difference between the different social classes living in Palestine, and how the above-mentioned measures are pertinent to the classification of someone or a group of individuals on the socioeconomic spectrum. In the case of *Al-Taghriba*, the Al Sheikh Younes family represents the people living on the low end of the socioeconomic spectrum; whereas, the characters of Al-Mukhtar and Abu Ayed, an arrogant, wealthy man owning the majority of the lands and property in their village depict those living on the higher end of the socioeconomic spectrum. The different lifestyles that these two groups represent are signified by, first, their clothing for the differences were quite distinct. For instance, Abu Ahmad's male family members were always dressed in off-white/beige pieces of clothing that were worn out, and those of the kids were always dirty. They had the same outfit on all the time, whereas Abu Ayed's male family members, including the kids, were always

dressed in the most delicate pieces of clothing such as “Abaya”, pants, and embroidered shirts and belts. Viewers seldom saw the female members of Abu Ahmad’s family wearing accessories or gold, while Abu Ayed’s daughter often wore exquisite gold necklaces, earrings and bracelets. On the one hand, Abu Ahmad’s family lived in a semi-closed house made of stones, where some of the family members slept on mattresses inside the house under a ceiling while the rest of the family slept outside in the yard. On the other hand, Abu Ayed had a typical big house where he and his family members all slept on beds. Adding to that, Abu Ayed’s family never had to worry about what to eat, whereas Abu Ahmad’s family were not always able to sustain themselves when it came to food. When they had guests over, they went out of their way and fry them eggs from the ones they kept aside.

These textual elements were clearly noted by my sample, who commented on how such representation changed their perceptions of Palestine. For example, one of the interviewees who had watched the show before expressed that what stuck in his mind from this serial, other than the scene of exile, are the scenes that portrayed the class difference between Abu Ahmad and Abu Ayed’s family. As for the focus group participants, some of them said that one of the lessons or new things they learned is about the lifestyle and living conditions of the Palestinian people, especially the concept of barter. Moreover, given that the majority of the participants did not know about the way farmers lived, they now formed a clearer idea of the struggle that the farmers and villagers went through in contrast to the life of the people living in the city. The participants perceived the village as a beautiful place with nature and greenery, but their perception was altered after watching the serial and seeing the circumstances of Abu Ahmad’s family. All of the focus group participants, who sat and watched select episodes of the serial, noted the fact that, although this serial

sheds light on the historical and political aspects of Palestine (in relation to occupation and Israeli war), it also highlights the social aspects of life in Palestine (in regards to the everyday life as mentioned above) during the old times such as the class difference that existed back then. This was evident when I asked participants about anything they had learned from the episode they watched (episode three), to which one participant answered: “Most of the new things I learned today were about the living conditions and the lifestyle.” This indeed encouraged the rest of the participants to agree and express how they were not aware that this is how people used to live in Palestine. The more interesting finding was when the participants watched episode five of the serial, and one said: “Today, the episode was more focused socially than politically. So, it showed us how the lifestyle was in those days, and there was not a lot of politics going on.” According to this participant, he believes that an event should involve war, a battle, occupation, and such for it to be considered as political, and since that episode did not include much of what he perceives as political, he regarded it one that sheds light on social aspects. I will highlight this further in the next section.

C. Realism and the everyday

During a family visit, my aunt asked me about how my project is coming and what the topic is. The first thing she said when she knew that I am writing about *Al-Taghriba* was: “Your grandmother used to cry every time we watched it and when we ask her why, she says that it is realistic and as if those who produced these images were there living with them in Palestine.” In general, when speaking to the second generation of Palestinian

refugees about *Al-Taghriba*, the conversation seemed to always revolve around the realism depicted in the serial. As such, in this section, I am interested in exploring the way this serial makes use of the element of cinematic realism and the way my sample interacted with it.

In his book *History on film/film on history*, Robert Rosenstone (2006) identifies a tradition which he ties to Hollywood that consists of six elements that directors usually deploy in films. The fifth element he speaks of discusses what I would call the realism of the everyday. He says:

Film most obviously gives us the 'look' of the past, of buildings, landscapes, costumes, and artifacts. It provides a sense of how common objects appeared when they were part of people's lives and in daily use. Period clothing confines, emphasizes, and expresses the body at rest and in motion. Tools, utensils, weapons, furniture are not items on display, but objects that people use and misuse, objects that can help to define livelihoods, professions, identities, and destinies. (p. 53)

As such, it is clear that the director of *Al-Taghriba* has utilized the above element discussed by Rosenstone. However, it seems that, based on the response of focus group participants, they did not expect to watch such details that do not directly pertain to the political or war aspect. So too, one of the interviewees, who had already watched the serial several times, also noted the fact that the serial does not tackle war and political matters right from the beginning and acknowledged the importance of this, saying:

It broke the image of Palestine, the dream for me. Our parents used to speak about it [Palestine] that it was paradise and there is nothing more beautiful than it, although people were not really living comfortably and there were classes and feudalism. So, the elderly gave us an impression of Palestine that they were convinced of: that Palestine is like no other. But for me, for someone who did not live in Palestine, it is very problematic for me to think of Palestine as paradise. So, after watching the serial, I realized that no, Palestine is not paradise.

Indeed, this viewer has watched the serial with a certain expectation in mind that he has acquired from his parents, but he did not see what he expected, and this definitely has changed the way he relates to the past and how it is told. In fact, the tools that the director has deployed to give that ‘look’ of the past that Rosenstone speaks of have provided the viewer with a very different sense of the everyday than that portrayed by his family. The crucial role that the social and everyday play is evident here as it is significantly involved in forming the structure of the way one looks at and regards his/her country, just like in the case of this interviewee.

In an article titled “Great Expectations: Cinematic Adaptations and the Reader’s Disappointment”, Julian Hanich (2018) examines the way readers of novels set expectations when it comes to film adaptations of these novels. She notes:

Most importantly, as argued above, they [readers-turned-spectators] may expect the world of the film to look (and sound) like the one they have mentally constructed during the act of reading. At issue is thus a very special form of reception: the viewing of the filmed version is “filtered” through these expectations, and in a certain sense also constrained by them. (Hanich, 2018, p. 428)

I want to argue here that viewers of serials and films seem to approach history with certain expectations of particular events, just like the readers of a novel tackle the cinematic adaptation of that novel. Often, and as shown below, people set an expectation of what they are going to watch. It follows then, that upon watching or dealing with history or its recreation through the medium of television or film, viewers expect certain moments to be hit and specific events to be covered. This is interesting in terms of how viewers relate to history. So, when a viewer is expecting something in relation to history, and yet receives

something different, this can potentially change the way people view history in the form of film or televised dramas.

An interviewee has also noted how tackling the social aspect and going into the details of the everyday is something that might bore people, especially if they watch the serial with a certain expectation in mind, given that from its name, it is expected to cover how the Palestinians were exiled. As it turns out, the first ten to twelve episodes of the serial discuss almost nothing about the Nakba; instead, those episodes focus on the lifestyle and living conditions of the people in the villages with some insights about that of the city.

On that note, the interviewee shares an experience he had with a friend of his:

Actually, almost until episode 10, there is no Nakba yet. The beginning was about how the situation in Palestine was from 1916 until 1948. And people get bored from this. I once told my friend who is not Palestinian to watch *Al-Taghriba*. She watched the first three episodes and said: “Okay.. what is next? Where is Palestine in this?” Because there is a traditional rhetoric about Palestine that includes the Nakba and the exile, so this is what people expect to watch...

One of the interviewees had lost count of the times he had watched *Al-Taghriba*. He expressed his appreciation of the show, and he even relies on its scenes to write Facebook posts. There is one particular insight he offered that was striking that hints a lot at this individual's, and many others', relationship to history, research and the past. After speaking about the realism he saw in this serial and how it broke the romantic image he had of Palestine, he added: “Actually, the serial did me a huge favor and spared me from going and researching especially about topics such as city vs. village, class in society.” It is clear that the serial established a certain level of trust with this viewer in that he was willing to accept the presentation of life in the village to such a degree that he actually put on hold a research project. In fact, this indicates that this viewer trusted the representation of the past

that the serial offered. In addition, given that this interviewee had been told beforehand by his family that this serial depicts what happened to them and that this is their past, so he watched the serial with a presumption that what he will watch is reality. On that account, my interviewee expected to watch a serial that would offer him a journey to understand his family's and nation's past, which is evident by the relationship of trust that took place between him and the serial. Thus, the serial does offer a window for historical knowledge to be acquired; however, to what extent should this knowledge be trusted, and how should the viewer make meaning out of it in regard to his relation to the past and history?

D. Role of women: Strength, deep trauma and adversity

In my initial outline of this research, I did not plan to address anything related to women. However, after preparing the thematic analysis of my interviews and focus group discussions, the theme of women was very recurrent. Both the focus group participants and the interviewees addressed three women figures in particular and discussed their characters as major constituents of society and everyday life. Accordingly, I argue in this section that, in addition to the living conditions and lifestyle, the serial highlights, albeit in a very subtle way, the figure of women in relation to society back at that time in three different dimensions: strength, deep trauma and adversity. Although that was portrayed through short and very few scenes, just like the details of the everyday life I previously addressed—the interviewees and the focus group discussions participants paid attention to them and remarked upon them. I will discuss the three dimensions below in relation to three characters: strength and the notion of motherhood portrayed by Em Ahmad, deep trauma

manifested by a woman who lost her child and adversity in terms of gender roles in marriage as shown in the case of Ahmad's wife.

Em Ahmad's strength was portrayed in a very particular scene related to her son Ahmad's beating. When Ahmad came back home after being beaten up by Abu Ayed's men, Ahmad's mother tried to heal his injuries and asked his sister to stop crying. She also picked up a wooden stick from the yard and stormed to Abu Ayed's house. She kicked the door, entered, ignored the fact that Abu Ayed has guests over, and started hitting him with the stick and scolded him for hurting her son. "There was something very nice about this episode as we saw that Palestinian women are very strong. I mean, she actually went and hit the guy to defend her son," said one of the focus group discussion participants as she used synecdoche, making this one woman stand as a symbol for all Palestinian women. In another instance, we see Em Ahmad as the Palestinian mother who raises her children to be strong and sends them to be part of the resistance for the sake of the nation. So in these instances, the producers of the show portrayed the strong woman and the caring mother who is ready to go the extra mile to ensure her children's safety and dignity, yet who is at the same time ready to send her children to defend their land and maybe die for it.

The second dimension related to women, trauma, was also brought up by the interviewees. Some of the interviewees really focused on the element of motherhood in the serial saying how that had affected them when they were young, and the scenes pertaining to this theme are unforgettable for them. More than four interviewees who had already watched the serial recalled the scene of a woman who was in a rush to evacuate her house and escape from the Zionist bombs to the extent that instead of grabbing her baby, who was covered in a white swaddling wrap, she grabbed a white pillow. Later through the show, we

get to see the deep trauma that this woman lived while seeking refuge. Her deep trauma and severe mental state were manifested by how she starts treating the white pillow as if it is her baby. When asked about a scene from the serial that has stuck in her mind and why, one of the interviewees shared the following: “The [scene of the] mother and the pillow... maybe it is not directly related to the Palestinian cause, but whenever they say *Al-Taghriba*, this is the scene that I immediately remember. Maybe because I was a child, I only remember and relate to the scenes that involved motherhood.” It was very interesting how both the interviewees and the focus group discussions participants brought up all these scenes related to women and motherhood. As a matter of fact, addressing this topic was not part of the questions I had prepared for the interviews nor for the focus group discussions. However, after conducting several interviews and realizing that the elements of womanhood and motherhood were significant to the viewers, I had to address them.

Finally, to talk about the dimension of adversity, I will discuss how the serial hints at the way women were treated but not overtly. In fact, the scene that stood out the most and to which the focus group participants have reacted most strongly is between Ahmad and his wife. However, before I discuss the scene, it is vital to understand Ahmad’s character and journey. Ahmad, the eldest son of the family, was the type of character that confronted the segregations that were occurring between the classes and rebels against the ruling class and the way they controlled the village. Although he was publicly shamed and beaten for doing that, he did not surrender. In 1934, Ahmad traveled to Haifa to look for a job. While he was there, he further notes and observes the contrast that was taking place between people from the urban upper class and those from the lower and working class who mostly came from villages. Not only that, but during his travel to Haifa, he became

more aware of what was going on nationally with respect to the struggle for the liberation from the British mandate and the efforts to debunk and fight the Zionists. Adding to that, during this particular trip, Ahmad knew about Sheikh Ezzedine Al Qassam, who was an influential leader in the Palestinian fight against occupation and oppression as he always called for resistance and revolting against the occupier, and was influenced and inspired by him. Accordingly, we learn that people who lived in the village were not well-versed about what was happening and had not developed a national consciousness, yet. As a result, it was only when Ahmad left the village and went to the city that he became aware of what was going on and was able to spread this message in his village and thus become more involved politically, militarily and nationally. Upon his return, with his social and national conscious being shaped by what he saw and knew of during the trip to Haifa, Ahmad organized and led an armed group of men from his village and the neighboring village assuming the role of a leader that replaced the traditional leaders such as Al Mukhtar and Abu Ayed. Gaining this national and militant role, although being a villager and farmer in origin, allowed Ahmad to get married to a girl from an esteemed family from the city. However, Ahmad's role as a national leader, even if on a small scale, ended right when the Nakba started, and after that, he just started aging and went back to being Ahmad, the typical villager. In spite of the fact that Ahmad had left the village, seen life in the city, and was able to develop a political and national consciousness, he did not develop a different perspective towards women or social relations in general. At the beginning of the last episode, we see how Ahmad screams and storms at his wife, who is from the city and did not mind going with Ahmad and living in the village, just because he was angry that he had

lost his national and political status. One of the focus group participants noticed that and said the following in a heated way:

But there is something that none of you has spoken about and it is something that I did not like which is how Ahmad treats his wife, especially after realizing he is no longer a threat to the Zionists.. Even if he is angry, he has no right to treat her that way.

After her intervention, the rest of the discussion participants paused and realized that what she said was, in fact, true, which drove the discussion towards the character of Ahmad and how tragic it is. All of the participants directly sympathized with Ahmad, given all of the potential he had and how he eventually ended up not fulfilling this potential as a national leader, but they did not notice the complex portrayal of his character in relation to how he treated his wife. No one else had called attention to how Ahmad treated his wife until that one particular participant intervened and pointed it out. That being the case, we see how the serial holds some valuable political potential; in spite of that, this political potential is not always realized. In Ahmad and his wife's case, even when this potential was mentioned, the rest of the participants took the discussion in a direction to rationalize Ahmad's behavior. In addition to the particular example of Ahmad's wife related to adversity, the figure of women in relation to adversity was emphasized again mainly during the middle of the serial when the village of Abu Ahmad's family was threatened to be next under the Zionists' attack. Those scenes were the most effective in highlighting some of the tactics and strategies that the Zionists used to take over villages and cities and exile its residents. One focus group participant said: "So basically, the Zionists used to go village by village and not all at once, raping women and terrorizing them along with the children." It was apparent in several scenes how women were so frightened from what they had heard has

happened in the locations that the Zionists had attacked. As such, this led the family to escape and leave their houses, just like other families, who preferred to stay alive rather than die or be humiliated and prone to having their women raped and their children tortured or killed.

In conclusion, the three dimensions through which the figure of women was portrayed—motherhood in terms of strength and trauma and gender roles have shown different and diverse facets of the political power that the social can and does hold. Nonetheless, it seemed as though the interviewees and focus group participants barely scratched the surface of this potential and focused on the representation of these roles in the social and everyday context.

E. Education: Resistance and Persistence

Last but not least, education and its importance with respect to the Palestinian community were highly discussed and portrayed throughout the serial, which is something the viewers during the focus group discussions noted. Just like the topic of the role of women was not part of my research outline, education was also brought up through the thematic analysis of my interviews and discussions which led me to dedicate this section about that topic. Indeed, my informants regard education as part of their everyday life and that is why they considered it as such in accordance to the characters of the serial. As mentioned before, Abu Ahmad's family was not wealthy and they could not afford to send two of their kids to school in the city, so they had to choose Ali, who is the youngest. Not only did the family have to worry about the tuition fees, but also about the other costs such

as the dormitory and the pocket money. On the contrary, Al-Mukhtar and Abu Ayed had no trouble sending their kids to school. While at the dormitory, the latter's kids used to have eggs and jam for breakfast, whereas Ali used to have rotten pieces of bread. To add, Ali had a very light piece of cloth to cover himself while sleeping, whereas Al-Mukhtar and Abu Ayed's sons had thick wool sleeping covers. Despite Abu Ahmad's family's limited financial capabilities, they sent Ali because they believed in the crucial role that education plays in elevating the burdens of life off of one's shoulders. The serial has also characterized education as a form of resistance, which is something an interviewee highlighted, as she said:

We were raised and brought up with the idea that we have to defend our country. I learned that we have to be educated and get degrees whenever we have the chance to. Our education is our only weapon. I can't use a gun or drive a tank. I can fight with my education.

Similarly, a focus group participant shared her thoughts and experience and said:

I felt really happy when the kids received their grades and the fact that their brother wants them to learn and so... This is something that still exists today, and it is known.. Whenever anyone knows that I am a Palestinian they start saying Palestinians are smart and brilliant and educated.

Drawing on my informants' quotes above, it is apparent that the serial did not focus only on war and its events, it has also included several factors pertaining to the everyday life of people. Indeed, the portrayal of education in this serial is important because my informants regard education as part of their everyday life and when they saw the way it was portrayed in the serial, they interacted with it because it resonated with their own everyday lives.

F. Conclusion

To sum up, I have tried in this chapter to provide a very brief overview of some of the serials of Syrian production that covered the topic of the Palestinian cause and compare one of the most known amongst them to *Al-Taghriba*. I have also shed light on the serial's portrayal of the everyday life of the Palestinian people at that time and how the viewers related and reacted to this dynamic. I discuss the serial's portrayal of the everyday as a unique aspect because it breaks the general narrative about Palestine in televised serials where it is associated with suffering and death. On the contrary, *Al-Taghriba* takes around 12 episodes before delving into the events of the Nakba that include the most representations of oppression, violence and war. As such, I argue that through addressing the everyday life in Palestine before, during and after the Nakba by utilizing tools such as language, realism, figures of women, and education, *Al-Taghriba* presents itself as a distinctive Syrian televised production of the topic of Palestine.

CHAPTER III

AL-TAGHRIBA IN THE FAMILY SETTING

As demonstrated in the introduction of this research project by the parents who decided not to tell their children that they are Palestinian, family plays a vital role in cultivating an individual's ties to his/her nation and homeland. In point of fact, the most common and interesting pattern that I observed in the informant's answers revolves around their "family", which drove me to dedicate this chapter to explore the contributing factors and the setting through which the viewers watched *Al-Taghriba*. As a matter of fact, the "family" played a huge role in the viewing process of *Al-Taghriba* by my informants, which I will discuss as "enforced viewing". For most of this chapter, I will be referring to the interviewees who had originally watched the serial during Ramadan, some of whom watched it again on YouTube in the years to follow. In order to better understand the context of viewing, it is very important to take into consideration the age of these interviewees when they first watched *Al-Taghriba*. In fact, their age is the overarching factor that has to be taken into consideration when I discuss the context of viewing during Ramadan, the process of enforced viewing and utopia this serial had offered to the interviewees. As mentioned in my methodology section, the sample of interviewees I worked with were third generation Palestinian refugees, born between 1991 and 1998. I interviewed six individuals and their ages ranged between six and thirteen years old when they first watched the serial.

In the previous chapter, I discussed *Al Taghriba* as the object of viewing; however, in this chapter, I would like to shed light on the context of viewing as per David Morley's recommendation:

Just as we need to understand the phenomenology of 'going to the pictures', so we need equally to understand the phenomenology of domestic television viewing—that is, the significance of various modes of physical and social organization of the domestic environment as the context in which television viewing is conducted. (1992, p. 150)

Accordingly, in this chapter, I am interested in exploring the different factors that made up the context of viewing of *Al-Taghriba*, such as the age of the viewers and the date of release, which was during Ramadan. In addition, I am interested in studying how watching TV in a family setting as a context can affect the viewing choices of the viewer and the way these dynamics work. Moreover, in this chapter, I would like to highlight the fact that within the context of watching TV in a family setting lies another context. As per my interviewee's testimonials, some of them watched *Al-Taghriba* with their parents and siblings and others watched it with extended family as well. Indeed, this is crucial and contributes towards the different meanings the viewers can make from watching the serial, as we will see later in the chapter.

A. *Al-Taghriba* during Ramadan

The first element pertaining to the context of viewing of *Al-Taghriba* that I would like to discuss is the time of its original broadcast, which was during the month of Ramadan. Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar where Muslims all around the world fast by refraining from eating and drinking from dawn until sunset. This month means a lot to the Muslims as they seize it as a chance to be pious, more observant of God,

and pay respects to their religion. Accordingly, Muslims dedicate a lot of their time for praying, reading the Qur'an and giving charity. Thus, Ramadan revolves around religious and spiritual awareness. Nonetheless, ever since the upsurge of television and satellite technology in the pan-Arab countries during the 1990s, the holy fasting month of Ramadan had an additional meaning for people in the Arab world. In addition to the religious and spiritual awareness, people all over the Arab world, and not only Muslims, anticipate Ramadan to see what serials would be broadcast on TV during that month. Moreover, there arose what is now called "Ramadan prime time". Christa Salamandra explains this term saying: "'Ramadan prime time', approximately one hour after the beginning of iftar, is reserved for the year's most eagerly-anticipated local television production, the Ramadan dramatic series (musalsal)" (1998, p. 104).

In fact, *Al-Taghriba* was broadcast during Ramadan 2004 and some viewers were anticipating it and aware of the phenomenon of "Ramadan prime time", whereas there were other viewers for whom the time of the broadcast was not significant. As an example showing great awareness of the significance of Ramadan prime time can be found on an online forum called "Palestine Network for Dialogue" (www.paldf.net), where a user posted a question prior to the start of Ramadan asking about the showtime of *Al-Taghriba* in addition to two other serials. Interestingly, another user called "Al-Aqsa Girl" replied to that user in Arabic and I am providing my English translation⁴ of her reply below:

I too, my brother, advise you to use this generous month in what is best for yourself, as this is the month that God bestowed upon us and sent it to us, which is our chance to make up for our sins and to get closer to God and not to watch series, no matter its quality. Importantly, I hope that we all make

⁴ All English translations are translated by me. I am a native Arab speaker and I have a minor in Translation.

use of our time in Ramadan to pray for our brothers in Palestine and Iraq and for our Muslim brothers everywhere. It is better for us than a million series whether about Palestine, Iraq, or Afghanistan..... (October 13, 2004)

Indeed, this user has noticed the interest that people have grown in TV shows and drama serials during the month of Ramadan and how this is conflicting with the religious purpose of the holy Muslim month. In her response, this female-identifying user acknowledges that these serials are of good quality and they tackle topics that concern the Arab world, one of which is Palestine. Nonetheless, it is clear from her response that she believes there is something more important than televised serials. So, as per the discussion on this online forum, some of the audience, who were potential viewers of *Al-Taghriba* back then, manifest an understanding of the relationship between Ramadan and prime-time serials.

In spite of that, watching *Al-Taghriba* in Ramadan was not the most prominent context for other viewers. For them, the family setting itself and who they were watching the serial with were the more salient contexts, which will be further discussed in the rest of the chapter. In particular, when I asked my interviewees about the first time they watched *Al-Taghriba*, the majority of the answers were about how old they were when they watched it, the hour they watched it at, and that they watched it with their families. Those were the primary contexts that those informants were aware of. It is interesting to think about why the context of Ramadan was not that noticeable for those viewers in comparison to the other aforementioned contexts. As per my conversations with those viewers, they stressed that watching this serial was directly linked to their families and knowing more about how they were exiled out of Palestine. I believe one important factor that plays a role in the absence of the Ramadan context for the majority of the informants is that, by the time they first watched the serial in 2004, their average age was eight years old, which according to

Islam is not usually the age when the child starts fasting. So, given that by that time, they did not live the full Ramadan experience that includes fasting, it is plausible that the context of Ramadan was not engraved in their memory while watching *Al-Taghriba*.

Nevertheless, there is one interviewee who was actually aware that the first time he watched *Al-Taghriba*, it was broadcast in Ramadan and he was also aware of the rise of the satellite and TVs back then. This interviewee said:

I watched it [*Al-Taghriba*] when it was first released. I saw the ad on TV and given that we are a Palestinian family that was kicked out of its country, so the title was very attractive. I remember it was in 2004, maybe 2005, so the TV was something essential, especially Ramadan series. So, every year we used to watch series during Ramadan, and they put an ad that they will put the *Al-Taghriba Al Filistenyah* which is a Syrian docudrama about the Palestinian Nakba. So, I got to know it with my family.

One striking point about this viewer is that he was nine years old, which is the age when it is natural for the children to start fasting in Ramadan. When asked about watching *Al-Taghriba* during Ramadan, the interviewee said:

I used to fast during Ramadan, and I remember that it was in Ramadan because my parents used to wake me up for Suhoor and I used to watch it with them then because Ramadan was during the academic year and we had school.

Suhoor is the meal Muslims have just before the break of dawn during Ramadan so that they are able to fast the whole day until sunset, and it is also a practice that Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him) used to do, so that is why it was favored that Muslims do it as well. So, given that the serial was broadcast during October 2004, the scholastic year had already begun which means that parents used to make their children go to bed early in order to wake up to school the next day. Evidently, this informant had lived the full

Ramadan experience from fasting to waking up to Suhoor, which likely plays a role in making the context of Ramadan salient to this informant more than the others.

B. Enforced Viewing of *Al-Taghriba*

All the informants whom I interviewed had watched *Al-Taghriba* when it was first broadcast in 2004, which means that their average age was eight years old. All of them watched it with their families. As a matter of fact, because my sample was very young when they first watched the serial, their families were the reason they watched the serial in the first place — which is in line with what Lull calls “enforced viewing”. As he notes:

The fundamental point here is that any one individual’s viewing is often non-selective, in so far as viewers often watch programmes that are selected by someone else in the family. This is often referred to as ‘enforced viewing’, hardly an uncommon situation in any context in which there is more than one person in the viewing-group. The point is that programme-selection decisions often are complicated interpersonal communication activities involving inter-familial status relations, temporal context, the number of sets available, and rule-based communications conventions (Lull 1982, as cited in Morley 1992).

The dynamics of enforced viewing are important here as this concept contributes to understanding the politics of the family’s viewing choices and the reason they chose to involve their children in the viewing experience. One possible reason for choosing to watch *Al-Taghriba* is that the family believes that the serial’s storyline promotes their nation. For example, one interviewee said:

My parents used to watch it a lot on TV. The whole family used to gather in a room and watch TV. My parents were the main reason behind us watching the serial. As a child, I didn’t know what this serial meant. Perhaps, they made us watch the series so that we become aware of the [Palestinian] cause.

Another interviewee shared: “When I was young, my parents used to watch it, so I watched it with them.” There is one informant who said that he watched *Al-Taghriba* only because of his family, which was very knowledgeable and interested in the topic of Palestine and the exile. I particularly asked him whether he would have known about the serial or watched it had it not been for his family, to which he answered:

That is a very hard hypothesis... but I think the chances would have been less. But, I would have still known about it because I am Palestinian, although I was in a Lebanese private school and lived in the Lebanese community and I did not live in the camp, but I had family there and I used to go there. I was raised as a pure Palestinian.

What this interviewer said is interesting on two levels. First, it shows that the primary reason behind watching this serial is his family, so he did not willingly and intentionally choose this serial and decide to watch it. He was influenced by his family’s viewing choices. Second, there is something compelling about what he said as it incorporates *Al-Taghriba* as part of his social imaginary. It also suggests an assumption that if one is Palestinian and/or lived or had anything to do in a Palestinian camp then that means that he/she would know about *Al-Taghriba*. So, the serial became part of what he thinks is important for one to be Palestinian. Charles Taylor talks about social imaginary saying: “the social imaginary is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy” (Taylor 2004, p. 23). As such, this informant believes and assumes that the awareness of and watching *Al-Taghriba* contribute to one’s Palestinian identity. He suggests that if one is Palestinian then it automatically means that they should be well-versed about their cause, culture, history or anything related to that.

In fact, watching *Al-Taghriba* could be one way of connecting with one's Palestinian identity, but it is definitely not the only way, and so not having watched this serial does not necessarily connote knowing less about the Palestinian history, culture, etc. For instance, one of the focus group participants comes from a group that is very active when it comes to Palestinian politics and Palestinian scouts; in spite of that, he did not know about this serial nor watch it when he was young. Moreover, there were two participants from the focus group discussions who lived in a Palestinian refugee camp and went to an UNRWA school; yet, they did not know or hear about the serial before. As a matter of fact, this means that those people, who grew up without knowing or watching the serial, had their identity shaped without the effect of consumption of this televised medium: *Al-Taghriba*. On the other hand, the former informant, with the social imaginary that I discussed earlier, had formed his identity based on this serial as he gained a lot of material from the serial that helped form his national, political and cultural thought. This was indeed evident by the extensive conversation I had with this informant where he told me in detail about how he believes that this serial helps build one's identity:

I believe that it [*Al-Taghriba*] builds an identity in a sense that wherever you are, you are able to help and contribute to your cause. All it takes is that you believe in this cause in depth. Personally, this serial is the main reason that motivated me and gave me a goal in this life. It gave me a cause that there is nothing in this world except for it. Indeed, this serial is like someone came and gave you a goal for free. Some people might live 50 years searching for a goal in life, so we got ours before we were born.

It is fascinating how this informant has related the serial to his life as a whole and he also incorporated the whole Palestinian people with him and assumed they are similar when he said, "we got ours [goal] before we were born".

Given that the average age of my informants was eight years old and that TV and the satellite channels were still relatively fresh by 2004, how realistic is it to expect a six or an eight-year-old child to willingly decide that he/she wants to watch a specific series and know the time it is broadcast and so on? Therefore, the home and family setting play a huge and crucial role in the viewing choices of its members as was the case with my interviewees. Morley comments on how absurd it would be for someone living in a family setting to be able to have viewing choices and explains:

We are, in short, discussing television viewing in the context of domestic life, which, as we all know, is a complex matter. To expect that we could treat the individual viewer making programme choices as if he or she were a rational consumer in a free and perfect market is surely the height of absurdity when we are talking about people living in families. For most people, viewing takes place within the context of what Sean Cubitt (1985) calls ‘the politics of the living room’ (Morley, 1992, p. 133)

So, in conclusion, by the time *Al-Taghriba* was broadcast for the first time, my informants were all children and the television content they used to watch was controlled by their parents. It is actually interesting to think of the “politics of the living room” of the parents of my informants versus that of the parents who did not inform their children that they are Palestinian because they did not know how to explain what being Palestinian means. Thus far, we have seen how age has shaped my informants’ experience with *Al-Taghriba* insofar as they were not old and mature enough to choose watching this serial.

C. Utopia of *Al-Taghriba*

As per the data analysis of my individual interviews, the uniting impact of the television emerged as a prominent theme. In what follows, I will be referring to the unifying force of the television in relation to interviewees and their families watching *Al-*

Taghriba. In her book *Make Room for TV*, Lynn Spigel discusses discourses that were taking place in post-war America regarding the ideal family in relation to the television. Television was considered as a new medium that entered the social sphere with promises of unity and the American dream (Spigel 1992). She describes the television as a force of both unity and division, which accord with its utopian and dystopian dimensions, respectively. The utopian dimension, which I will be focusing on, promotes television as something that brings the family together, uniting them and bridging the existing gap between its members. For example, Spigel's book examines discourses on television and the family after the second world war. At that time, there were several social and cultural changes taking place in the US such as the condition of men who were traumatized from the war and the role of women within the cult of domesticity. This caused tension amongst family members, resulting in fragmented families. Spigel argues that the utopian point of view of the television promised togetherness, mending marital problems, entertainment, and resulted in having the children in front of the television. In short, Spigel speaks of television as a medium and a physical machine that shapes and constructs a social effect, mainly in the dimension of a family.

The most interesting aspect of the utopia that television offers in the case of *Al Tarighba* is its vital role in bridging the gap, to a certain extent, between the first and the third generation of Palestinian refugees. To begin with, post-Nakba was a hard time for Palestinian refugees, not least in terms of the relationship between generations and, thus, family members. Often times, and as reflected by the majority of the interviewees, three generations of Palestinian refugees were living in the same house. In general, it is very common in the culture of Arab countries to have not only the nuclear family, but also

extended family, such as the grandparents, uncles and/or aunts, living in the same house. As such, once the Palestinian man has a child, three generations of Palestinian refugees would be living together under one roof. In point of fact, living under one roof did not necessarily mean a united family; indeed, the difference in ages and the social and cultural developments resulted in unbridged gaps between the different generations. Speaking from my own experience, the third generation of Palestinian refugees lived a starkly different lifestyle than their grandparents (the first generation). Many of the third generation of refugees were more engaged with the Lebanese community and were part of the nurseries, schools, universities and job market. The first generation of refugees struggled when they first came to Lebanon as they looked for shelter and a way to sustain themselves, especially since they thought that they would go back to Palestine very soon. Other than the political, economic and social factors and differences that caused the gap between the two generations, it is important to take into consideration the rise of technology ever since 1948. Definitely, technological advancement played a huge role in widening the gap between the generations of refugees. For instance, the youngest generation are tech-savvy and always manage to stay up to date with the newest technologies and trends, which allow them to have plenty of resources that would shape their outlook of the world and make them connected to events happening around the globe. On the contrary, the older generation relies mostly on television, news reports and political talk shows to stay informed about what is happening in the world. In fact, the older generation are aware of this gap and this is perhaps one explanation for why some of them try to become closer to the younger generations, by learning how to use smartphones and creating social media accounts, for example. Moreover, in most cases, there was limited communication between the first and

third generation. Being a third-generation refugee, I personally used to consider that my grandmother was an old housewife who spent most of her time at home and had no idea what my day-to-day life looked like, so I rarely knew what to talk about with her.

In essence, the social effect of television on the level of the family that I am interested in is its potential of filling a gap between family members, especially those of different generations. A brief synopsis about the generations of Palestinian refugees could be useful here. First generation refugees were the ones who were living in Palestine and were exiled in 1948 into the neighboring countries such as Lebanon, Jordan and Syria, among other countries. Those were the people who experienced firsthand the terror of the Zionists and the war. Indeed, they were traumatized and did not know how to deal with this trauma. When they sought refuge in the neighboring Arab countries, they were still under the impression that it would only be a few days and they would return back to their homes in Palestine. As a matter of fact, many Palestinians took the keys to their homes with them when they were exiled thinking that their houses would stay as they were, and they would return to them shortly. In the following paragraph, I would like to shed light on the experience of one particular informant and her relationship with her grandfather. This interviewee did not live in a refugee camp and was seven years old when she first watched *Al-Taghriba*. She watched it through “enforced” family viewing. According to her, watching *Al-Taghriba* on TV with her family brought them closer together. As she says:

My family and I never actually sit together to watch TV, but this serial made us sit all together to watch it. We actually had a rule at the house, set by my mother, I still remember, that we had to be done with our homework before 7 pm so that we are all free and can sit and watch it [*Al-Taghriba*] together.

When asked about any discussion about the Nakba/Palestine that used to take place in the family, the interviewee focused on her grandfather. She extensively explained his role and how they, the grandchildren, perceived him, and how the mere act of watching *Al-Taghriba* together played a huge role in shifting their perspective. She explains:

For us, our grandfather was this old man whom we should respect no matter what. We never interacted with him as in sitting and having a conversation, for example. So, there was not much of a relationship between us. But I still remember how when we used to gather and watch it [*Al-Taghriba*] and he sat to watch it with us, we saw him in a different way because he used to tear up. We never knew this is what they went through. But then this made us start talking to him and asking him questions about Palestine and what happened. I vividly remember how my grandpa would be sipping from his cup of tea and the topic of Palestine comes up or Nakba, his hand starts shaking and then he talks about how he used to live there, their houses, villages, his parents.

According to French historian Pierre Nora, we are witnessing “a world-wide upsurge in memory” (2002). He believes that the different forms of this upsurge are significant indicators for establishing close ties between “respect for the past – whether real or imaginary – and the sense of belonging, collective consciousness and individual self-awareness, memory and identity” (2002). By all means, this global rise of interest in memory has been catalyzed by the development of different forms of media. In her book, *Media and Memory*, Joanne Garde-Hansen adapts Nora’s views as she tries to explore further explanations for the increase in popularity of memory, which would tie it to media studies (2011, p.13). She does so in an effort to show the solid relationship between memory studies and media studies. Among the several reasons she mentions for this upsurge, I chose two that might help understand this informant’s grandfather’s experience while watching *Al-Taghriba*:

- 1) the recovery of repressed memories of communities, nations and individuals whose histories have been ignored, hidden or destroyed;
- 2) an increasing emphasis upon trauma, grief, emotion, affect, cognition, confession, reconciliation, apology and therapy;

It is fascinating to see how in the case of this interviewee and her grandfather, watching *Al-Taghriba* gave them a context within which to communicate about Palestine, memory and the past. Accordingly, watching this serial allowed him to speak to his grandchildren about his memories of his childhood, community, and trauma which indeed impacted family relationships, especially those between the first and third generation: those who lived the Nakba and those who only heard about it. So, here we can see how the serial played a role in bridging the gap between the different generations of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Even more, the serial prompts a rare moment of dialogue between the grandchildren and this figure, which according to the informant, was considered distant. It seemed as though the interviewee's grandfather had been holding in this information about his experience and just needed a trigger to share it, while the grandchildren never knew that about their grandfather in the first place. So, we can see an affective relationship taking place, which is something I will discuss in chapter four. Going back to the relationship between grandparents and their grandchildren, I would like to highlight a couple of instances where my informants referred to their grandparents when discussing the serial. During the focus group discussions, the informants and I watched an episode that included a scene that reflects the effect of the trauma that the first generation was subjected to: Abu Ahmad suddenly starts crying out of nowhere because of everything they passed through and the fact that they were refugees in their own country and land. Actually, during the discussion

of this episode, one of the participants pointed out that in that scene, Abu Ahmad very much resembled his own grandfather and reminded him of his grandfather. Interestingly, in addition, another interviewee who had already watched the serial, shed light on this very same scene saying:

The first scene is when Khaled Taja is sitting in the tent and suddenly out of nowhere he starts crying. I believe that this scene does not deserve an Oscar, but something much more than that because this is an experience that all of the Palestinians have seen, and I personally saw it with my grandfather. He used to sit between us and he suddenly starts crying. Suddenly! There is no reason, no one spoke to him. This shows the amount of suffering they went through that they kept to themselves and never spoke about and maybe they were not aware of it. Is he crying for Palestine? his kids? or the fact that he was unable to do anything? I feel that this scene summarizes the cruelty of colonialism. So, this scene really affected me because I have lived it and seen it.

I personally remember sitting for hours with my grandmother without her saying anything. She stayed silent. However, the moment I asked her something about Palestine or her life there, she spoke unstopably as if she was waiting for this chance to talk about how she lived.

In conclusion, and as per the examples discussed above, first generation Palestinian refugees are very different from those of the third generation and indeed, distant. They were considered as those figures of aged people who are not approachable because there was nothing in common with them. Thus, the unifying force of the television and the role it plays as a catalyst for family relations that Spigel addresses is evident in the case of *Al-Taghriba*, as it enhanced family relations and gave space for discussions over the generations about Palestine and the Nakba.

D. *Al-Taghriba*'s Realism Effect

In addition to the unifying role that *Al-Taghriba* played between the interviewees and their grandparents, I would like to shed light on the effect of realism of the serial on those viewers. As per the interviewees' responses, the serial's realism resonated with them and it seems as though they accepted the representations displayed in the serial. As mentioned in the first chapter, one of the interviewees actually trusted what he watched and was relieved that watching the serial spared him from going and doing research about the topic. He further comments that he believed what he watched because his family confirmed the representations in the serial. He said:

My parents, grandparents and aunts told me about the woman who lost her son and how, because she was afraid, she took the pillow instead of her son and rushed running to escape from the Israeli bombing. So, they say she went crazy. My aunts know this story and they narrated it to me before I saw it in the serial. I also heard it from different people as well. The description and the representation were very accurate.

What is interesting in the case of this interviewee is that he had gotten the chance to speak to his different family members about Palestine and had a source that could help him confirm or reject the representations in the serial. So, the rest of interviewees did not significantly comment on the representations, but rather expressed that they were convinced as a result of the realism portrayed. Similarly, the majority of young men and women who participated in the focus group discussions and watched the serial for the first time had a similar reaction. The majority of their responses indicate that the realism portrayed in the serial was convincing. In this particular case, realism may have encouraged a blurring of fact and fiction in people's minds as I did not receive any critical feedback from the participants regarding the depiction of events and their relation to history, except for one

informant which I will discuss below. Based on people's general feedback about *Al-Taghriba* and my informants' insights, viewers were taken by the realism of the serial. In fact, one year ago, I met with my high school English instructor, who is also a professor at the Lebanese University. When I told him that my MA thesis would be about *Al-Taghriba*, the first comment he had was about how realistic the serial is. As per the analysis of one particular interview, it is clear how an informant showed the close ties this serial has to his identity and social imaginary, so what this serial mediates to the viewers can actually be a reason for them to accept this representation on various levels without questioning it. Actually, when asked about realism in this serial, one focus group participant shared the following detailed feedback:

There is one scene that struck me which is when they talk about the UNRWA and how it started, but that is not what attracted my attention. In fact, what attracted my attention might be considered by all of you as a minor detail, but it was of great importance to me. There was a little kid who was not from the main characters, but he was not wearing a shirt. Instead of a shirt, he was wearing a bag of flour that has "UNRWA" written on it - those were the bags that the UNRWA used to distribute food into the Palestinian refugees. I heard about this from my grandmother because that is what she used to sew for her children. So, when I saw it, I remembered what she told me, and I like the fact that they hit such little details in their portrayal of the story of the Palestinian people.

All the participants wondered what this informant was talking about and started saying that they did not actually notice the kid he mentioned. I then asked this participant on what that means to him if he were to comment on the accuracy of the serial, to which he answered:

Look, I cannot really comment on the serial as a whole, but I can comment based on the episodes and scenes we watched together. In general, the scenario and the chronology of events portrayed sounded solid and there was not anything that seemed odd. From the beginning of how they showed us the life in the village and lives of the farmers, that seemed realistic and accurate to me because that is what my grandfather's childhood was about. Now, although my grandparents were not internally exiled, and they sought

refuge in Lebanon, in contrast to the main characters of the family in the series, it makes sense for me to understand that my grandparents had undergone and lived the same circumstances that are very similar to what we have watched. I actually did not find any discrepancy between what my grandparents had told me and what I watched in the serial. So, in general, I believe that this serial is accurate and realistic. However, I would not be saying this if it was not for my grandparents.

In a similar vein to the interviewee discussed earlier, this participant compared the information he already knew to what he watched in the serial and accordingly questioned the accuracy of the events and representations he saw. This kind of exercise was actually striking for me amidst the absence of any critical feedback from other participants. As a matter of fact, what those two informants presented regarding their families being the source that allowed them to accept what this serial represents triggered me to address another focus group participant who had stated earlier during the meeting that: “I feel now that I know more about Palestine and this serial fills the gap of the absence of my grandparents.” I was intrigued to explore the exercise this informant had when she reached this conclusion vis-a-vis the exercise of the previous informant. When I asked her for a clarification for that previous statement, she said:

I did not have the privilege of meeting my grandparents and as such, I did not get the chance to hear their stories about Palestine and how they used to live there etc. So, when I watched this serial, I felt as though I met my grandparents in an indirect way. It [the serial] is just very realistic and convincing from the smallest details about life in the village to the whole Nakba. It does not give you a reason not to believe that this is the truth. After we watched the first two episodes together, I went to my mother and told her about what we watched, and she actually confirmed that that was really what happened from what she heard from her parents. And that is why I was even more convinced that it is correct and depicts the truth.

So, compared to her fellow focus group participant, this informant was largely convinced by the representations manifested in *Al-Taghriba* due to their realism and, as an extra step,

she confirmed those representations with her mother at a later stage. This indeed made me think about the viewers who actually did not meet their grandparents or those who simply do not have family members who can act as a source of knowledge about Palestine; how would their reaction to the serial be? On this note, one of the interviewees expressed that the very fact that she does not have anyone to ask about Palestine is what made her watch

Al-Taghriba. She says:

It [the serial] is about me, my nationality, about something I have not heard about before... I rarely go and ask someone to tell me how they got out of Palestine, and how they fought. So, I took an idea about all of this from the serial, and now when I read something over the Internet, I do not trust it and I prefer that we watch the serial instead.

Definitely, my fascination in this phenomenon of the reception of my informants is not to say that the serial does actually present inaccurate historical information; however, I just find the consumption of this serial and that of mass media in general as very interesting. This actually makes me wonder if the lack of production and circulation of media about Palestine a principle reason for Palestinians could be to accept the first representation—one that employs realism—of the past that they come across.

E. Conclusion

To conclude, in this chapter, I have discussed the crucial role that the age of my informants played in their reception of *Al-Taghriba* and its effect on some levels. I have also discussed the dynamics of watching television in a family setting and its importance as I am interested in exploring the context of viewing that my informants had when they watched *Al-Taghriba*. In point of fact, and as per my informants, children at the age of six

to nine years old did not have enough power/authority back in 2004 nor the awareness to consciously choose what to watch. As such, this relates to what David Morley calls “enforced viewing”, which my informants went through and that is how they actually got to watch *Al-Taghriba*. But what is interesting is that, although the choice to watch it in the beginning was not up to them, they made use of the serial in individual ways, which are still important to them years later. Other informants watched the serial because of the close ties it has with their identity and others because of the way it fits their social imaginary. Indeed, the serial served these multiple non-exclusive purposes for many viewers. Moreover, I have shed light on how watching *Al-Taghriba* on television was an intermediary process for some of the interviewees as it mediated a discussion between family members and acted as a catalyst for the family relations.

CHAPTER IV

AL-TAGHRIBA BETWEEN PROSTHETIC MEMORY AND PEDAGOGY

“Walid Saif delivered the most important drama yet in terms of discussing the exile of the Palestinians in their homeland and the diaspora, starting from the grand Palestinian revolution in the thirties of the past century to the Naksa of June and what followed it. It is the story of the longest refuge in the world, a sad story that does not leave who watches it without creating them anew - a drama that cost Walid Saif nearly three years to be written and cost us tears of grief after joy.”

This is my English translation of how blogger and film critic Eslam El Saqqa opened his blog post about *Al-Taghriba*, which he published in Arabic in 2016. His blog post was reposted by Bab Al Wad, which is a website that belongs to an institution for colonial studies, based in Jerusalem, Palestine. What is interesting is the title of his blogpost, which translates to “The Making of Consciousness in the *Al-Taghriba Al Felesteneyah* serial: the model of Abu Saleh.” In his article, the author analyzes the journey of self-discovery that Ahmad, one of the main characters, went through until he found himself and, as such reached this consciousness of who he was. What is even more remarkable about El Saqqa’s introduction is how he believes and takes it for granted that whoever watches *Al-Taghriba* will be “re-made”. In fact, what I am interested in exploring in this chapter is what meaning did my informants make from watching this serial and their main takeaway lessons. In some ways, this serial can be seen as an interactive tool that transmits a message through affective engagement, which facilitates understanding the overall message. It is true that many shows create affective engagement with the past, but the unique aspect of this serial

that I would like to address is the particular group of people that I targeted with this research.

A. Can a prosthetic memory and an affective engagement inform one's identity?

Al-Taghriba is an engaging serial that discusses the topic of the Palestinian cause and has the capacity to provide a prosthetic memory for its viewers. Alison Landsberg highlights the possibilities of prosthetic memories within the media saying, “When the film takes the historical past as its subject, the possibility of acquiring prosthetic memories is even more pronounced.” (2009, p. 222). Thus, if films generally have the capacity to elicit prosthetic memory, this is all the more pronounced, indeed, overt, when their topic is history. As such, I am interested in exploring the degree to which the sensual experience of watching the serial can impact the way the viewers think and act. To explore this idea, throughout this chapter, I will be referring to Landsberg’s concepts of prosthetic memory and affective engagement, which I briefly introduced in the introduction of this research project. Landsberg mainly discusses how mass media can offer a way for individuals to experience history in a different way from how it is portrayed in history books or other forms produced by historians. Landsberg introduces her concept of prosthetic memory—which I believe plays an important role in facilitating this different experience of history she talks about—and calls it so because it is artificial. Moreover, she argues that, due to commodification and new emerging technologies of memory, “the kinds of memories that one has ‘intimate’, even experiential, access to would no longer be limited to the memories of events through which one actually lived” (Landsberg 2009, p. 146). In other words,

although one did not physically live a particular experience, they can still have a prosthetic memory that is personal because it originates from engaging with an experience mediated through mass media. What is interesting about Landsberg's argument is that she believes that such a sensual concept can actually contribute to one's individuality. Furthermore, she highlights this contribution saying:

What I mean instead to underscore is the unique power of prosthetic memory to affect people in profound ways – both intellectually and emotionally – in ways that might ultimately change the way they think, and how they act, in the world. (Landsberg 2009, p. 158)

In addition to the concept of prosthetic memory, it is essential to speak about Landsberg's concept of affective engagement, which complements and nuances the former concept. In her book *Engaging the Past*, Landsberg argues that narratives about the past circulating through mass culture can engage the audience both intellectually and affectively. She further argues that once one is engaged affectively with a medium, i.e. when one's body is touched, moved, provoked, he/she will be able to better acquire historical understanding and knowledge. Rather than addressing the viewer as a passive recipient of historical information, she argues that, through this experience, a viewer would be able to generate new thoughts about history. As such, she speaks of the concept of the "reenactment of history" and describes it as an experiential mode where the individual engages with an experience in order to think of history. In what follows, I will consider *Al-Taghriba* as an experience of reenactment of history and examine my informants' engagement with it and if and how it contributes to their understanding and knowledge of the history of Palestine.

In order to explore and understand the maps of meaning that my informants formed, in this section of the chapter, I will look into their engagement and reaction to the

episodes we watched together over the different times we met. Before screening the episodes with the focus group participants who had not watched the serial before, I asked them to rate their knowledge about Palestine from one to ten. The average answer was six out of ten. When asked about the source of this knowledge, the participants' answers varied from living in a refugee camp and going to an UNRWA school, reading books, living in a political environment, listening to their parents tell stories that their grandparents had told them, to the internet and social media. All of the participants had grandparents who lived in Palestine and a few of them actually had the chance to sit with their grandparents and listen to their stories about Palestine and the suffering during the exile, whereas the rest only have memories from their grandparents such as the key to their house in Palestine and a piece of wood that they brought with them from Palestine. As we were about to start screening the first episode, one of the participants demonstrated excitement and curiosity about watching the serial by saying, "I would really like to know how they did [the grandparents] get out of Palestine and how it all happened."

After watching each episode, the participants conveyed enjoyment, readiness and eagerness to watch more episodes. What was fascinating is that there is one particular participant who went home and watched the whole serial. She said:

I watched it last week after the second time we met. I finished all 31 episodes in one day, I just spent all my day and night, I did not sleep, skipped my homework and I watched it all, all of it.

So, this informant could not wait until the next time we met and was so excited and eager to know more. When asked why she did that, she answered enthusiastically:

I love this serial so much! I loved it because of how they showed the events in chronological order and how they highlighted the suffering of the farmer and the Palestinian citizen and how they left. I also love how they

demonstrate the different generations of Palestinians. The struggle and injustice that our people went through seriously touched me. I literally spent the whole time crying while watching.

What is compelling about this informant's insights is how she used the feeling of love to refer to the serial, in addition to using the expression "touched me", which suggests a bodily feeling that Landsberg talks about and that ultimately shows that this participant affectively engaged with *Al-Taghriba*. Speaking of the memories involved in such engagement, Landsberg says: "As memories taken on and experienced sensuously, even viscerally, they become powerful tools in shaping one's subjectivity." (2009, p. 155). Landsberg here signals one of several layers that are involved when an individual is "touched" by history. In point of fact, this participant said:

The thing is that when I watched it, I was moved and I was very emotional and it is not like when you read a piece of information on social media like Instagram, for example. Now, whenever I want to talk to someone, whether Palestinian or not, about the Palestinian cause, I immediately would suggest that they watch *Al-Taghriba*. Indeed, it [the serial] reinforced my identity and made me get more attached to the [Palestinian] cause. It also made me hate Arabs *laughs* because in this serial, they show us how the Arabs gave fake promises and how Abu Saleh believed and trusted that they [the Arabs] will come for help and he kept on waiting for them, but they did nothing.

Not only did this participant engage with the serial, but she also acquired historical information, and that process was different to her from simply reading the same information on digital social media platforms. After asking her about those online platforms that she follows, I asked this participant about this difference that she highlights, to which she answered:

The difference is that for example, when you read this information on social media like Instagram, it is just information, not more. It did not affect me like the serial did, because the serial played on the emotions by showing us the people's experiences and the events that happened.

We can see how presenting information using the elements of audiovisuality and basing the plot on people's experiences has affectively engaged this participant in comparison to "just" reading information online. In fact, through her book, Landsberg (2015) calls against the dismissal of history presented through audiovisual media as an experience that would result in viewers who identify with what they watch without any questions. On the contrary, Landsberg believes that an experience like that of the participant discussed above could open doors for a logical understanding of history instead of just simply watching representations of the past without making meaning out of it. The participant's responses suggest that she has implicitly accepted what the serial offered her without questioning the historical information, indicating that she believes that it accounts for a kind of generalized truth of historical experience. Adding to that, as we saw in the second chapter, the majority of my informants did the same whereby they engaged with the serial and broadly accepted the representations it offers.

During the different episodes, the participants expressed a variety of feelings ranging from pride, empathy, hate towards the Zionists, happiness, appreciation of the importance of education to helplessness. However, the most recurring feelings were those of anger, sadness and heartache, and several participants repeatedly expressed that they have felt goosebumps while watching. One participant said, "I got goosebumps when the British were shooting at them [the Palestinians] and they did not back down; on the contrary, they kept going and they fought back... It was very nice". While another participant shared what they felt and said: "Goosebumps! It gave me goosebumps and I felt that I wanted to cry all the time because I realized that this is not just acting; this is what people actually went through." A participant took a deep breath and then said in a sad tone:

“This episode made my heart ache!” Furthermore, participants interacted fully with what they were watching. At certain instances, they laughed and at other instances, some participants actually started addressing the characters as if they were in the same setting:

What broke my heart the most is how the baby was crying and they shot him and Taim Hasan started crying... This is someone who is young and innocent, why would you kill him?

The scene this participant is referring to is a point-of-view shot where we first see the Zionist soldier standing with the baby beneath him on the floor while pointing his gun at him and then we see how the protagonist, Ali, is seeing this moment. As such, the informant is living this tragic scene through the eyes of Ali. Landsberg comments on the effects of such a process saying: “Point-of-view shots force us to look at the world through someone else’s eyes, from their literal perspective, thus pulling us into the action of the film, and into the mental and emotional life of the protagonist” (209, p.225). She further argues that this can eventually lead to having the viewer engage emotionally and intellectually with an experience they did not live and thus they will be inclined to ‘enter into a relationship of responsibility and commitment toward, “others”’ which will in her opinion provide a foundation for empathy.

Landsberg’s argument is rooted in the fact that a film with historical trauma as a subject can achieve this emotional and intellectual experience, and thus empathy and identification, even if this trauma is depicted based “not on sameness and similarity, but on distance and difference between viewer and subject” (Landsberg 2009, p. 225). To support her argument, Landsberg refers to the film *The Pianist*, which deals with the topic of the Holocaust. Indeed, what is fascinating about Landsberg’s argument and example here is that she assesses the success of a film by the possibilities of affective engagement it fosters

based on the condition that the film can make the viewer identify and empathize with a protagonist even if the viewer feels distanced and alienated from this protagonist. This invites me to think of the intensity of empathy generated in the case of my informants and *Al-Taghriba*, where there is an intrinsic and natural connection to the serial and its characters, which can suggest an even more powerful empathy than the one Landsberg talks about above. It is true that the viewer is different from the protagonist, but in the case of *Al-Taghriba*, there is so much in common between the two parties and it is almost hard to say that there is a distance that can be kept, especially that based on the testimonies of my informants, whether those who watched the serial previously with their families or those who watched select episodes in the focus group discussions, they had watched this with a presumptive belief that what they will watch is the story of their grandparents. Maybe, the slight distance that can be kept in the case of my informants and *Al-Taghriba* is that those who are watching the serial are the grandchildren. Of course, those grandchildren are very much connected to their grandparents naturally; however, they were not present at the moment of exile and they did not live it with all its terrors. Those grandchildren are currently living the result of the exile of their grandparents. So, given that prosthetic memory can be applied to people who do not share a natural connection to the memories in question, just like in the case of *The Pianist*, I believe that this prosthetic memory can work even more strongly among individuals who have a natural connection but who, nonetheless, lack many of the memories in question.

Furthermore, one of the interviewees who had already watched the serial comments on how he believes *Al-Taghriba* can help build one's identity and says:

In general, when you are people who have been subject to settler colonialism and have lost your identity, your land etc., it is so hard for you to find your identity so that is why we are lost when it comes to our identity. Sometimes, we say we are Canaanites, Palestinians, Arabs, Muslims.. We do not know what we are exactly. However, in our unconscious we know that Palestine was ours and that we used to live there, and someone came and kicked us out. So, this serial connects you with the land and with the Palestinian person who used to live there who is not a stranger.

This informant directly identified the protagonist he is watching as a non-stranger, which further supports my stance regarding empathy between individuals who are naturally connected.

Indeed, Landsberg emphasizes the idea of empathy on two levels. She believes that empathy on the level of individuals from the same community is almost natural. However, on a more remarkable and surprising level, comes empathy that is forged between people who are different from each other. As such, I would like to offer a further type of empathy that is formed between different subjects, who in my case are first generation grandparents and third generation grandchildren, and yet, happen to be within the same community. The interesting aspect about this type of empathy is that the difference between the two parties is bridged by a mediated prosthetic memory. In her explanation of the impact of prosthetic memory, Landsberg marks its importance and usefulness in generating empathy, as she says, “Technologies such as the camera and the cinema enable people to take on memories of difficult pasts and thereby facilitate the experience of empathy” (2009, p. 156). In fact, this was evident as one focus group participant said: “When someone watches such a thing, unwillingly, you either put yourself in the shoes of these people or you start thinking how they lived in such situations and hardships.” Interestingly, what this informant said made the other participants think and

then contribute to the discussion as one of them said: “Yes, that is true! I was able to relate it to my grandpa, whom I understand more now, especially when there are clashes in the camp; he refuses to leave.” Another participant added saying: “True, the old generation of Palestinian refugees in Al-Yarmouk refused to leave when the Syrian crisis started because they said we left our houses once and we will not do it again. It makes sense now.” One more participant referred to his grandfather and said: “I thought that my grandpa is just like Khaled Taja, and he will do and take the same decisions that he took so it was very relatable.” Evidently, the focus group participants demonstrated a variety of feelings while watching select episodes, and they displayed empathy that made them further think about their grandparents and the situation they were in. One participant shared the following:

Literally, I did not know anything about Palestine, how the old people used to struggle, how we were marginalized and if we did not get scholarships we would not have received any education. Yes, it is realistic and could be watched once, twice and three times - when they are happy, you feel happy and when they are sad you feel sad and when they succeed you feel happy for them. It is so realistic it makes me feel as if I was living with them - I felt that when they used to succeed, it is as if I succeeded myself.

As such, could the possibilities of the prosthetic memory that *Al-Taghriba* might hold be more plausible in the case when the viewer displays empathy and identification with a character they have a natural connection to?

B. Pedagogical Possibility

In addition to prosthetic memory, I believe that *Al-Taghriba* holds the possibility of pedagogy. In fact, after exploring my sample’s reaction to watching the serial, it is crucial to acknowledge that there are several sites of learning besides schooling and the subjects we study there such as museums, cinema and television. What is interesting about

the case of my sample is that they did not receive the education of Palestinian history at school, so it not like they have the school in addition to televised pedagogy; it is only *Al-Taghriba* in this case, in addition to stories from grandparents for a couple of participants. I would like to relate this notion of cinematic pedagogy to Landsberg's concept of affective engagement because the pedagogy I address is not equal to scholastic education and not to be reduced to just receiving and being taught something. On the contrary, the pedagogy I am interested in is one that involves empathy, identification and affective engagement, which in their turn would enable the individual to gain knowledge as they are incorporated through images, sounds, props etc.

Over and above empathy, the focus group discussion participants manifested that they are now more aware of the historical timeline and events that happened and led to Nakba. As we were discussing the timeline, each participant started adding an event chronologically until they all together put up the timeline. The discussion that went on between the participants to come up with the timeline made me think of this focus group vis-a-vis the informants who watched the serial in a family setting, which I discussed in the previous chapter. So, it seems as though this focus group discussion had a pedagogical role in reinforcing and having the participants apply what they learned from the different episodes they watched. In fact, this resonates with what the interviewees experienced with their grandparents when they discussed the details of what they watched with them.

Although the experiences are similar in that manner, I believe they could also be different. The focus group discussion mainly triggers the elements of knowledge and empathy, whereas the family setting triggers a type of knowledge that is accompanied by emotional ties, given that the informant has their grandparent in front of them telling them

that this is what happened and how it felt. Moreover, when asked about whether they observed a particular strategy that the Zionists were following in their war and attacks, the participants were able to identify at least two strategies such as terror, especially against children and women, through massacres, and attacking village by village through blowing them up. In general, the focus group participants manifested that they learned a fair amount of information that they did not know before. This observation is indeed essential because it posits this televised serial in the position of a key source of information for my sample.

Similarly, in her ethnography in *Dramas of Nationhood* (2004), Lila Abu-Lughod sheds light on the significance of the Egyptian televised melodramas in allowing the citizens to imagine themselves as part of the Egyptian nation through what she calls “national pedagogy”. Just like certain Egyptian melodramas allow for this scope of education that helps in shaping a citizen’s national identity, I am interested in exploring this possibility in *Al-Taghriba*. In point of fact, I would like to explore a moment where Landsberg’s concept of affective engagement may collide with Abu-Lughod’s notion of national pedagogy. Abu-Lughod addresses the melodramatic emotions that serials can instill in the audience and says “Many people with whom I spoke described the good television serial as one that ‘pulls’ (bitshidd). It not only ‘pulls’ audiences in, but ‘pulls’ on their feelings” (2004, p. 118). She further comments on this type of media saying that they “provide an education in sentiment” (Abu-Lughod 2004, p. 119). Actually, I believe that this process of “pulling on their feelings” and “providing education in sentiment” is closely tied to affective engagement. As such, in the case of *Al-Taghriba*, this education in sentiment would actually be in the manner that a viewer can remember how something felt, so when they feel the history being shown in the serial, they will be able to easily learn it

and have it engraved in their memory. Landsberg says, “I am suggesting that even these mass-media representations of the past have the capacity to produce historical knowledge and to foster the historian’s mindset, a kind of historical consciousness” (2015, p.24). This was indeed evident as per my informants’ insights about the information they gained after watching the serial. For instance, one interviewee described this serial as one that has “educational, awareness-raising and entertaining content.” He explains:

This serial is one of a kind. It is necessary to be taught to all of the Palestinian generations and the upcoming ones because it really does present an educational, awareness-raising and entertaining content at the same time and it builds an identity. You are not watching a documentary and just getting to know what happened in Palestine. No, you are watching, and you are interacting with the characters and feeling with them. Maybe you are feeling things that happen with you now in relation to those characters and this is what we call consciousness. So, it provides a timeline of the events that led us to where we are. I believe it is important to be taught because of what is happening today and the fact that there is an absence of the subject of history and there are generations that are dying. So, this serial fills the gap and acts as the link. For me, this is the only serial that has presented the Palestinian cause in a way that is closest to perfection.

The insight this informant provides is interesting on different levels. First, he considers the serial not only as an educational tool but also as something that helps build an individual’s identity. He believes that the way the serial engages the viewer is what, in fact, allows for the intake of “historical” information in a self-aware way. In addition to describing the affective engagement he had while watching the serial, this informant addresses the issue of history, which I shed light on in the introduction of this research, as he believes that the subject of the history of Palestine is completely absent from the schools’ curricula. As such, he suggests that *Al-Taghriba* should be used as a national pedagogical tool that would help facilitate the way Palestinians have access and remember their nation. The informant talks about preparing this pedagogical material himself as he says:

This serial was like a wake-up call. If I have time, I would just sit and crop episodes and divide them so that I prepare an educational subject about it. You can teach any topic you want from it. Indeed, this serial made me break this romantic idea I had of Palestine because I realized that this will lead us nowhere.

So, this informant believes that once an individual is better informed and well-educated about the history of their nation, they will be more prepared to defend the nation compared to only having a romanticized image of it, which in his opinion is not useful. This informant thinks that the current generation of Palestinian refugees only think of Palestine as “paradise on earth” and the only references they have of it are Jerusalem, Dome of the Rock, and “those beautiful pictures you see over the internet of the greenery, valleys, olive trees and the sea”, he says. This relates to what this informant shared, which I addressed in the second chapter, about the expectations he had of what Palestine is and looks like and how this serial “crushes the fantasies” people have of Palestine.

In point of fact, what this informant talks about was reflected in another interviewee’s response about the impact of this serial in which he says:

This serial makes you hold on to your identity and your Palestinian cause. When I was young, I was aware that I lived in Lebanon, but I did not know what Palestine is. We do not know what it means to be a refugee, so the serial sheds light on these topics and it helps you spread your cause to the world, what your cause is, and what is the suffering that the Palestinian people went through. It actually made me feel and empathize with other Palestinians and the cause itself.

As we can see, Landsberg’s argument about empathy and identification surfaces in this testimony, as it is evident that this informant has gained historical knowledge that affected his identity and the way he thinks. Another interviewee shares her takeaway from the serial saying:

It made me try to look for serials that talk about Palestine too. I learned a lot from it. I learned that I have to remember my country at all times and

remember the suffering of my people. I learned that education is our only weapon. It increased my sense of belonging. I would not leave the lands I saw in the serial, although it was just a made-up setting. However, I would not be here if my grandparents stayed there. I blamed them for leaving. Yet, I have to accept the reality and that God has a purpose behind this.

Similarly, this informant shares how important remembering is for her and the way she thinks about herself and her grandparents. Likewise, another informant shares her thoughts about watching this serial and says:

I went to a Lebanese public school and then to a Lebanese private university and the majority of my friends were Lebanese and they spoke the Lebanese accent. So, when I watch the serial again it feels that I belong to the people I am watching and not where I am today.

It is important to note how this informant expressed that language, in her case, accent, is part of her identity and who she belongs with. Indeed, it is only suitable here to recall Benedict Anderson's concept of imagined communities and how he believes that language plays a crucial role in the birth of nationalism (1983). Thus, linguistic identity is key for this participant to be part of this imagined community and according to Anderson, language is vital for a national identity to be formed (1983).

In addition to the knowledge the informants acquired and how it affected the way they think and act, the focus group participants noted the new pieces of information they learned after watching select episodes of *Al-Taghriba*. For example, one participant said that he only knew that there was a Nakba, but never knew about the Naksa. A participant said that she only learned about the 1936 revolution from this serial. Another participant said that she did not know about the dates of the events, and here it is important to note that during the serial, it was written on the screen the year during which the events were taking place.

Furthermore, one common takeaway that all participants and some of the interviewees talked about was the UNRWA and its role. One interviewee comments:

They showed things as they are. They indeed spoke about the UNRWA and how it was aiding, and they highlighted how the UNRWA personnel started to be in control and my family used to tell us how they used to rule the camp as they wanted. And this is shown in the serial and this kept on happening in the refugee camps in Lebanon. The portrayal is so true, and it shows us how UNRWA was just another piece of the puzzle. They did not go extreme in this portrayal, but they did mention it and hint at it. They picked my brain to further think about this topic and explore it.

What this informant shares is significant, taking into consideration that this is the same person who said that watching *Al-Taghriba* spared him the research about life in Palestine. So, according to this informant, it seems as though the topics that the serial has addressed in a fair amount of episodes and details such as life in the city vs. the village and class in the society presented themselves thoroughly to the extent that no further research was deemed necessary; however, the topics that the serial only hinted at were things that intrigued him to research and know more about.

Another mental exercise that I found interesting was when one of the focus group participants related what he watched in one of the episodes to an event that happened in Palestine a few days before our meeting for the screening:

The issue of Palestine was made and destined to end years ago but what made the Palestinian cause stay alive is the preservation of the Palestinian identity. So, what the martyr Omar Abu Laila did shows that “the owner of the house does not feel afraid”. What would make a young man with just a knife he got from the kitchen attack an Israeli checkpoint where there is a soldier with a gun? Of course, this proves that “the owner of the house does not feel afraid” and that we [Palestinians] are not the ones who are afraid, this is our land and they [Zionists] are the ones who are afraid because it is not their land. I am saying this because what we watched today is very much relevant to the operation that the martyr Omar Abu Laila did and this shows that the serial reflects what I have heard about the unevenness of power between both parties that existed ever since then and is still the case today.

Indeed, this participant compared the information he already knows to what he watched in the serial, and then related it to current events happening in Palestine. This kind of exercise is actually fascinating, and this is, in fact, evident that merely watching the past on a screen does not necessarily mean that the viewer will unquestionably accept what he/she is watching. On the contrary and according to Landsberg, watching an audiovisual recreation of history such as *Al-Taghriba* can lead to affective engagement, which in turn can lead to a rational understanding of the past and of the present, I would add.

C. Conclusion

To conclude, watching a historical documentary is a different experience from reading a history book, and Alison Landsberg believes that the reason is that popular forms of media provide an experiential and affective engagement that other accounts of history usually do not offer. Indeed, this is interesting as it calls for a shift in the way history work is presented, especially in the particular case of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, where they are not taught the subject of Palestinian history. In this chapter, I explored the possibilities that *Al-Taghriba* holds for providing a prosthetic memory and affective engagement and how such a sensual experience can affect the way contemporary Palestinian refugees think and how it impacts their identity or sense of belonging. In addition to these, I examined the serial as a tool of national pedagogy and investigated the possible ways it can provide historical information for its viewers, especially when coupled with prosthetic memory and affective engagement. Interestingly, the majority of the informants talked about the educational content *Al-Taghriba* provides for themselves and

other Palestinians in general. Nonetheless, one interviewee provided a similar insight but on a larger scale addressing people in general. Based on her experience, she says:

I hope that this serial would receive more advertising so that this message would reach more and more people, because I studied Business Administration at AUB and my classmates and the people there thought that given that I am Palestinian, I leave to Palestine each weekend. So, not everyone knows about the case of Palestine and about what happened so you feel that everyone should be informed.

It would actually be so interesting to explore the maps of meaning *Al-Taghriba* could help create among a bigger and more diverse sample that would include people from the Arab world, for example. Last but not least, based on the data provided in this chapter, I believe that historical memory acquired through mass media does not only draw people into the past, it also has the capacity to define their present and future as it helps shape their identity.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This research project aimed to study the way third generation Palestinian refugees residing in Lebanon made meaning from watching *Al-Taghriba*, a Syrian televised serial about Palestine. Throughout this thesis, I referred to my informants as individuals who interpreted, decoded and related what they watched into their everyday lives. Indeed, by studying my sample's reactions to the serial and studying the way they make meaning of it, I was able to gain more insights about how contemporary Palestinian refugees understand their nation. Even more, by analyzing the representations that *Al-Taghriba* offers and the way my informants engaged with it, this thesis has shown how a media object can directly and indirectly contribute to the formation of an individual's identity, memory, historical knowledge and consciousness. In such modern times and as a result of wars, migration, globalization and technological advancement, a set of shared maps of meaning within a culture, as per Stuart Hall, "seem to provide a frame of reference [...] which connects one's present mode of existence to the way of life of one's ancestors" (1995, p.176). As such, getting in touch with a representation of the past of one's nation has the capacity of affecting their being today and tomorrow.

In chapter II, I argue that *Al-Taghriba*, being an audiovisual text, allows its viewers to form a public that is addressed by the text itself, which allows them to understand and engage with it against other available texts. I also try to posit *Al-Taghriba* against other Syrian televised serials that address the Palestinian cause in an attempt to

explore the uniqueness of this serial and the public that forms around it. Moreover, in this chapter, I highlight how *Al-Taghriba* offers an interesting representation of the everyday life in Palestine before, during and after the Nakba and, accordingly, I study how this dynamic was presented in the serial and the informants' reaction to it. This aspect of the serial was particularly interesting because my sample expressed that they were not much aware about such insights related to life in Palestine. Through my discussion of the usage of elements of realism in several scenes of the serial addressing life in the village, women and education, it was evident that this representation of the everyday life has formed a dynamic that allowed the informants to get in touch with their national identities.

In chapter III, I extend my analysis to the context of viewing of *Al-Taghriba*, rather than the media object itself. The context of viewing includes but is not limited to the age of my informants, the time of year when they watched it, and who they watched it with. Indeed, the age my informants played a crucial role in their process of making meaning of the serial, especially the fact that their average age on first viewing was eight years old. At that age, the informants went through what is called "enforced viewing" as they could not consciously decide to watch the serial. I also present the several reasons that could drive the family to include their children in the viewing process of *Al-Taghriba* such as their belief that it promotes their nation. Furthermore, I study the time of the broadcast of the serial, which was in Ramadan, and the effect of that on the viewers. Watching the serial in the family context has in several cases opened a door, which otherwise could have stayed closed, for dialogue and conversation between family members about Palestine and exile, especially between the first and third generation of refugees. Accordingly, I discussed the potentially unifying and utopic force of television in general and *Al-Taghriba* in specific

and how it translated on the level of family relations such as bridging gaps. In addition to the above, I also discuss how the realism displayed played a key role in presenting the representations of the serial in a way that convinced the viewers and that might have blurred the fact and fiction in people's minds.

In chapter IV, I pose the question about the possibility that *Al-Taghriba* holds for offering a prosthetic memory to its viewers, in addition to having a pedagogical dimension. I examine the serial as an interactive tool that leads to affective engagement, which in turn can lead to a prosthetic memory. I do that by exploring the sensual experience my informants lived as I look closely at their reactions and feelings while watching and how they expressed them. In fact, according to Landsberg (2015), when one is sensually and affectively engaged, this facilitates acquiring historical information. As such, I complement Landsberg's concepts of prosthetic memory and affective engagement with Lila Abu-Lughod's concept of pedagogy. The pedagogy I discuss is a process that incorporates empathy, identification and affective engagement which thus promotes the process of gaining knowledge. As per my sample's experiences, they have learned a fair amount of information about the Palestinian cause that they had not known before. Not only that, but the type of memory and knowledge this serial provided the viewers with has the capacity to also affect their present and future.

Throughout the different chapters, there was one overarching theme which is identification. My informants, whether focus group participants or interviewees, have expressed that the mere fact of watching *Al-Taghriba* has altered their sense of belonging in various ways. Furthermore, some informants expressed that watching this serial has "reinforced" their identity and even more, increased their attachment to Palestine, which

they felt like they were starting to lose. Other informants spoke about how knowing how their grandparents were exiled from their own land and the suffering they went through has helped them better understand what it really means to be a refugee, in addition to understanding their origins and the story of their nation.

To conclude, *Al-Taghriba* facilitates imagining and understanding the nation for third generation Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon. In this research project, I show how this sample comes to make meaning of what they watched from the serial and how that shaped the way they imagine themselves within a nation: Palestine. Further research is needed to study the impact *Al-Taghriba* could have on other generations of Palestinian refugees, Palestinians currently living inside the occupied Palestinian lands, and Arabs in general. Indeed, this serial has shed light on several untold stories and traumas that were neglected or not represented enough. As such, how would a first-generation Palestinian refugee react if they watch this serial? Would they remember and imagine themselves as part of the nation in the past? Or would it be possible for them to imagine themselves as part of a present and futuristic nation? Moreover, to better comprehend the effect of such a serial, future studies should address the script, image, music and sound used in this serial and its availability for free on YouTube. As a matter of fact, as a future completion of this research, I intend to translate the script of *Al-Taghriba* into English, use that as subtitles to the serial, and upload the episodes with English subtitles on YouTube for local and international reach because it would be very interesting for someone to study the impact of *Al-Taghriba* on international populations from different continents and nationalities.

Appendix I

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS GUIDE

My name is Jana Al Mawed and I am currently an MA candidate at the American University of Beirut.

We are here today because, as part of my thesis, I would like your help in understanding the perception of a televised docudrama that documents life in Palestine shortly before, during and after the 1948 Palestinian Nakba. For this reason, I will be meeting with 7 third-generation Palestinian refugees (men and women) who are 18 years old and above from all across Lebanon who have already watched the serial. The only exclusion criteria used in this study are if the participants are not Palestinians, or they are not of the third-generation of the Palestinian refugees, if below 18 years old and if they have not watched the serial before. All participants will be recruited through email via the Palestinian Cultural Club (PCC) at AUB. We will meet in the conference room of the department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Media Studies at AUB, Nicely 204.

I want to understand your thoughts, feelings and overall impressions of the serial. The interview will take a maximum of an hour. I will not use names. Everything you share is confidential. The study involves no risks beyond those encountered in daily life. There are no right or wrong answers. Your opinions are important. Participation in the discussion is completely voluntary. Refusal or withdrawal from the study will involve no loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled nor will it affect your relationship with AUB/AUBMC. There is no financial compensation offered in return to participation nor reimbursement for transportation expenses. The benefits of the study to you as a participant is that you will have an opportunity to hear others' opinions and express yourself in a safe space. Your perspective will be highly valued by the research team. You have the right not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. If you feel uncomfortable at any time during the study period, you can leave. Choosing to withdraw from the study will not affect you or your relationship with AUB in any way. With the information that I gather, I will be writing my final thesis research.

You will receive a copy of the consent document.

I will be audio recording this conversation to make sure that I will not miss what you have to say. Is that okay with you? If not, then I will be taking handwritten notes instead. The data collected (audio recordings and transcripts) will be stored in the principal investigator's office under lock and key. Only the principal investigator and the research team will have access to the recordings and transcripts. The data will be discarded three years after the submission of the study, as per AUB's Archives policy.

I am grateful for your time.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

In case of questions about rights or concerns about the study, please contact AUB IRB
Tel: 00961 1 374374, ext: 5445
irb@aub.edu.lb

- 1- How did you come to know about Al Taghriba?
- 2- When did you watch it (how old were you)? How many times?
- 3- How is it different from/similar to other serials you watched?
- 4- What made you watch it? Why did you decide to continue watching it?
- 5- Can you give a brief summary of it?
- 6- What is your overall impression of the serial? Why?
- 7- What did you like most about it? What did you dislike? Why?
- 8- What are the main points/scenes that stuck in your mind? How come/ why are they distinguished to you?
- 9- Who is your favorite character? Who is your least favorite?
- 10- Are there any things that you learned from this serial? If yes, are there any things that you learned about the Palestinian history?
- 11- Which of the characters, if any, do you relate to? Why?
- 12- In what ways, if any, do you relate to the living conditions/lifestyle displayed in the serial?
- 13- What do you think of the serial's portrayal of the refugee camps and the UNRWA?
- 14- The producers of this serial have tried to reflect a "realist" image of Palestine and life there by choosing this locale and set (including accent, clothing, etc), what are your thoughts on this?
- 15- Have any of your family members ever mentioned to you about the Nakba before? Were you able to link what you have seen in the serial to what you have heard from them? (How close was their description to what was displayed?)
- 16- What were the different feelings that you experienced while watching the series? What triggered those feelings (scenes/facts)?
- 17- What impact has this serial have on you? Did it alter your sense of belonging to the Palestinian community in any way?

Appendix II

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS GUIDE

My name is Jana Al Mawed and I am currently an MA candidate at the American University of Beirut.

We are here today because, as part of my thesis, I would like your help in understanding the perception of a televised docudrama that documents life in Palestine shortly before, during and after the 1948 Palestinian Nakba. For this reason, I will be meeting with 7 third-generation Palestinian refugees (men and women) who are 18 years old and above from all across Lebanon who have not watched the serial before. The only exclusion criteria used in this study are if the participants are not Palestinians, or they are not of the third-generation of the Palestinian refugees, if below 18 years old, do not agree to have this focus group discussion audio-recorded and if they have already watched the serial before. All participants will be recruited through email via the Palestinian Cultural Club (PCC) at AUB.

I want to understand your thoughts, feelings and overall impressions of the serial. Although it is comprised of 31 episodes, we will only be meeting four times over the period of four weeks where each session will take around 2 hours. We will meet in the conference room of the department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Media Studies at AUB, Nicely 204. Every time we meet, we will be watching an episode and then discuss it together. I will not use names. Everything you share is confidential. The study involves no risks beyond those encountered in daily life. There are no right or wrong answers. Your opinions are important. Participation in the discussion is completely voluntary. Refusal or withdrawal from the study will involve no loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled nor will it affect your relationship with AUB/AUBMC. There is no financial compensation offered in return to participation nor reimbursement for transportation expenses; however, refreshments and snacks will be served during the discussion. You have the right not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. If you feel uncomfortable at any time during the study period, you can leave. With the information that I gather, I will be writing my final thesis research. You will receive a copy of the consent document.

I will be audio recording this conversation to make sure that I will not miss what you have to say. Is that okay with you? The data collected (audio recordings and transcripts) will be stored in the principal investigator's office under lock and key. Only the principal investigator and the research team will have access to the recordings and transcripts. The data will be discarded three years after the submission of the study, as per AUB's Archives policy.

I am grateful for your time.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

In case of questions about rights or concerns about the study, please contact AUB IRB

Tel: 00961 1 374374, ext: 5445

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First: Episode three

Before:

- 1- Have you ever heard about the serial? From who? And how come you did not watch it?
- 2- Who of your family members have lived in Palestine? Have they talked to you about it? What did they tell you?
- 3- How would you characterize your level of knowledge about Palestine and its history? How did you gain this knowledge?
- 4- Would you like to visit Palestine one day? Would you like to meet and speak to people living there? (Are you interested in knowing about the lifestyle and people there?) Why?
- 5- What do you know about UNRWA? Why was it established and what services does it provide?

After:

- 1- What was your first impression of this episode?
- 2- What were the feelings you experienced while watching? Why? What triggered those feelings?
- 3- Did you learn new things about Palestine? If any, what are they?
- 4- What do you think are the main messages behind this episode? Through which scenes were they manifested? What are the things that caught your attention the most? Why?
- 5- In this episode there were opposing opinions regarding *several topics*, what do you think about those different points of view? Which one do you agree with most? Why?

Second: Episode five

Before:

- 1- Do you remember what happened in the last episode we watched together? Can anyone give a recap?
- 2- *Facilitator gives a brief of the main events happening in the connecting episodes*

After:

- 1- What was your first impression of this episode?

- 2- What were the feelings you experienced while watching? Why? What triggered those feelings?
- 3- What sense did you get from this episode on farmer's/peasant's life? Why?
- 4- What role or meaning does Ali have in this show and what do you think about it?
- 5- How does Ali's role affect you? How do you feel about it?
- 6- What do you think of Ahmad's reactions/response to injustice?
- 7- What are the scenes that struck you the most? Why?
- 8- Did you learn new things from this episode? If any, what are they?

Third: Combined scenes from Episodes Sixteen and Seventeen

Before:

- 1- Do you remember what happened in the last episode we watched together? Can anyone give a recap?
- 2- *Facilitator gives a brief of the main events happening in the connecting episodes*

After:

- 1- What was your first impression of this episode?
- 2- What are the main events that lead to the Nakba? If you were asked to describe how the Nakba happened, what would you say?
- 3- What roles did the Arabs play in the Palestinian Nakba?
- 4- What does the key mean to you?
- 5- What feelings did this episode trigger in you? Why? What scenes in specific caused these feelings?

Fourth: 2 Scenes from episode 20, first scene from episode 1 and last scene from episode 31

Before:

- 1- Do you remember what happened in the last episode we watched together? Can anyone give a recap?
- 2- *Facilitator gives a brief of the main events happening in the connecting episodes*

After:

- 1- What is your overall impression of the episodes you have watched?
- 2- What did you like most about it? What did you dislike? Why?
- 3- What were the different feelings that you experienced while watching the series? What triggered those feelings (scenes/facts)?
- 4- Do you think you would watch the rest of the serial?
- 5- Did you learn anything you think is valuable? Why? What did you learn?

- 6- If you were to describe the role UNRWA played, what would you say?
- 7- Did this serial change your perception of Palestine?
- 8- What are the main points/scenes that stuck in your mind? How come? / Why are they distinguished to you?
- 9- What are the things you learned from this serial? What did you not know before watching it?

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