Uncovering Palestinian Memory
A Role for Oral History
al-Majdal is a quarterly magazine of BADIL Resource Center that aims to raise public awareness and support for a just solution to Palestinian residency and refugee issues.

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Cover photo: Return march for the commemoration of the Nakba in the depopulated village of Lifta in Jerusalem, May 2006. © Anne Paq.

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BADIL was established in 1998 to support the development of a popular refugee lobby for Palestinian refugee and internally displaced rights and is registered as a non-profit organization with the Palestinian Authority.

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# Editorial

Encompassing the Voices: Building Palestinian History ................................................................. 2

# Commentary

Palestinian Non-Violent Resistance, A Response to Human Rights Watch  
*By Muhammad Jaradat* ..................................................................................................................... 3

# Oral History

Oral History, Memory and the Palestinian Peasantry  
*By Dr. Mahmoud Issa* .......................................................................................................................... 5

The Role of Oral History in Archiving the Nakba  
*By Diana K. Allan* .................................................................................................................................. 9

The Role of Participatory Methods for Mobilizing Change  
*By Dr. Karma Nabulsi* .......................................................................................................................... 14

Oral Histories: Gathering Intimate Views of Multiple Pasts Always in Dialogue with the Present  
*By Amahl Bishara* ................................................................................................................................... 17

A Little Innovation: Overcoming the obstacles to recording history in the Galilee  
*By Isabelle Humphries* .......................................................................................................................... 21

Oral History in the Palestinian and Sahrawi Contexts: A Comparative Approach  
*By Randa Farah* ..................................................................................................................................... 25

Lessons’ Learned from PalestineRemembered.com’s Oral History Experience  
*By Abu al-Sous (Salah Mansour)* ........................................................................................................ 31

# General Articles

Building a Diaspora Body Politic: North American Palestinian Students Taking the Initiative  
*By Maher Bitar* ......................................................................................................................................... 35

Oxfam Solidarity and Badil Resource Center Emergency Job Creation Project  
*By Badil Media Staff* ............................................................................................................................. 39

# Documents

Boycott-Divestment-sanction (BDS) Campaign Update ............................................................................. 42

Letter to Riyadh Mansour, Head of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations  
from Palestinian NGOs Regarding Concern over the Register of Damage as a Result of the Construction  
of the Wall and its Associated Regime ........................................................................................................ 45
Encompassing the Voices: Building Palestinian History

The Nakba and other subsequent displacement have resulted in the loss of numerous written documents and have dramatically shaped Palestinian identity. With the contribution of oral history, Palestinians are enriching their history to encompass all segments of society; giving a voice to the poor, peasants, women, those marginalized by the official ideological or national narrative - most importantly - those who have lived the Nakba of 1948. Including these diverse and multiple experiences and voices within national Palestinian history crucially seeks to uncover and deepen understanding of events that have shaped this people’s dispossession, colonization and occupation. It also permits to discover the richness of Palestinian culture and traditions, its diversity and complexity. It nuances the official Palestinian narrative too often based on political personages and ideological dogma. Oral history also permits to challenge the written and dominant discourse surrounding the Nakba, a discourse dominated by proponents of the Zionist-Israeli narrative.

The upcoming commemorations - 40 years of Israeli occupation (2007) and 60 years of the Nakba (2008) - provide opportunities for furthering the place of oral history in Palestinian history. To this aim, many activities are planned (see the Call to Action on the back cover of this issue), such as the creation of a truth commission based on the South African model whereby witnesses and victims of the Nakba can tell their stories to parliamentarians, academics and international figures.

This issue of al Majdal aims to discuss the role and importance of oral history for Palestinians and of different approaches and initiatives undertaken by Palestinians, including refugees and the diaspora.
Palestinian Non-Violent Resistance
A Response to Human Rights Watch

by Muhammad Jaradat

Palestinians are experienced in mass struggle and have been extremely creative in using non-violent means. Thus, I am writing this not as an intellectual analysis, but rather in order to express my anger and to share my feeling about the lack of respect for people struggling against occupation and colonization, as encapsulated by the recent Human Rights Watch statement. The prominent US-based human rights organization condemned Palestinians in the Gaza Strip for defending their homes and properties with their own bodies, armed solely with their belief that something must be done to save what can be saved from Israel’s bulldozers and F16s.

The spontaneous popular reaction has been condemned, as well as the use of stones to confront the aggressive occupier, and we are told this is “violence” or a “war crime”. Palestinian mothers have also been condemned by many of the world’s politicians and some human rights organizations for allegedly sending their children to death. No one bothers to think why those children throw stones or chant against the Israeli occupying army, although the answer is so simple: it is because Israeli soldiers harass them physically on a daily basis.

Human Rights Watch statement: Civilians Must Not be Used as Human Shields Against Military Attacks

Human Rights Watch said that “calling civilians to a location that the opposing side has identified for attack is at worst human shielding, at best failing to take all feasible precautions to protect civilians from the effects of attack. Both are violations of international humanitarian law.”

“There is no excuse for calling civilians to the scene of a planned attack. Whether or not the home is a legitimate military target, knowingly asking civilians to stand in harm’s way is unlawful.” Sarah Leah Whitson, Middle East director at Human Rights Watch.

Palestinians have been asked to follow the model of Gandhi. This is good advice. It is important to learn from the experience of the resistance of others. Palestinians have followed this advice, and tens of Palestinians NGOs and political factions have been promoting Gandhi’s literature and videos, in order to educate young generations about how to resist the occupation. We have also learned from the South African Anti-Apartheid Resistance Movement, and from others elsewhere in the world. The South African experience for instance has been particularly enriching from the point of view of fighting racism, discrimination and hatred.

What strikes me, as a Palestinian born and brought up in the occupied Palestinian territories is the creativity of my people, and I can not help but be amazed by the Western double standard in relation to the Palestinian Zionist conflict.

The so-called civilized world requests Palestinians to adopt non-violent resistance saying, “If you use non-violent means, we will support you and stand beside you. If undertake elections under occupation we will support you, and if you ... we will ...” Fine - that is what we did and what is the answer? The stone is violent; we were wrong to elect Hamas because it is not the corrupt force beloved by the West; we use non-violent struggle in Gaza, and we are wrong again.

Here I would like to ask: wasn’t Gandhi the one who sat down with the Indian people in front of the British tanks? Didn’t Gandhi, the non-violent leader and teacher, ask his people to boycott the occupier’s products? I wonder if those who condemn Palestinian non-violent resistance have read about the experience of Gandhi and others in this regard. I wonder whether they would accuse Gandhi and Martin Luther King, as well as the French Resistance, of war crimes, just because their actions do not suit them?

Finally, it may well be that we Palestinians have run out of creative ideas after more than sixty years of resistance to this unique type of colonization. So yes, we would appreciate new ideas and suggestions for non-violent, ethical and acceptable resistance from all those of you who condemn and criticize Palestinians. It is not enough to say that this or that is in violation of international law; it is your moral duty to point out what people under occupation can do. It is your moral duty to do so, because you deny to Palestinians all forms of resistance employed by others throughout history. It thus appears that what is left to Palestinians is to go as a group of slaves to Israel, and offer our apologies for being so cruel and thank them for their enlightened occupation. We should also tell them that we recognize that they are the victims and we Palestinians are the aggressors. Still, I doubt that Israel and the “civilized and democratic world” would accept our apology. I think we would be asked to repeat it, because we do not speak the language well and clear enough.

Muhammad Jaradat is the Campaign Coordinator at Badil Resource Center.
Oral History, Memory and the Palestinian Peasantry

By Dr. Mahmoud Issa

Oral History: From Islamic Tradition to Modern Methodology

Oral history was, and will remain, one of the main sources of socio-historical understanding. One can say clearly that oral history is as old as history itself, especially important before the advent of writing as a means of communication, and later on as a main source for documentation. In the seventh century - the early years of Islam - and later on, controversy reigned over interpretation and the authenticity of the collected hadith (the oral speeches of the Prophet Muhammad), and other prominent personalities including al-Sahaba, who accompanied him in his prophetic mission. The gathering of all the spoken hadiths of the Prophet from oral sources of his companions, and the long period that elapsed before recording in writing, poses a serious question concerning accuracy and authenticity of the collected accounts. It took Islamic/Arabic scholars long years of investigation, analysis, and comparisons to reach what was believed to be the final version of the exact words of the Prophet. Al-Bukhari, the Arab Islamic historian, was one of the most well known prominent literary figures of the classical period who challenged the authenticity of hundreds of the different versions of hadiths that were recited by different people after the death of the Prophet. He reduced the numbers of hadiths to less than 2 or 3 after spending years of collection, analysis, investigation and comparisons. The process of this analysis demonstrates to us today the highly scientific and well-researched methodology that our ancestors employed in attempting to present the most authentic registration of the oral accounts of the Prophet and his companions. One could say that
al-Bukhari was one of our Arab Islamic pioneers in establishing the best techniques and modes of verifying the oral accounts and histories before writing them down as a credible source of documentation.

With the advent and advance of printing, the role of the written document and the validity of its testimony assumed a quasi-religious status – with the assumption that the written word always presented the most reliable account of historical events. But in recent years, and with the development of post-colonial and subaltern studies, question marks began to emerge concerning the validity of written documents as the only source of recovering the historicity of the events. Certain post-modern historians began questioning the ‘objectivity’ of the ‘event’, and the influence of the ‘subjective’ when recording or registering the ‘objective’ event. Finally, we are obliged to answer the fundamental question: who made history? And what about the experiences and the accounts of the ‘illiterate’, the ‘marginalized’, the ‘colonised’ and the ‘oppressed’? Are these forces considered to be an inclusive part of our modern history? And what are the best means of registering and preserving their version of histories?

Subjectivity and the tendency of those in ‘power’ to present their personal version of the facts jeopardized the whole concept of ‘total objectivity’. Only recently, oral history began to establish itself as an independent discipline with its own theories and research methodologies, especially after people realized the inadequacy of traditional historical methods. In November 2003 on a visit to South Africa to study what South Africans have done to provide restitution of land and property in the last ten years of the post-Apartheid era, Land Commissioner Tozi in Pretoria told us that they will employ oral history techniques to identify the lands of the black people who had no written documentation and titles of their expropriated land, together with other techniques such as family genealogical trees and cemeteries of their ancestors.
Oral History of Rural Palestine

The use of oral history is assumes a central and invaluable place in Palestinian historiography because of the massive lack of information concerning our past and modern historiography as well, and especially because of, the strong and dominant discourse of the Zionist movement, who succeeded, to a large extent, to marginalize the indigenous people’s accounts and narratives.

Hundreds if not thousands of books have been written to analyse the Palestinian situation from almost all aspects: historical, social, economic, psychological, political, etc. But one fundamental and critical aspect is absent until now, with a few exceptions, namely recording history directly from its authentic voices, or ‘actors’ (to use theatrical language). The majority of the Palestinian people, who are fellahaen (peasants), and who lived all aspects of ‘real’ life are absent from historical documentation; in daily life in the fields, in their houses, or in war, imposed on them from external forces. Not only men, but women voices too are also absent, neglected and marginalized in many ways, though they are half of society. The narratives of the neglected, the marginalized, the alienated, are almost totally absent from our historiography. Until now, we have only the official Palestinian documentation and the Israeli version of the events. But the question is still being posed: why have the Palestinians not accomplished the main task of narrating their own histories and accounts by themselves and not through indirect and the mostly selective representation of others?

Is it because of illiteracy among the rural population in Palestine, among many other reasons? I fundamentally disagree, but let us suppose that this is correct, then we should ask: where were our intellectuals and revolutionaries? How come that Chinese and Vietnamese intellectuals wrote books about the participation of Chinese and Vietnamese peasants in their revolutions, and Palestinian intellectuals did not?

A prior and vital question is: do we really want to know our modern history or not? And second, do we believe in new definitions of culture and history, far from the elite’s concepts and their vision and version of history?

After nearly 60 years of uprooting and exile in one of the biggest ethnic cleansing operations in modern times, we still have less than forty books written about the destroyed villages, what about the rest - as many as 531 villages according to one authority? Indeed, for fifty years our academics adopted the number 418 for the villages destroyed in or after 1948, until Salman Abu Sitta¹ and other Israeli sources came up with well documented maps showing 531 localities, including all the localities and hamlets in the Naqab desert. Thanks are also due to the personal engagement of Ghassan Shihabi, who published more than ten books about demolished villages on his own: Dar al-Shajara-Damascus. There may be even more villages still waiting to have their place in modern history.

Given the huge loss of documents due to the sudden uprooting of the population from their houses and lands, there is only one way to fill the gap: to record the lives of the pre-1948 generation through oral history methods as quickly as possible. According to the last estimate of a Palestinian demographer: Palestinians aged over 68 represent between 3.3 - 3.9% of the whole population. This would make the pool around 210,000 (counting only Palestine and the Arab host countries, as Rosemary Sayigh wrote in the editorial to Al-Janna magazine).²
Although it is only through practice that one can properly control the recording and later editing and transcription of the interviews, there is an urgent need to train people in this new methodology. The project needs to be adopted by a university or institution so as to train the few who are interested to continue this work. The destroyed villages are only one possible topic, there are tens if not hundreds of projects that could uncover recent histories still lying in the dark. As long as our modern history is not recorded properly, the mistakes will continue on the same basis, and the representation of the Palestinian people will never be as it should be.

The experience of Ghassan Shihabi in al-Yarmuk camp, in Dar al-Shajara, is a good example of villagers themselves publishing books about their own experiences. Shihabi published a book about Tantura before Teddy Katz wrote his study of the massacre. Because Shihabi’s book is in Arabic, no one knows about it, while Katz’s study became famous, even though he subsequently withdrew his accusations against the Israeli army. Teddy assured me last time I saw him in Jerusalem that he will continue his claims about the massacres committed in Tantura.

People do not always agree about this or that version of the story. I will give an example: a book about Lubya written by Ibrahim Shihabi provoked another man from another family, Yousef Abu Dhais, to write another book about the village because he thought that Ibrahim’s book was incomplete. I think this is normal, and a positive sign. We could solve this problem by pushing to establish a qualified committee to help, coordinate, and support future projects, and to archive what is published already. Most of our modern documents are in the Zionist archives, in UNRWA, in the UNCCP; when we shall Restitute our own history remains an open question. Could it be the task of the Right of Return Coalition Committees, or a special institution for oral history? Or a well-known Palestinian university? The new Israeli historians have done a lot to reveal the ethnic cleansing policies of the successive Israeli official narrative. The rest of the job is for Palestinians to rewrite the modern history which has not yet been written.

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Endnotes
2. This project of the demolished villages will continue through the coming years with a museum exhibition that will comprise all the documents, the transcripts of 700 interviews, photographs, and a model of Lubya before its destruction in 1948. This exhibition will move from one city to another and to other museums in Europe, with the hope of eventually sending it to Palestine. Others from the same village or area will be asked to contribute to the exhibition when it reaches their city. This project is an educational one for university students, for lay people interested in our culture, and for Palestinians born after the 1948 nakba, to get to know their roots and their origins.
The Role of Oral History in Archiving the Nakba

By Diana K. Allan

While Palestinian identity was not created by the 1948 displacement, the event has remained an important part of Palestinian history and collective experience, marking the loss of Palestine as a physical entity and its birth as a national signifier. In a recent article, Palestinian historian Elias Sanbar writes: “The contemporary history of Palestinians turns on a key date: 1948. That year, a country and its people disappeared from both maps and dictionaries.”1 Sanbar goes on to foreground the importance of cataloguing these disappearances as a means of creating a cultural and historical inventory of relation to pre-1948 Palestine. Since many refugees from the generation of 1948 were illiterate few memoirs or journals exist and oral transmission has been the primary means by which this cultural heritage has been preserved. However, in spite of the calls by Sanbar and others to “counter population statistics with human voices” and reconstruct the local life-worlds lost in the wake of the 1948 expulsion, this crucial period of Palestinian history is rarely explored from the perspective of those who lived through it.2 Although the experiences of the principal victims of this war - the peasants, camp refugees, poorer city dwellers, Bedouin tribes, and so on – have been represented in poetry and literature, they have gone largely unrecorded in the field of Palestinian history, with a few notable exceptions.3

In light of the ongoing Palestine/Israel conflict, Palestinian historiography has found itself closely aligned with the goals of statehood and national struggle, and the need to refute the Zionist version of the 1948 “war.” Revolving around a set of reified symbols that seek to re-inscribe 1948 as a constituting factor of refugee identity, historiography has been ordered and reordered to fit the needs of national self-determination. The authenticity and legitimacy enacted, and often controlled, by this increasingly institutionalized understanding of 1948 history clearly comes at a cost. This selective reading of the past, which those of us working in the field may be unintentionally co-constructing through our research, can be alienating and
distorting, and often leaves many crucial areas of research unexplored. Searching for certain kinds of national truths, can effect the structural forgetting of others: in this context, the diversity of historical experience is sometimes elided in favor of codified nationalist narrative. Why, for instance, did residents from certain villages, like Majd al-Krum, decided to flee, while others (in many cases, relatives from the same family) stayed? Why have the massacres in Aylout and Al-Bassa gone unrecorded in Palestinian historiography, while much has been written about the massacres in Deir Yassin and Lydda? Why did treaties brokered between local Jewish settlements and Palestinian mayors prior to the expulsion fail? What factors determined where refugees fled in 1948? Given the volumes that have been written about this period of history, the list of unanswered questions seems unsettlingly long.

While “lived histories,” in the form of oral histories and testimonies, could provide the necessary experiential data to respond to some of these queries, they are often dismissed as subjective, or viewed as a potential threat to the coherence of nationalist history. The persistent bias in favor of “objective” archival evidence is undergirded by the assumption that scholarly authority – as defined by a Western historical tradition – is grounded in textual references rather than the spoken word. In recent revisionist Palestinian histories and Israeli critiques of Zionist historiography, archival documents from the pre-mandate period, military records and memoirs of key political figures, are normatively privileged over the experiences of ordinary civilians, and in both cases, oral histories are strategically excluded on the grounds that they are likely to be inaccurate. What this discourse of historical “objectivity” fails to acknowledge is that history itself is a strategically deployed narrative that is made up, in Jean-François Lyotard’s evocative phrase, of “clouds of stories.”

A growing interest in oral histories of al-Nakba by researchers, institutions representing refugee interests and international activist networks, and an awareness of the need to record these eyewitness accounts of these events before it is too late, must be understood as centrally connected to politics and timing. During the last decade the battle over the interpretation of 1948 has intensified between scholars and activists calling for further investigation into the human tragedy of 1948 from a more ethical perspective and traditional Zionist scholars who continue to view the events of 1948 in terms of realpolitik. The collapse of the Oslo peace process, the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada, continued Israeli expansion in the West Bank and recent peace initiatives that do not recognize any comprehensive right of return have all raised the historical stakes, and the perceived importance of associating the Palestinian narrative with the question of responsibility for the expulsions of 1948. This renewed interest in oral testimony – at the very moment when “Palestine” as a historical signifier at times appears in danger of losing its signified – thus appears to be both retroactive and prospective in that it looks back to the catastrophe of 1948, and forward to the possibility of further erasure. In approaching oral testimony as a way of acknowledging a violent past, calling for redress, or preventing suffering in the future, we need to be attentive to the ways in which a politically expedient re-framing of the past might also conceal important distinctions.

Since 2002, I have been working on an archival project to record testimonies on film with first
generation refugees in camps around Lebanon about life in their communities prior to 1948, and their experiences of the expulsion. The Nakba archive, co-directed by myself and Mahmoud Zeidan, has been conducted in all twelve refugee camps in Lebanon, as well as with unregistered refugees in “gatherings,” and consists of approximately 500 filmed recordings with refugees from over 132 villages. The selective ways in which 1948 was remembered and forgotten in the course of our interviews brought into focus the residual experiences of several generations of refugees silenced or left unassimilated by this nationalist history. The gravitational pull that a nationalist meta-narrative exerts on personal memory became clearer, as individual stories fell into and out of discursive alignment with national goals, shedding light on the contingent conditions and processes of historical production within the Palestinian community in Lebanon. As the oral historian Alessandro Portelli has argued, the specific utility of oral histories “lies not so much in their ability to preserve the past, as in the very changes wrought by memory. These changes reveal the narrators’ efforts to make sense of the past and to give a form to their lives…”

In the course of conversations with elders and their families, pre-1948 Palestine or the events of the expulsion often emerged as anecdotal reminiscence rather than as a coherent historical narrative. On one occasion it was the aroma of za`tar that sparked a series of interconnected memories, taking Umm Salih first to Jish and the memory of picking za`tar in the mountains with her grandmother, before turning to a recent visit with her sister in ‘Ayn Hilwa camp where she had seen families pounding their own za`tar. This unsystematic weaving of events and places suggests a refusal to suture partial memories into an interpretive schema. The value of this fractured reminiscence may lie in its ability to enact a doubling of witness, transmitting not only historical details but also the shattering effects that this history has had on the lives of those who have lived it. In the case of a family that I knew in Shatila, the grandfather would recreate memory maps of his village of Sufsaf, noting the placement of the wells, mosques, school and homes of principal families. These narrative and performative strategies, in which history appears more an active process for constructing meaning than a passive depository of facts, clearly record another history; they inscribe the means by which individual biography becomes social text, and public past.

This has been in several ways a unique moment for such a study of the creation and transmission of Palestinian histories in exile. As the living ranks of the 1948 generation continue to thin, the cultural value placed on their narratives by communities within the Palestinian diaspora continues to rise. The sense of urgency is in fact twofold. I have indicated that these histories should be considered not static but protean, continually redefined as they are through cultural practice in the present. In light of this, what is so striking about the Palestinians in Lebanon is the sense of the escalating demands upon the past of an increasingly urgent present. A codified, traumatic history is being ceaselessly re-filtered through the radically unstable lens of the current situation. In other words, the context of narration giving meaning to these histories includes the need not only to make sense of and transmit a traumatic past, but also the attempt to take hold of and give shape to an imminently uncertain present and future.

Diana K. Allan is the Co-director of The Nakba Archive and the director of Lens on Lebanon, a grassroots media collective funded by the Soros Foundation which is documenting the long-term effects of the 2006 conflict with Israel. She is the producer of the documentaries Chatila, Beirut (2002) and is currently working on a book project, Photo48, while completing a doctorate in anthropology and film at Harvard University. Her publications include “Mythologizing al-Nakba: Narratives, Collective Identity and...

Duplicate sets of the Nakba Archive (a collection of 1100 DVDs with accompanying database) and “The Nakba Archive Documentary” are now available for purchase. All proceeds go to the costs of continuing the work of the archive in Syria. See: http://www.nakba-archive.org and http://www.lensonlebanon.org.

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Endnotes

3. Prominent scholars who have shaped the field of oral history in Palestine studies are Rosemary Sayigh, Randa Farah, Saleh Abdel Jawad, Sonia el-Nimr, Sharif Kanaana, Adel Yahya, Mai Seikaly and Salim Tamari.
4. For instance, Ted Swedenburg, in his study of pre-1948 peasant resistance movements, observes how nationalist history has tended to gloss over class and regional divisions within the peasant population by vesting agency initially with the educated elite (effendi), and subsequently the nationalist leadership of the PLO. See Ted Swedenburg, ‘Popular Memory and the Palestinian National Past’, in Golden Ages, Dark Ages, eds. Jay O’Brien and William Roseberry, University of California Press: 1991, p167.
5. It is telling that even in the work of revisionist historians that seek to question established readings of Palestinian history and identity, such as Rashid Khalidi’s Palestinian Identity (1997) or more recently, Eugene Rogan and Avi Shlaim’s edited volume, The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948, no oral histories are cited.
8. The intensification of debate over 1948 and the explicit linking of history to current political events was well illustrated in the conflicts sparked by Teddy Katz’s thesis on the massacre at Tantura, and the disciplinary action taken against his advisor, Ilan Pappe, at the University of Haifa between December 2000 –November 2001; and also by Benny Morris’ (2002) recantation of his former position regarding the war of 1948 in “A Change of Heart” published in The Guardian, February 21, 2002, and Shlaim’s response published in the same paper the following day.
9. In a recent workshop led by Karma Nabulsi on the importance of oral history in the Palestinian context, she explicitly links these two concerns, suggesting that oral history could provide the basis for “restitution demands for the victims of the post-Nakbah ethnic cleansing and campaigning against the danger of another.” Karma Nabulsi, “Draft Summary of Workshop on Oral History, Nuffield, September 15/16th, 2002.”
10. The Nakba Archive has been funded by the Welfare Foundation, the Ford Foundation and through private donations. For more information about this project, please visit our website: www.nakba-archive.org.
11. Alessandro Portelli, op.cit, p52.
12. For more on this notion of doubling of witness see Samera Esmeir’s article “1948: Law, History, Memory,” in Social Text 21.2 (2003).
Israel will Prosecute Israelis Transporting Palestinians from the Occupied West Bank in Cars with Yellow License Plates

Chief of IDF Central Command Major General Yair Naveh announced a new Israeli military order: Order by OC Central Command Forbidding Palestinian Travel in Israeli Vehicles. This Israeli order forbids Palestinians in the occupied West Bank to travel in cars with yellow license plates without a special permit. In other words, Israelis, including Jerusalem ID holders, will only be able to carry Palestinians in their cars if they have the required ‘special permit’. An Israeli caught transporting a Palestinian without the required permit will be prosecuted. The regulation is to take effect January 19th, 2007.

IDF sources mentioned that there are cases in which the order is not applicable – for example, when the Palestinian in the vehicle is a first degree relative of the Israeli (parent, sibling, spouse, child, grandchild or grandparent) or when the Palestinian has an entry permit into Israel or an entry permit into Israeli colonies. According to Naveh, the regulation will also absolve Palestinians who have a permit and work for an international organization, a medical team or in infrastructure maintenance.

Israel’s new discriminatory policy continues to sever the relationship between Palestinians and Israelis. This will particularly affect Israeli human rights organizations that work with Palestinians.

On December 6, 2006, Israeli human rights organizations published a statement in Ha’aretz demanding that this illegal order be canceled, and announced that “This order creates an Apartheid regime and it is blatantly illegal. We will not cooperate with it, will not ask for special permits, and will continue to help Palestinians who ask for our help.”

The Role of Participatory Methods for Mobilizing Change

By Dr. Karma Nabulsi

“Palestine for us is not just a country on the political map. For us, Palestine is a history, identity, life texture, living, breathing; it is absolutely unique. You made me cry by remembering it. We no longer have relations with Palestinians. The Palestinian families that lived with us are scattered now. Some left and some immigrated. I always ask my father to tell me stories about it, because I can’t even find a book with these facts. I started to seek my soul and my history, I no longer know where I am. I was watching a TV show when my father was telling me how the Zionists invaded. I no longer connect with this feeling. I feel that I am in a different world. The Palestinian youth lost their way. I won’t tell you that they forgot their history but they made them forget it. I am searching very hard for something very difficult to find. I keep telling my friends that I am connected to things in an unusual manner, because I know that when you remove a plant from soil before it grows, it will forever remain wilted and it will never grow. They removed us from our land.” (Participant, Egypt)

Surveys, opinion polls, and now, consultative approaches are increasingly being used to explore Palestinian refugee issues, and to formulate policy. The Civitas project (in which I participated as director) adopted an entirely different approach to the matter. Indeed, civic participation is different even than consultation exercises - participation gives space for the young woman from Egypt (in the quote above) to articulate the complex sentiments, ideology, and political understandings that she possesses. It highlights many of the understandings Palestinians have for Palestine, but crucially it gives a more sophisticated understanding to those reading it about its importance and relevance.

Civitas set out to explore the links which connect Palestinian refugees across different geographical regions, and the political and civic aspects of their experiences. By emphasizing their civic and political status as active agents in the Palestinian body politic, it recognised this status, and emphasized these basic rights. In over 100 meetings in over 25 countries, Palestinians themselves set the questions, the debates, and the priorities.

In highlighting the limitations of quantitative surveys and pre-coded questionnaires, this work also argued for the use of open-ended themes and participatory methods. This approach was one of the methodological premises of this collective project, its central aim being to empower refugees and exiles by facilitating a process where they identify their own political and civic needs. However, it went further than this strategic goal, as it saw the refugees not simply as subjects of research,
but as agents of change. This can be seen in the very scope of the subject matter being assessed: political and civic realities. By focusing on these themes, it recognised that refugees and exiles are both citizens and part of the core Palestinian body politic, with the fundamental right to discuss these issues, and to take part in deciding upon them. The discussion by a participant from Italy in a public meeting illustrates this approach:

“So that we could all be on the same page, I would like to start by saying that as Palestinians, we no longer can control any political decision-making of our own. In the past, the Palestinian organizations were effective. There was the PLO and its national institutions along with the Palestinian federations, unions and committees, and there was Arafat. Now all this is lost, so we don’t have a strong political will. Palestinian citizens can be sent to jail without doing anything and without finding any support. Second, our dealings with NGOs and official organizations as members of the Palestinian community became very difficult. Why? Because their perspective on what relates to our problem is definitely different from ours, for we all support the right of return, but most of the NGOs and organizations that travel daily to Palestine don’t recognize the right of return. As a community living in Italy we lack awareness, not because we don’t know our rights, but because we don’t really interact with daily Palestinian suffering. In Italy, we are far from the events. Although we receive news about our people through television, we are distant from the Palestinian political decision-making process and the suffering our nation is going through every day. However, the cultural interaction should be on a daily basis, otherwise we would have a serious crisis. Of course, we don’t have enough people in the community to have enormous experience, and we don’t properly safeguard the principles that we hold onto.” (Participant, Public meeting, Rome, Italy)

Part of the universal commonality of civic and political rhetoric is the method and style of the arguments that are made in collective meetings. When expressing what needs to be done, or recommending a course of action or a particular civic structure, interventions are invariably prefaced by a discussion of why the particular suggestion is needed, as well as a reasoning of what went wrong to create this particular circumstance or need. A suggestion on future action can only be persuasive and agreed upon if an understanding of the nature of the problem is shared among the participants. There must be common agreement on what is the nature of the problem, and especially upon why it arose in the first place. Therefore many recommendations made are located in a line of reasoning that first articulates the problems being faced, and the precise reasons for these problems. Here is an illustrative example, from Spain:

“We have been suffering from huge problems since 1992. This is because we always knew that there was a big lie, but we too believed in this big lie. This lie is the peace project. Our enemy doesn’t want peace on any level. But we believed that the enemy really wants peace. As a result, all the social institutions of the PLO were frozen, and their activities in all countries were frozen as well. Even the activities of the organizations that existed all over the world were frozen, because we all believed that peace will actually be achieved after four or five years, and that we will return to Jerusalem. This is actually the lie that destroyed us, for it is the social structure that we had, whether as the Students’ union or Women’s union or any other union that were frozen all over the world. Consequently, we discovered after living here in Europe for thirty or forty years that the existing associations and communities no longer exist. In addition, we have political affiliations which separated us over the years. It is true that we all know each other, but every five or ten of us have a different view. This is also a negative thing. When we look at ourselves today, we find that we have been trying for years to work within the community, because the community is an inseparable part of the PLO. Through this community, we have a channel to express our needs, because this community brings together all our political trends. We are also interested in the youth, because...
A suggestion on future action can only be persuasive and agreed upon if an understanding of the nature of the problem is shared among the participants.

we already have a lot of the old negatives that are still deep-rooted in our souls, and because our youth have new visions”. (Participant, Public meeting, Barcelona, Spain)

The Register of Palestinian exile and refugees - both inside and outside of Palestine, is now a new and dynamic source for all those seeking to establish the civic, political, social, and economic needs, as well as the civic and political agenda of Palestinians, as articulated by themselves. Above all, in an increasingly fragmented body politic, with Palestinians scattered over the four continents, and more refugees created every day, this Register enables one to understand the most fundamental feature of any people - its collective spirit.

The Register is available online at www.civitas-online.org. For a hard copy of the report in Arabic or English, please contact civitas@mfield.ox.ac.uk . If you are in the occupied West Bank and Jerusalem contact Badil at info@badil.org.

Dr. Karma Nabulsi was a PLO representative in Beirut, Tunis and London, as well as at the UN, between 1978 and 1990, and an advisory member of the Palestinian delegation to the peace talks between 1991 – 1993. She currently teaches at St Edmund Hall, Oxford University.

New Report

40% of Colonies in Occupied West Bank on Private Palestinian Land

“The State has been taking advantage of the weakened status of the Palestinians in order to steal their land.” says the recently released report by Peace Now, titled Breaking the Law in the West Bank - The Private Land Report.

For the first time Peace Now is able to prove what many Palestinians have known for a long time. Despite the State and settlers’ claims, nearly 40 percent of the colonies in the occupied West Bank are constructed on private Palestinian land, in violation of the State's own laws regarding activities in the West Bank. According to official data of the Israeli Civil Administration, the government agency in charge of the colonies, the colonial enterprise has “undermined not only the collective property rights of the Palestinians as a people, but also the private property rights of individual Palestinian landowners.” The construction of colonies on private Palestinian land is illegal according to the Supreme Court ruling on Elon More of 1979. The data presented in

the report has been hidden for many years, for fear that the revelation of these facts “could damage it’s international relations.” Peace Now Demands that the Attorney General order an immediate investigation into these findings and bring those responsible to justice.

Oral Histories: Gathering Intimate Views of Multiple Pasts Always in Dialogue with the Present

By Amahl Bishara

Those of us who have listened to Palestinian elders tell stories of dispossession, struggle, and survival know of the captivating power of these narratives, told so listeners can envision stalks of grain from a pre-1948 village glimmering in the sunshine of sixty years past. In informal settings, stories from the past are a pleasurable means of passing along knowledge and values. Since the 1980s and 1990s, Palestinians have used oral history to assert their continued connection to land and the past. What is the value of recording these stories for scholarship, especially in a Palestinian context?

In the absence of national museums or the other state institutions usually essential for the production of a national history, Palestinians have had to memorialize and record the pivotal events of their recent history in other ways, among them oral history. Oral history is considered an unorthodox approach to historical research for several reasons; yet, its rewards are not to be minimized. Not only does it help to compensate for some of the gaps in Palestinian historiography that are the consequence of Palestinian statelessness, but scholarship that utilizes oral history methods or analyzes oral historical narratives also helps to create a view of the past that, in many ways, helps to forge a productive way forward, as well.

Historians long disdained oral history as a methodology of historical research. Oral history was deemed unreliable because people’s own telling of their pasts were assumed to be unreliable. Using the methods of oral history in Middle East history posed further obstacles. Even as historical
research on the United States and Europe began to embrace oral history as a method, historical approaches to the Middle East continued to focus on political histories of elites, keeping oral history out of scholarship (Doumani 1992; Fleischmann 1996).

Anthropologists, whose methods and subjects of study are more open to oral historical approaches, have produced key works which feature oral histories (Sayigh 1979; Swedenburg 1995). Several recent studies show that oral histories can shed light on theoretical topics like memory, nation, and identity as well as on Palestinians’ collective past (Davis 2002; Khalili 2005; Slyomovics 1998).

A key insight of some of these works is that oral narratives have value not only when they accurately reflect past events, but also because they express something about the relationship between the past and the present. In this way, they are like other forms of historical sources, and thus not unusually unreliable. Just as archival material must be read with the conditions of its production in mind, and just as academic historical texts often reflect as much on the context in which they were written as they do on their historical subjects, so are individuals’ narratives of the past always told in relation to their contemporary setting. For example, Swedenburg, in writing about Palestinians’ memories of the 1936-1939 Revolt, analyzes how speakers related historical events to the first Intifada, the period during which he was conducting his research (Swedenburg 1995). This analysis helps to place oral narratives on the same epistemological level as other kinds of historical sources.

A corollary insight regarding the use of oral narratives is that because narratives are told in specific social circumstances, their narration follows the rules of those circumstances. This can be a guide to how we should use these oral narratives. For example, Rosemary Sayigh notes that “Women in Palestinian refugee camps have a rich stock of historical experience in the form of qussas (stories; singular qissa), transmitted mainly in women’s gatherings and family settings. Their stories are fragmentary and particularistic, limited to what the speaker has witnessed or heard directly, since veracity is essential to the qissa” (Sayigh 1998:42). When gathering narratives in these settings, Sayigh could be confident that they were truthful because the norms and rules of the genre do not permit imaginative fiction.

Having, then, addressed the presumed problem that oral history is not reliable, we can turn to a more interesting question of what oral history can especially contribute. Its benefits to scholarship on Palestinian society are at least two-fold: first, it allows us to include in the historical record neglected perspectives and voices; second, it helps us to analyze topics and forces generally obscured in other historical narratives.

First, oral history can encompass voices that usually do not make the pages of more traditional political histories. Oral histories assert the importance of women’s perspectives and experiences, which are so often excluded from archival sources like newspapers or economic statistics (Fleischmann 1996; Gorkin and Othman 1996; Sayigh 1988). Oral histories can include the viewpoints of the poor and refugees (Swedenberg 1995, Sayigh 1979, 1998). Oral narratives are also an effective way of studying political imprisonment, since access to prisons themselves is quite limited (Nashif 2004). Aside from prisoners, all of these groups tend to be marginalized in other forms of Palestinian historical writing. Thus, argues Sayigh, “The life stories of refugee women from low-income strata do not merely ‘reflect’ national history; they offer the materials for a more complete, more “real” national history – one not narrowly focused on men, political parties, and the national elite, but taking in women, home, families, non-elite classes, and varied diaspora locales” (Sayigh 1998:43).
Second, oral histories open up novel subjects of study, three of which I will note here. Oral histories tend to conceive of place in relation to experience, rather than in relation to national or colonial ideologies. While traditional histories often view empires or nation-states as the object of research, oral histories are often much more intimate, reflecting how people actually perceive of, interact, and shape the places where they live. Memorial books, a genre not unique to Palestinians but also found in the wake of other moments of violence and dispossession, often tell the history of a particular village, or even an individual house (Slyomovics 1998). These up-close perspectives may capture what is at stake when people are dispossessed of these places better than political narratives. These perspectives may also help us imagine non-exclusivist, but just, resolutions to problems of displacement.

Oral history often takes as its subject everyday life (Davis 2002). Narratives of economy, kinship, and movement that focus on everyday life can help to connect the past and the present in revealing ways. For example, forthcoming research by Adah Kay, Catherine Cook, and Adam Hanieh uses first person narratives of movement restrictions under military rule in the Galilee from 1948 to 1966 to provide a contextualization for movement restrictions in the Occupied Territories today. Especially given the dearth of research on military occupation of the Galilee, oral narratives help to connect Palestinians in the Galilee with those in the Occupied Territories, who often see their experiences as profoundly different.

Finally, oral history can help to capture resistant actions and viewpoints that otherwise go unnoticed. Swedenberg’s research on memories of the 1936-1939 Revolt includes not only narratives that reflect official and elite Palestinian nationalist accounts of the revolt, but also those that emphasize popular contributions to the revolt, and even those which are overtly critical of the national movement. These perspectives would otherwise go unnoted, leaving official narratives unchallenged. Even when those contributing to oral histories are not among the most disempowered, oral narratives highlight agency in unique ways. Rochelle Davis, in an article about education during the Mandate period that uses sources based on personal testimony, quotes a slogan used during protests against the Balfour declaration. She identifies the powerful qualities of these oral sources, brought back through the ages by way of an individual’s memory: “this chant reminds us of the specificity of individual memory and the contribution each person makes to creating the whole” (Davis 2003:12). She asserts that by using oral historical sources, “we can appreciate the role that personal testimony plays in undermining dominant narratives” (Davis 2003:12).

Oral history is a historical method which, when used thoughtfully, avoids essentialism, encourages critical thought about the relationship between the present and the past, and promotes a multiplicity of outlooks. By creating a view of the past that is more inclusive – of women, the poor, and those holding alternative perspectives on history – and by emphasizing specific places and individual voices, oral history can usher in a view of Palestinian society that shows the texture of the past and the stakes and potentials of the future.

Amahl Bishara is a professor of anthropology at Chicago University.

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Commemorating Education: Recollections of the Arab College in Jerusalem, 1918-1948. Comparative
Israel Blocks UN Human Rights Council Fact-finding Missions to the Gaza Strip

On the 5 and 6 of July 2006, the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) held its first special session to discuss the situation in the Israeli military operation in the Gaza Strip. The Council passed Resolution A/HRC/S-1/L.1/Rev.1, adopted with 29 in favour, 11 against (Germany, Canada, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Japan, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, United Kingdom and Ukraine) and 5 abstentions. The Council decided “to dispatch an urgent fact-finding mission headed by the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories.” The fact-finding mission was however unable to visit the Gaza Strip due to Israel’s lack of cooperation. In the second session of the HRC between 18 September and 6 October 2006, John Dugard, Special Rapporteur, said that “more than a month had passed in waiting for a reply from the Government of Israel, and he thought that there was no alternative but to construe this as a refusal.”

Soon after, on 15 November 2006, and as a result of the Beit Hanoun massacre on 8 November and in which 19 Palestinian civilians died, the United Nations Human Rights Council convened a third special session and passed a resolution with 32 in favour, eight against (Canada, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Poland, Romania, and United Kingdom) and six abstentions. The resolution calls for an urgent high-level fact-finding mission to Beit Hanoun. The mission, headed by Desmond Tutu, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, is mandated to assess the situation of victims, address the needs of the survivors and make recommendations on how to protect Palestinian civilians against further Israeli attacks. Due to Israel’s lack of cooperation, however, Desmond Tutu informed the President of the Council on 11 December that “the Mission has been frustrated by the failure of Israel to grant the necessary visas.”

As a result of Israel’s refusal to cooperate with both fact-finding missions, the HRC passed resolution A/HRC/2/L.13 on 8 December, adopted with 34 in favour, 1 against and 12 abstentions calling for the implementation of resolution A/HRC/S-1/L.1/Rev.1. Only Canada voted against the resolution, arguing it “did not go far enough to represent a balanced approach.” It also added that “the Palestinian Authority should take concrete measures to address Israel’s security concerns and eliminate attacks against Israel, for its part, should assume its responsibility to exercise utmost caution to prevent civilian causalities as it exercised its right to defend itself against terrorism.”

Sources: Human Rights Council Adopts Resolutions on Follow-up to its Decisions on the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Lebanon, 8 December 2006.

"Lack of Israeli cooperation prevents UN fact-finding mission to Beit Hanoun" Department of Public Information, 11 December 2006.
**A LITTLE INNOVATION:**

*Overcoming the obstacles to recording history in the Galilee*

By Isabelle Humphries

Q: You have met families from 'nearly every village'. How did you get to meet them all?

A: Simple: I just placed photos of the villages in the newspaper, and then my telephone didn’t stop ringing...

This is a story of silences - and ending the silence. When we went to meet Jamil Arafat, a Galilee based historian, I intended to document his use of oral history methodology in constructing histories of destroyed villages. However, what came through as the most important message to convey was not his invaluable contribution to documenting oral history testimony, but the struggle he, and other activists of the Nakba generation, went through to even reach the stage of being able to record oral history.

Understanding the lengths that Israel went to, to prevent the retelling of Palestinian history, highlights firstly the often overlooked oppression of internal refugees and Palestinians remaining inside the new Israeli borders of 1948, and secondly, the value that Israel correctly recognized in the preservation of history in holding together community roots. It is precisely for this reason that the state attempted so hard to crush it.
Born in 1933 in the village of Mashad, Jamil Arafat remains there today. While not himself a refugee, it is clear that he sees no separation between himself as a dispossessed Palestinian in his homeland, and those who literally had homes taken from under them. Mashad is a small village situated between the villages of Kafr Kanna and al-Rayneh, all in the vicinity of Nazareth, the largest remaining Palestinian town inside Israel. At age 15, at the time of the Nakba, a young Arafat attended school in Nazareth and saw with his own eyes the poverty and suffering of internal refugees. Researcher Charles Kamen estimates that in 1948 over 5000 refugees were sheltering in Nazareth, and more than 7000 in the surrounding villages.

Arafat’s interest in gathering history predates the state. In the fourth grade at school, he had a Jordanian teacher who inspired his love of history from that day on. So during the days of the Mandate, born at a time of historic Palestinian resistance against the British, the young school boy started to observe history in the making around him.

While activists know of the iron Israeli control through military occupation in the West Bank and Gaza today, many are not aware that for two decades, Israel kept its Palestinian ‘citizens’ – Israeli passport holders – under strict military rule. Developed from the 1945 British emergency laws, Israel implemented military law from 1948-1966 only for its Arab citizens, forbidding movement beyond certain zones, requiring work permits and employing strict control over political activity.

After the dispossession of 1948 and destruction of the Palestinian economy, many families could no longer afford to send their children to school. Arafat however was lucky to be able to continue to study in down town Nazareth, thus witnessing daily the overcrowding of refugees in convents, halls and in shacks assembled in the old British army barracks in the centre of town. After graduating, he became a teacher himself – among other subjects teaching history. However, as remains the case today, Palestinian history is excluded from the curriculum. Teachers were vetted through the security system and prevented from being employed with any security record. Any teacher attempting to defy these boundaries would lose their job.

Systematic recording of interviews within the internal Palestinian community this time would have been stopped before the project even started. If you go to a library to try and find out more about 1948 Palestinians – aside from the work of Zionist journalists and sociologists – you will not find anything predating the landmark work of Sabri Jiryis and Fawzi al-Azmar in the 1970s, three decades after the dispossession.

With such strict measures in place, many would be too afraid to continue – but for Jamil Arafat this meant the development of innovative strategies to pursue his aim of recording and raising awareness of Palestinian history - without having the law put a stop to it. If he couldn’t write about the history of the people of the Galilee, he would write a book detailing nature trails in the Galilee and the Golan.

So in 1968, the first of many books was published – co-authored – on the hiking trails in the Galilee and the Golan. ‘And it was from this point that I started to collect information about people and villages more seriously’.

Words are dangerous – so he decided to focus simply on inserting photographs in local
newspapers – ‘lots of pictures, very little text – nobody was supposed to speak at this time’. As a Galilee history teacher, and respected deputy headteacher, thus personally vetted by the Education Ministry – he submitted and had work published in a Ministry educational magazine. ‘They asked me to write a historical article about Saffuriyya, but they had no idea which direction I would take it – I focused on the living characters of the village.’ After the article was published he received a call from the (Jewish) head of the Arab Education Department.

‘And it was from then that I felt like I was being watched’. But this didn’t stop him accepting an invitation to write for local Arab newspapers, or attempting to photograph what remained of Palestinian villages. ‘This is years before Walid Khalidi’s All that Remains, or Benny Morris’s research. Although I knew from my interviews where villages were, we didn’t have the information widely available like it is today. Nobody had made public attempts to ascertain exactly how many there were.’ On several occasions he was detained or chased off sites which were supposedly ‘closed military zones’, although this was long after the end of the official reign of the military government.

Mention of the Boy Scout Movement does not immediately bring a revolutionary image to mind. However it was working as a leader with his local scout group that Arafat could start to bring history to a new generation – ‘although at this date some of them even remembered it’. Naturally forbidden to invite refugees to speak officially to the group, he still succeeded in organizing regular trips for the boys to destroyed villages. ‘For sure we would have been forbidden to organize proper educational tours to the villages, so we used to go out for leisure trips walking or swimming. And then we would happen to pass by a village which I could point out…’

When he finally began to record oral history testimony, Jamil Arafat was still years ahead of the establishment of village heritage committees or the recently established Jewish movement Zochrot, who today are working on creating an important oral history archive.

And how did he meet those he interviewed? He was quite simply overwhelmed by callers responding to a regular feature he began to publish in the communist newspaper al-Ittihad. Strengthened by its links with Israeli Jewish communists, it was harder for the government to ban all Communist party activity. For decades, the Communist Party and its affiliated projects were the only forum permitted for what little Arab political expression was allowed. In the 1970s, starting a regular section entitled Thikriat al-Watan (Memories of the homeland), in al-Ittihad , Arafat’s documentation of a Palestine lost started to reach a large number of readers.

‘People would see the photos in the newspaper and know that I was gathering information. They would call to share their photos and memories – they had so many things they wanted to tell about what they had lost’. People had been waiting decades to talk…

Isabelle Humphries is conducting doctoral research focused on the experience of the Palestinian internal refugee community in the Galilee. Contact: isabellebh2004@yahoo.co.uk
JMCC Poll: Palestinians still favor Two-State Solution, despite significant support for One-State solution allowing Israelis and Palestinians equal rights

The Jerusalem Media and Communications Center (JMCC) undertook an opinion poll in September 2006 in which it asked 1,200 Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip this question: “Some believe that a two state formula is the favored solution for the Arab-Israeli conflict, while others believe that historic Palestine can’t be divided and thus the favored solution is a bi-national state in all of Palestine where Palestinians and Israeli enjoy equal representation and rights, which of these solutions do you prefer?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Solution preferred by Palestinians</th>
<th>Total out of 1,200 respondents in the West Bank and Gaza Strip</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two-state solution: an Israeli state and a Palestinian state</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bi-national state in all of historic Palestine</td>
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<tr>
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<td>*Islamic state</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Answers not included as part of the answers read to interviewees.

UNHCR Alarmed by Attacks and Lack of Protection of Palestinian Refugees in Iraq, Calls for a Humanitarian Solution

Attacks against Palestinians in Iraq continue. An attack against Al Baladiya, a Palestinian neighbourhood in Baghdad, on 13 December left at least nine people dead, including many children and many more injured. On 9 December, the same al Baladiya area was also under mortar attack, leaving 10 people injured. Many Palestinians were also kidnapped.

Radhouane Noucier from UNHCR said “We are very alarmed by this attack and dismayed by the lack of protection given to the Palestinians in Iraq. They have very limited freedom of movement and no possibility to leave the country - unlike Iraqis - to find a safe haven, nor any community to protect them.” UNHCR wrote that Palestinians are “trapped in the capital” and appealed “to countries to provide a humanitarian solution for Palestinians attempting to flee Iraq.”

UNHCR has asked Israel to at least allow Palestinians to enter the occupied Palestinian territories to seek temporary protection, but Israel refused. Similarly, Arab states and other countries have been asked to open their doors to Palestinian refugees on a humanitarian basis. But so far, only Syria and Canada have agreed to allow a very limited number of Palestinian refugees. Syria took 287 Palestinians in May 2006 and Canada 64 Palestinians stuck in the desert between Jordan and Iraq in November 2006.

Source: “UNHCR appeals to countries to provide humanitarian solution for Palestinians fleeing Iraq”, UNHCR Press Release, 14 December 2006.
Oral History in the Palestinian and Sahrawi Contexts:
A Comparative Approach

By Randa Farah

Notwithstanding the specific features of the Palestinian case, many aspects of al-Nakba or Palestinian Catastrophe have parallels in contemporary history. One important but neglected case that lends itself to comparative research is the struggle of the people of Western Sahara for self-determination. Notwithstanding the similarities, it is important to point to the fundamental difference between the two cases: the Zionist objective is to continue to expel as many Palestinians as possible to maintain a Jewish majority, while the Moroccan regime rejects the Sahrawi right to self-determination, and thus aims at assimilating them as Moroccan citizens.

In the following article, I draw on oral histories and narratives I collected while conducting research in Palestinian and Sahrawi refugee camps to briefly situate oral history in relation to the national project, and how refugees reproduce the concepts of homeland and their imagined return. The limitations set for the article unfortunately do not allow me to include excerpts from the life-histories, and force me to leave out important themes that have resonance in the Palestinian context. However, I think it is important to mention some of these issues: a) the reshaping of gender and generational relationships in the context of prolonged conflict and displacement; b) the Moroccan ‘Wall of Shame’ ironically built upon the advice of Ariel Sharon to the late King Hassan II in the mid-eighties; c) the creation of new realities on the ground by subsidizing Moroccan settlers in Western Sahara; c) the autonomy plan suggested by Morocco which has many similarities to the Oslo agreements; d) finally, forms of mobilization, organization and resistance (including the role of youth in the two Intifadas) in both national liberation movements which have straddled two centuries, and their relationship to the larger Arab world.

Sahrawi women showing me traditional dress - in Smara refugee camp. © Randa Farah
Refugee oral histories bring stories of how individuals and communities experience prolonged conflict and displacement to the public. Because of this, and despite variations in socio-economic status, gender, generation, country of refuge embedded in the accounts, each oral history simultaneously functions as an individual and a collective history. However, by definition, an oral account is open and incomplete in the sense that what is articulated, remembered or silenced and forgotten depends on the context in which it is narrated (Farah, 1999).

Background to the Sahrawi Conflict

Western Sahara was a Spanish colony for almost a century (1884-1975). Upon the withdrawal of Spain in 1975, Moroccan and Mauritanian forces invaded the territory, forcing the flight of Sahrawis to the inhospitable Algerian desert. Although Mauritania signed a peace agreement with the Sahrawis in 1979, Morocco continues to occupy two-thirds of the territory, claiming that Western Sahara is Moroccan territory in violation of the principle of _uti possidetis_ applied in decolonization cases, the UN Charter, Security Council and UNGA Resolutions, and a 1975 International Court of Justice advisory opinion. While Morocco describes the Polisario as a ‘separatist’ movement, Morocco’s claims are primarily based on its interest in controlling the rich phosphate deposits, abundant fisheries along the Atlantic coast, and a large potential of oil and gas underneath the sand and waters of Western Sahara.

In arid Algerian desert camps built on sand, the Polisario established the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). The state-in-exile proceeded to implement a National Action Program directed at transforming the refugees into citizens capable of leading their own future nation-state upon their return to Western Sahara. However, neither SADR nor the refugees anticipated that their exile would last for three decades and that the referendum would have as much substance as a desert mirage.

Oral History and the Nation: Subaltern, Hegemonic and as Established Tradition

Palestinian society has a written record of its past, this despite its dispersal, the Zionist attempt to destroy its historical record, and the lack of centralized state institutions. At one level of analysis, the Palestinian written/professional or official record is described as hegemonic for its emphasis on the elite and its marginalization of the poorer segments of society. Consequently, oral history increasingly became a focus of research to capture the experiences of the poor, including refugees. Although it is not possible to conflate the Palestinian hegemonic meta-narrative of the past with that of subaltern classes, both are inseparably entangled and occupy the position of the subaltern in relation to a dominant Zionist colonial historiography.

The Oslo context gave impetus to an upsurge in projects aiming to document Palestinian experiences before and during al-Nakba, countering the Oslo agreements which framed the conflict and its resolution upon the 1967 Israeli occupation, thereby deliberately circumventing the 1948 war and its consequences. The Oslo context gave impetus to an upsurge in projects aiming to document Palestinian experiences before and during al-Nakba, countering the Oslo agreements which framed the conflict and its resolution upon the 1967 Israeli occupation, thereby deliberately circumventing the 1948 war and its consequences. Thus, oral histories of Palestinian refugees pose as a discourse of remembering against omission implied in the Palestinian Authority’s official policies (despite lip-service to UNGAR 194), and reaffirming that they still have land claims and political and legal rights in the 1948 territories.

Unlike the Palestinians who prior to the al-Nakba were a settled agricultural population, Sahrawi
tribes were mobile pastoralists who did not have a written historical record, but did have an established oral tradition transmitted through narration, poetry and story-telling. However, the conflict necessitated reconstructing a Sahrawi official history in a coherent manner to counter Morocco’s claims that they do not have a distinctive national past, and to educate younger generations on the basis of national – not tribal – affiliation and belonging.

Thus, when asked to distinguish a Sahrawi culture, refugees point to such factors as their separate historical experience shaped by Spanish colonialism, as opposed to that experienced by other North African countries colonized by the French; their specific Arabic dialect called Hassaniyyah; their mode of livelihood; food, dress, songs and the status of Sahrawi women.

In 1991 a cease-fire came into effect and the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) was deployed with the purpose of administering a referendum through which the people of Western Sahara would be able to decide on their political future. Refugees eagerly began to prepare Sanadeeq al-Awda (suitcases of return), believing they were returning to participate in the referendum which the UN planned to implement in January 1992. However, Morocco succeeded in endlessly obstructing the referendum, and the suitcases became reminders of international betrayal for failing to pressure Morocco to abide by Security Council and UN Resolutions.

In light of the above, it is not surprising that oral histories of Sahrawi refugees collected more than a decade after the cease-fire, reveal growing public criticism and pressure on Polisario-SADR to resume armed struggle, especially by unemployed, impoverished and educated youth who linger wasting their years ‘drinking tea’ as they say, in the scorching desert. However, similar to the effects of the Palestinian Intifada, the Sahrawi Intifada within the Moroccan occupied territory which began on the 21 May 2005 became the focus of solidarity activities between the outside (refugee camps) and the inside (Western Sahara) reawakening nationalist sentiments.

The oral histories of Sahrawis also map out how they situate their political and cultural identities
The oral histories of Sahrawi refugees like those of Palestinians are reconstructed around contrasts, as before and after the Moroccan ghazu (invasion) which resulted in their mass flight in 1975 which they refer to as al-Intilaqa (departure) a term equivalent to the Palestinian al-Nakba.

Narratives of the Homeland and Return

For Palestinian refugees of rural origins, their pre-1948 original village land and a ‘peasant way of life’ represent continuity, stability and contiguity within a familiar Palestinian landscape, upon which they carried out specific (gendered) tasks and mapped their social identities in elaborate genealogical charts. For city dwellers, an urban culture, the neighborhood and family house are the loci of memory and personal history.

The form of remembering gave shape to the conceptualization of the future return: a collective return to an original land, village and place. Thus, it is not surprising that in the oral histories recorded following the Oslo agreements, 1948 refugees did not consider that the return to a Palestinian state as citizens in the West Bank and Gaza fulfilled their dream/right of return. In fact, many of the refugees living in camps in Jordan considered a ‘return’ to the West Bank and Gaza and not to the original village as another form of displacement.

The oral histories of-Sahrawi refugees like those of Palestinians are reconstructed around contrasts, as before and after the Moroccan ghazu (invasion) which resulted in their mass flight in 1975 which they refer to as al-Intilaqa (departure) a term equivalent to the Palestinian al-Nakba. These oral narratives depict pastoral nomadism as central to the Sahrawi cultural ethos and nationalist discourse, just as the rural hinterland and the fallah (peasant or farmer) informed Palestinian nationalism, despite the fact that new generations were born in exile and many had lived in urban centers even prior to their displacement.

Sahrawi camps tents and adobe huts. © Randa Farah
For Sahrawi refugees of all generations the historical homeland is remembered as a landscape where they were free, dignified nomads and warriors who moved from place to place following the rain and greener pasture. However, movement and settlement are specified as along familiar and known routes, wells, streams and hills, which took on more significance as Sahrawi territory in the context of the anti-colonial struggle and displacement. This is an important point since the popular conception is that nomads or Bedouins are not attached to national territories, mainly because their mode of livelihood implies crossing between geo-political boundaries.

Unlike Palestinian refugee oral histories of return which focused on the land and original village, Sahrawis center their imagined return on the independent state. This is partially due to the nature of the conflict where Morocco is willing at best to accept an autonomy, while Sahrawis aspire for sovereignty. However, the yearning for their own dawla (state), an objective prevalent in oral histories, is also attributed to the role of the Polisario-SADR in mobilizing for the future on the basis of citizenship, and modernist ideals of development and progress. SADR’s National Action Program required collective mobilization and participation at all levels. This process involved administering camps as if they were provinces, districts and municipalities, and the establishment of ministries, popular committees, national unions, schools, hospitals, etc. Thus, the Polisario-SADR took over many of the functions previously carried out by the family and tribal freeg.15 In fact, in the UN sponsored peace plan the return of the Sahrawi refugees was seen ‘as a stage necessary for the completion of a peace process’ (Bhatia 2003:786), during which time the refugees would return to vote in a referendum on self-determination.

In conclusion, oral histories of Palestinian and Sahrawi refugees reveal processes and shifts in national struggles that either promote or challenge collective mobilization and consent around a strategic vision for liberation. What is certain is that despite decades of overwhelming power and repression imposed on these two stateless populations, their struggle has been reshaped, but not silenced. Both Palestinians and Sahrawis have a great deal to learn from each other.

Randa Farah is an anthropology assistant professor at the University of Western Ontario. Dr. Farah was a research associate at the Centre de Centre d’Etudes et de Recherches sur le Moyen-Orient Contemporain (CERMOC), in Amman, where she participated in a research project on the relationship between Palestinian refugees and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). She held different positions as Visiting Fellow and an associate researcher at the Refugee Studies Center (RSC) at the University of Oxford, where together with a lawyer, she taught a course titled Palestinian Refugees and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Dr. Farah acquired her Ph.D. at the University of Toronto where she examines the relationship of Palestinian popular memory and identity in the context of a refugee camp in Jordan. Her current research on Western Sahara is focused on national identity, generation and gender issues. Her writings and lectures reflect her interests in the areas of memory/history and identity, conflict and displacement/refugees, nations and nationalism, children, and humanitarian aid.

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Oral History


Endnotes

1. I would like to express my gratitude to the Sahrawi and Palestinian refugees who allowed me to record their life-histories. I am also grateful to the Office of the Vice-President, Research and International Relations at the University of Western Ontario, which allowed me to conduct research in the last two years in Sahrawi camps.

2. I conducted anthropological field research in Palestinian camps between 1995 and 2000, and the material used for this paper on the Sahrawi case took place between 2004 and 2006.


4. In 1964 the Organization of African Unity (currently the African Union) adopted this principle which establishes the boundaries of the colonial territories as the frontiers of newly independent states. For more on this question see G. Joffe (1987).

5. See the International Court of Justice, Case Summaries “Western Sahara: Advisory Opinion of 16 October 1975.

6. Polisario is the Spanish acronym for Frente Popular para la Liberacion de Saguia el Hamra y Rio de Oro or The Popular Front for the Liberation of al-Saqiya al-Hamra and Rio de Oro, the two regions al-Saqiya al-Hamra and Rio de Oro (Wadi al-Dhahab) make Western Sahara. The Polisario was established on the 10 May 1973 and led the resistance against the Spanish and later against the Moroccan and Mauritanian invasion.

7. The nearest town to the Sahrawi camps is Tindouf, a small Algerian border town. The camps are geographically isolated in one of the harshest deserts, where temperatures can soar to over fifty in the summer and below zero in winter. Most refugees rely on batteries for electricity and water tanks to fill water. This is in contrast to Palestinian camps located in or near major urban centers in the Middle East.

8. The Sahrawi state was declared in exile in the refugee camps on the 27th of February 1976 and is recognized by over eighty countries. One of the functions of the state is to distribute international humanitarian aid, since it does not have an economic base.

9. The Sahrawis subsidized their livelihood with seasonal cultivation, trade, fishing and towards the end of the Spanish colonial era, many were forced to settle in urban centers working as cheap labor in colonial enterprises, primarily in the phosphate industry and the construction of roads.

10. Sahrawis often hired a Mrabet or Koranic teacher who taught reading and writing to the children of a freeg. The Mrabet moved with the freeg and was usually paid in kind for his services.

11. Sahrawis are the descendents of tribes who migrated to North Africa during the Islamic conquest and intermarried with local Berbers, one of these tribes is Bani Hassan, hence the term Hassaniyya dialect.

12. Sahrawis point to the fact that unlike the situation of women in surrounding Arab countries, Sahrawi women are highly respected (violence against women is absent and abhorred among Sahrawis), autonomous and have equal rights enshrined in SADR’s constitution.

13. During research in recent years, many Sahrawis informed me they sold all their meager belongings, such as the goats they were able to buy after many years in exile, believing they were soon returning.

14. See Amnesty International http://web.amnesty.org/report2006/mar-summary-eng, which stated that popular protests were met with ’excessive use of force’. Many Sahrawis have been killed, injured or imprisoned as a result of their demands for self-determination and human rights.

15. The basic socio-economic unit in the Sahrawi tribal society made of three to five tents or families who cooperated in carrying out daily functions.
Lessons’ Learned from PalestineRemembered.com’s Oral History Experience

By Abu al-Sous (Salah Mansour)

Introduction

Since PalestineRemembered.com’s* inception in 2000 - the largest online community for Palestinian refugees on the internet - we have been looking for documented resources for Palestinian history & culture, especially for events pertaining to Nakba, but very little was found or available. Consequently, it became apparent that oral history is the only tool left to solve this problem. We also recognized that we should react quickly, otherwise, it could be too late since our refugee population, especially those who survived the Nakba, are aging quickly, and their memory could be lost forever. As a result, in 2003 PalestineRemembered.com initiated al-Nakba Oral History project in Jordan, where the largest refugee community currently lives. Since then we have recorded over 230 interviews with refugees who survived the Nakba, containing over 750 hours of recording (all can be viewed or heard on the internet), which cover over 140 ethnically cleansed and destroyed Palestinian towns.

Lessons Learned

In this article, we would like to share with you our experience in the field of oral history - hopefully other oral historians will find it beneficial. From the beginning, we have faced many problems, but the key to our success has been persistence and perseverance. As the project

What is certain is that despite decades of overwhelming power and repression imposed on these two stateless populations, their struggle has been reshaped, but not silenced.
Before each interview, we mandated that interviewers should research the refugee’s town. Such a research isn’t only helpful during the interview, but it also helps in gaining the refugees’ trust.

On Saturday 25 November, some 100 participants gathered for Zochrot’s latest destroyed village tour, this time to Naji al-All’s home village of Shajara. Amongst the group were several of the original inhabitants — today spread across the country from Kafr Kanna a few kilometres away, to Lydd, two hours drive away.

Zochrot is dedicated to presenting the Palestinian experience of the Nakba to a Jewish audience, and to this end pay careful attention to recording the testimonies of refugees from every village that they visit. The group produces a booklet to distribute to participants, in which organizers publish testimonies of several villagers, in Hebrew, Arabic and English.

Sitting in the shade next to the old well, visitors to Shajara heard the testimonies of Najia Aed Diabat and Hani Musa Diabat, aged 12 and 11 at the time of the Nakba. The speakers turned around as they spoke, pointing to landmarks long gone — from the location of the school to the place the animals used to feed. No houses remain intact in this village – no mosque, no church. Yet through the words of the speakers the village came to life.

Raneen Geries has been recording testimony on camera from the refugees assisting Zochrot with their tours, contributing to the building of Zochrot’s oral history archive. She is particularly interested in gathering the stories of women, often sidelined in the process of history gathering, not just in a Palestinian context, but internationally.

Zochrot’s contribution to oral history work will not only serve to educate a Hebrew audience (when translated), but serve as a valuable archival resource for all those interested in Palestinian history.

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Zochrot’s emphasis on oral history

Visit to depopulated village of Lifta organized with Zochrot for the commemoration of the Nakba. May 2006. © Anne Paq.

Read more about the trip to Shajara at www.nakbainhebrew.org/index.php?id=483
For written testimonies see: www.nakbainhebrew.org/index.php?id=381
4. Scouting for qualified candidates has been a constant battle; it has been very hard to find qualified candidates especially when they live all over the place. What makes this process even more challenging (especially in Jordan) is the absence of any grassroots organizations.

5. Since PalestineRemembered.com is a privately run, managed, and funded website, funding has been a struggle from the start. The website and the project are being funded mostly from a private fund, and if it was not for lack of funds, we would have already expanded the project to Lebanon, Syria, and Gaza.

6. Early on we struggled to find the right mix of technologies that is cost effective, easy to use and publish on the internet. Now we use digital camera with no tapes involved.

7. Based on our experience, we found that preparing refugees for the interviews is critical. Although the preparation process is costly and time consuming, we found that such preparation visits help in put the refugees at ease, help them to open up more, dissipates a lot of their fears, and make them receptive to answering questions.

8. Before each interview, we mandated that interviewers should research the refugee’s town. Such a research isn’t only helpful during the interview, but it also helps in gaining the refugees’ trust. We also coupled this step by showing the refugee’s town at the website including all available pictures.

9. Early on in the process, we make sure that refugees know we are not profiting whatsoever from the interviews, and their interview will be available online within a short time. We also found another important hidden advantage in this step; by telling the refugees that their interviews will be available online, it decreases the likelihood of exaggeration, and encourages a respect to others in the narrative.

10. At the end of each interview, we share a copy of the interview with each refugee. We make sure that they know this before the interview, which also increases their level of confidence and trust.

11. The questions are divided into two parts. The first part attempts to paint of picture for the village or city before the Nakba, and the second part attempts to paint a picture of events before and after the Nakba. We found out that the second part is more complex and dynamic than the first, and usually requires lots of efforts and skills by the interviewers. It might be because of refugees’ old age or because of memory loss, but we found lots of refugees mix timing, places, directions, and sequence of events. Although many refugees like to talk about their experiences, we found that events leading to the Nakba are intentionally being skipped for certain unknown reasons! To solve this problem, we have devised a special set of questions to refresh their memory by intentionally slowing them down - we call these questions breaks. These questions are being asked purposely not to collect information, but rather to refresh refugees’ memory, such as: what were you wearing when you left your home? Who was with you? What time of the day was it? Did you have any cars? …etc. When the refugees are slowed down, we found that hidden important events comes to the surface all
of a sudden. For this reason interviewers have to be extremely alert for follow up questions. Consequently, sometimes we require the presence of another interviewer (especially when budget allows) to help in directing the interview. Regardless of the interviewer’s skill and experience, we found that the quality of the interviews usually increases when a director is present.

12. After each interview, the management in the US and in Jordan evaluate each interview. Sometimes the interviewer fails to ask certain important follow up questions pertaining to special event (such as experience as a prisoner of war, visiting their town post-Nakba, ...etc.), and we ask for a follow up visit to clarify or shed more light on certain event. We believe that is an important step in the process since it improves the overall quality.

13. From our experience, we found that conducting two to three interviews per village, and up to five interviews for the cities is more than adequate. Usually after conducting two interviews per village, the third interview repeats 90% of what is in the previous two, and they mostly differ with events pertaining to leaving the town. Otherwise, almost everything else is similar.

14. We found that many refugees mix right of return with their right of self-determination. Also we found that the mass majority of refugees equates compensation with selling land or dishonoring Palestine. We spend considerable time educating the refugees that right of self-determination should not precondition their return, and most importantly returning goes hand in hand with compensation for suffering, and destruction of lives and properties.

**Conclusion**

We cannot think of any other project more important than the al-Nakba Oral History to work on. We call on all organizations, activists, and individuals to collaborate and share their findings so we all can learn from each other’s experience, and to keep duplication of efforts and resources at minimum. In that regard, we hope that activists in this field share information about the towns which they have researched share sample interviews so others may benefit from their experiences. This is the only way for other activists in this field to concentrate their resources to cover towns that have not yet been covered. We hope this article, along other publications on this subject, will bring much needed attention to this subject. In that regard, we are very thankful for Badil Center’s effort in raising awareness on this important subject.

Our DATE is 58 years LATE, inshallah we shall return.

*PalestineRemembered.com is a non-profit website based in the USA. Currently, it’s the largest online community for Palestinian refugees on the internet (with over 12,000 registered members). This article is also available on the PalestineRemembered.com website.*
In early April 2006 more than 70 Palestinian students from a diverse array of North American universities came together at Swarthmore College, near the city of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to inaugurate the first Palestinian Student Society (PSS) summit. Student-inspired and led, the summit sought to identify – through a democratic participatory approach – the specific needs, demands, and responsibilities of emerging Palestinian voices within the particular context of North America. Moreover, it aimed to articulate these common issues through the careful formulation of an encompassing mission statement, as well as through the creation of an organizational body through which Palestinian students could begin to both establish a network of committed and engaged peers and represent themselves as an integral component of the global Palestinian body politic.

The conference was initially conceived by Sa’ed Atshan, who has since graduated from Swarthmore College to pursue a graduate degree at Harvard University. As the recipient of a Lang Opportunity Grant at Swarthmore, Atshan managed to secure a visit by Columbia University professor Joseph Massad. The latter succeeded in engaging and challenging the summit participants regarding the future of Palestinian activism as well as advocacy. The grant also allowed for travel costs to be covered – thus, ensuring a certain regional and socio-economic diversity that served to strengthen the quality and breadth of the debate surrounding PSS’ aims and mission. Among the many represented universities were Yale, Berkeley, Swarthmore, Temple, Stanford, Georgetown, George Washington University, Marquette, City University of...
The core of the summit was dedicated to crafting a mission statement aimed at clearly articulating a collective assertion of the rights and responsibilities that emerge from a shared and active notion of Palestinian heritage and identity. Facilitated by the author of this article as well as by Noura Erakat – legal advocate for the U.S. Campaign to End Israeli Occupation – participants were given four driving questions, each of which related to a central issue facing Palestinians in exile. In broad terms, these reflected conceptions of community and identity, representation, individual and collective rights as members of an exiled diaspora, and finally, the responsibilities entailed in such a consciousness and informed by the specific North American exile context and circumstances. Discussed in small groups, these questions brought to the fore important, and for many, novel notions of what it means to identify with and engage in a diaspora body politic. This exercise highlighted a key individual and collective tension facing our generation – one that is rooted in the global fragmentation of the Palestinian nation and the political realities that have engendered a stark division between Palestinians within the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, i.e. those Palestinians that have become the sole focus of international political and humanitarian attention since the beginning of the peace initiatives in the early 1990s, and those outside these areas. As is often overlooked, the latter, Palestinians in exile throughout the world, constitute the majority of the Palestinian people. The Civitas Project report entitled *Palestinians Register: Laying Foundations and Setting Directions* - a landmark participatory project that places the voices, demands and recommendations of Palestinians throughout Al-Shatat, or the Palestinian dispersion, at the forefront of the Palestinian question - identifies this division as the outgrowth of a political process of exclusion, which has primarily come at the expense of the majority of Palestinians. It states that, “This exclusion has denied Palestinians residing outside the West Bank and Gaza the most elementary democratic right to shape the key constitutional and the political institutions of the future state that belongs to them as much as those resident inside occupied Palestine.” Specifically for Palestinian students in Al-Shatat, this division has, in short, fermented a tension between, on the one hand, standing in solidarity with the Palestinians and, on the other, crucially recognizing one’s place within the Palestinian national arena and thus standing as a Palestinian with concomitant rights, obligations, and a duty to actively engage in the future of this dispersed community. Through this deliberative process, the summit sought to challenge the dominant conceptual hold of the former standpoint and begin a move toward a more inclusive understanding of diaspora political involvement.

Merging the findings and working statements of each group together, a final mission statement was formulated by consensus among the PSS participants. Each concept and term, as well as the implications they embodied, were discussed in detail. Though it tested the patience of many, this collective participatory process enabled a remarkable grappling with the core issues of what it means to be a Palestinian, of belonging to an exiled national community, of benefiting from the privileges of a university education, and, in extension, what duties such an identity, educational opportunity, and political consciousness entail.

This process reflected a transformative conceptual and practical realization for many. Nadeem Muaddi, a current associate at the Washington, DC-based Jerusalem Fund for Education and Community Development, emphasized the implications of such a conceptual shift in a reflection he circulated shortly after the summit:

In the past, Palestinians in diaspora who stood in solidarity with Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza would state that they could not advocate for a solution...
to the conflict because it was not their place as non-residents to do so. Together, we called for the end of such nonsense. Recognizing that all Palestinians worldwide – whether in Israel, the Palestinian Territories, North America, or other – constitute a single nation, we cemented our right to involvement in deciding the future of our people.

Central to this argument, and present in the mission statement below, is the recognition of a need for and the desire toward integration in the Palestinian national debate. Palestinians in North America, especially students, embody an integral part of the Palestinian national community and, with their unique skills and experiences, have the responsibility to ensure that their voices are projected and heard across the Palestinian national spectrum. In this spirit, the mission statement should be understood as a simple, inclusive call for Palestinian students in North America – as one distinct component of a larger Palestinian diaspora body politic – to both assert their rights within this national framework and contribute to the formation of its present and future. The statement reads,

*We are students in North America who actively identify as Palestinian because of a shared national, historical, and cultural experience, regardless of current citizenship, current location, religion, class, or gender. We strive to provide an institutional structure for participation in the greater Palestinian national movement for self-determination. As members of the Palestinian diaspora, we assert our right and responsibility to involvement in the determination of the future of Palestinian nationhood.*

The significance of the PSS effort, in this short time period, should be appreciated in terms of how it has sought to redefine and thus reframe the political vision and possibilities for Palestinians of a new generation who live outside the territorial confines of the Occupied Palestinian Territories. It encapsulates a recognition that Palestinians, globally, have a right and obligation to contribute to the national questions and debates that tie all Palestinians together, regardless of current residence and territorial presence. Furthermore, this vision acknowledges that local considerations and needs, in contra-distinction to those of a national scope, differ across the communities in exile and in Palestine. As such, they can best be identified and addressed by those on the ground in each of these localities. For our generation, however, the political focus on the OPT has overshadowed and, in some cases, determined the national debate. It is crucial to understand that a marginalization of the exiled voices of the majority by an exclusive focus on the OPT serves to disenfranchise most members of the nation. Therefore, as students in North America, we must tackle our local needs within the North American Palestinian community, while simultaneously engaging with and contributing to the national effort.

In light of the *Civitas* project and its reception by international institutions involved in different aspects of the Palestinian question, the Palestinian Student Society emerges as a much needed project, which embodies the democratic and participatory principles that have long animated the Palestinian political struggle. For a generation, where these principles, practices, and institutional mechanisms for involvement have all but disappeared, the PSS represents a small, yet important, collective initiative aimed at re-integrating diaspora voices and recommendations within a larger, national Palestinian political vision.
A graduate of Georgetown University in Washington, DC, Maher Bitar is currently on a Marshall Scholarship at the University of Oxford, where he is reading for a Master of Science in Forced Migration at the Refugee Studies Centre.

Endnotes

General Articles

“Palestinian Refugee Rights Must be Claimed in order to Be Addressed”
Report from the 5th Annual Meeting of the BADIL Legal Support Network

Between 2-5 November 2006, the BADIL Legal Support Network held its 5th meeting in Athens, in order to discuss, plan and recommend key areas of work and intervention for Palestinian refugee rights in 2007 and beyond. The Legal Support Network (LSN) is a voluntary forum of some 50 Palestinian and international lawyers, academics and human rights professionals, committed to supporting the rights and demands raised by Palestinian refugees, in particular members and partners of the global Palestine Right of Return Coalition and BADIL. The question on everyone’s mind was “How to claim Palestinian refugee rights and maintain ongoing pressure on states and the international community for enforcement of effective protection and the right of return, restitution and compensation in times when constructive political negotiations with Israel are beyond reach?” This question also guided the debate of this year’s annual meeting convened by BADIL for the members.

Among the priorities identified and addressed by this year’s expert meeting were:

- The gathering of more accurate figures regarding Palestinian refugee and internally displaced persons to be used by Palestinian and international organizations, in order to enhance the credibility of accounts of displacement in the past (1948, 1967) and ongoing displacement by Israel’s occupation and colonization, including its Wall under construction in the West Bank;
- A strategy for effective advocacy and lobbying inside the United Nations system, in particular the Human Rights Council, UN Committees charged with monitoring the implementation of human rights treaties, and with UNRWA and UNHCR.
- Developing mechanisms to uphold international law, in particular in the field of universal jurisdiction and accountability of states and companies. While new laws have already led to a number of criminal charges against Israeli perpetrators in the 1967 occupied Palestinian territory, Palestinian refugees still lack an effective legal forum for their claims to return, property restitution and compensation.
- Providing professional assistance to campaigns conducted by Palestinian civil society and organizations, particular the Campaign for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel until it complies with international law, and public campaigns for raising awareness of Palestinian refugee rights on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Israel’s occupation in 2007, and the 60th anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba in 2008.

Members of the BADIL Legal Support Network reaffirmed their commitment to work on these tasks in 2007 as partners in the quest for a just solution for Palestinian refugees and internally displaced persons.
Oxfam Solidarity and Badil Resource Center
Emergency Job Creation Project

By Badil Media Staff

The emergency job creation project was created to improve and rehabilitate social service infrastructure and housing conditions in the western villages of Ramallah and in refugee camps across the West Bank to mitigate the adverse effects of the economic crisis resulting from actions of the Israeli army and the construction of the Wall. Funded by Oxfam Solidarity Belgium (OSB) and implemented by Badil Resource Center, the aim was to create jobs based on a ‘cash for work’ model. Thirteen camps from the West Bank responded with proposals, alongside a small village in the Bethlehem district called al-Walajeh. In short, the project aimed to:

1. Provide temporary income to unemployed refugees and their families;
2. Strengthen refugee community organizations and restore public facilities;
3. Alleviate the needs of Palestinian refugees in the West Bank.

Badil also tried to support and empower active community-based organizations, which focus specifically on the improvement of the socio-economic situation. In total, Badil, in cooperation with the camp’s popular committees and youth activity centers, built or renovated over 70 houses and 3 community centers.

The case of Walajah: The struggle for a school

The village of al-Walajeh is situated nine kilometres south-west of Jerusalem. Although al-Walajeh is not a refugee camp, its residents are refugees in their own village. During the 1948 war, the developed


the Palestinian Student Society emerges as a much needed project, which embodies the democratic and participatory principles that have long animated the Palestinian political struggle.
residential and agricultural areas of al-Walajeh were destroyed by the Jewish-Zionist forces and the inhabitants were displaced within their village. When the Rhodes Agreement was signed by Jordan and Israel in 1949, the ‘Armistice’ or ‘Green line’ was created. “The Israeli forces came immediately within days after signing the agreement to destroy our homes and farms. All residents watched as bulldozers uprooted and demolished everything precious and dear to them,” said Abu Ali. Around 200 houses were razed in addition to the school and village mosque. About 80% of al-Walajeh’s land was occupied by Israel in the 1948 War and approximately 1,000 residents fled to their agricultural land on the remaining 20% of the village under Jordanian control, on which they rebuilt their houses.

Following the 1967 war, Israel took control of the West Bank, including the Jordanian controlled area of al-Walajeh, and unilaterally declared almost 50% of the ‘new’ al-Walajeh, i.e. where residents had relocated, under the illegally annexed municipal boundaries of Jerusalem.

Since 1985, the municipality of Jerusalem assumes day-to-day authority over the area and issues demolition orders for homes built on al-Walajeh land by 1948 refugees without construction permits. Until 1985, the people of the village did not know they required building permits. Since then, however, 29 homes have been demolished, displacing over 100 persons. There are currently 39 structures (housing 61 families) with demolition orders. All people displaced and facing imminent displacement are 1948 refugees and hold UNRWA identification cards. Israel has been planning the construction of a new colony on al-Walajeh land since 2004.

Building a new Al-Walajah school

Abu Ali, a member of the school construction committee at al-Walajeh remembers, “before 1948 there was a small school in al-Walajeh village, and students were taught English there.” During that time, schools who taught English were among the most developed and prestigious. “Now, 58 years after the Nakba, we have one of the poorest schools in Palestine.”

The 2,000 residents have been receiving assistance since UNRWA’s establishment in 1951. “Under growing pressure from the residents, UNRWA promised to build a school” said Abu Ali. This was in 1968. UNRWA established a small school with 2 rooms. Two years later, UNRWA rented two other separate classrooms built by residents. “There were times when there were 50 students studying in one room that was not larger than 16 square meters” says Abu Ayman, head of the school construction committee. Ten years later, in 1980, UNRWA rented 4 other rooms. However, this time, the promise was conditional upon acquiring the necessary construction permit from the Israeli authorities. People in the village were hopeful they would be granted the required permit. However, these hopes were quickly dashed, as were several subsequent appeals.

UNRWA’s lack of protection

UNRWA justified its failure to build new rooms or a new school by stating it did not have a mandate to interfere in such matters. In other words, UNRWA would like to build a new school, but cannot demand that Israel issues the required construction permit. Despite the fact that most of the new al-Walajeh land where the school was to be built was classified as “area B” (1), the residents were forced to go through Israel, which has assumed administrative powers throughout the Jerusalem municipality.

Because of the growing number of students and the increasing restrictions of movement, residents felt that the construction of the school was a matter of urgency. Hence, they established a Construction Committee and bought a piece of land suitable for the proposed school. The Committee obtained
the construction permit from the Palestinian ministry, a significant accomplishment in itself, and the residents felt that their dreams would soon come true. However, because of the lack of funding, the Committee could not start the construction as planned.

The Israeli “justice” system
In order to fund the project, UNRWA requested an official Israeli response to confirm that they had no objection to the projected plan. However, the villagers’ plans were again quickly dashed. The Israeli authorities said that the land designated for building the school had been transferred from Area “B” to “C” within the “Wye River Agreement” signed in 1998 between the PLO and Israel. The school Construction Committee submitted on behalf of al-Walajeh residents a petition to the Israeli court. In 2001, the court decided not to rule on the petition; instead, the judge referred the case to the commander responsible for issuing the permit. The commander did not even bother to respond to the request of the villagers. At that point, the residents decided to take matters into their own hands and build the school themselves. They reasoned that “the risk which existed [the destruction of the school] was not as great as our need for the school” said Abu Ayman, al-Walajeh resident. The committee collected money from the families living in al-Walajeh, which was not even enough to begin working. So, they contacted the local community and NGOs. Some of those adopted a position similar to UNRWA, while others accepted to take on the case such as Badil, which contributed to the construction of the project through “The Community Emergency Project.”

A little victory
By mid-August, the Committee had completely finished the first phase of the construction of al-Walajeh school. Now, they have a building which consists of 6 classrooms, 50 square meters each. The next step is to transfer the students to the new school. Abu Ayman said: “We wanted to open the school this September, but UNRWA refused to move the staff in.” UNRWA has informed the Committee that they can not make a decision very quickly or easily; it takes time to research and calculate the risk. UNRWA, however, unofficially informed Badil in December that they agreed to move teachers and students from grade one to three to the school for the next term, beginning in January 2007.

Endnotes
1. Under the Oslo Accords, “Area B” indicates that the civil aspects in these parts are administered by the Palestinian Authority.
2. Under the Oslo Accords, “Area C” are entirely controlled and administered by Israel.

General Articles

“Under growing pressure from the residents, UNRWA promised to build a school” said Abu Ali. This was in 1968.

Right to Enter Campaign Update:
Israel issues last permits to 105 foreigners- and splits up families!

As of 20 November 2006, all foreign passports of families with Palestinian IDs who had applied for visa extensions were marked as “last permit” by the Israeli authorities. The 105 passport holders will be required to exit from Israeli controlled entry/exit points before the end of the year. The Israeli Ministry of Interior (MoI) office at Beit El began returning the passports on November 19 after a six week strike by Israeli MoI employees. This measure particularly affects Palestinians who have family members holding Palestinian IDs and who themselves only have foreign passports or IDs.

Those who overstay their allotted time are subject to immediate deportation from the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt). In an effort to avoid being considered “illegal” and threatened with arrest by the Israelis, some families are opting to relocate abroad, a clear form of population transfer. Indeed, every denial of entry and visa renewal refusal impacts an estimated 10 people, many of whom subsequently resort to moving to another country. According to the PA MoI, hundreds of applications for Israeli visa extensions following Israeli guidelines were submitted in October and are still pending. The pattern of refusing visa renewals for family members is part of an overall Israeli effort that denies entry to foreign nationals, especially those of Palestinian origin or with Palestinian spouse. Israel is also refusing to process an estimated 120,000 family reunification applications, violating Palestinians’ right to family life and the right to choose one’s residence.

For more information, visit the My Right to Entry Campaign website, www.righttoenter.ps.
BDS UPDATE

Help build the BDS Campaign, endorse the Palestinian civil society BDS call: www.bds-palestine.net

The following BDS initiatives were compiled between the end of October and beginning of December 2006.

FIRST BANK TO DIVEST

Dutch Bank ASN ends relations with Veolia
The Netherlands, November 27, 2006 www.StoptheWall.org

This week, ASN Bank, a Dutch bank based in The Hague, announced that it would end its relationship with Veolia Transport. Since it announced its intentions to become involved in an Israeli project to build a light rail/tramline system to be constructed in occupied East Jerusalem, Veolia Transport, a French multi-national corporation, faced criticism from all over the world. The tram aimed to connect the illegal settlements in East Jerusalem with towns and cities in Israel.

ASN Bank explains its decision, “As an ethical bank, ASN Bank does not only apply financial criteria when selecting its investments, but also takes account of environmental and social criteria; the latter include Human Rights criteria. UN resolutions are an important guide for ASN Bank in the practical interpretation of these Human Rights criteria.” The Bank once refused to deal with companies that were linked in any way with apartheid South Africa. To encourage ASN Bank to withdraw its money from Veolia, concerned individuals with an account at ASN Bank joined forces with Dutch, Palestinian, Israeli and international organisations.
CONSUMER BOYCOTT

Flemish Palestine Solidarity Committee campaigns for a consumer’s boycott of Israel - VPK Report
Belgium, 20 November 2006  www.stopthewall.org
The Flemish Palestine Solidarity Committee (VPK) campaigned for a boycott of Israeli products in front of several supermarkets. They asked the customers to sign a petition to the supermarkets’ directors, and built a ‘living slogan’ in order to place pressure on Israel to enforce its respect for international law.

The profits of Israeli products sold (also in Belgium) allow Israel to maintain the occupation of Palestine. Since the international community doesn’t impose sanctions against these violations, VPK calls for a consumer boycott of all Israeli products. Some of the well-known trade marks in Belgian supermarkets are Carmel, Jaffa, Tivall and Sabra.

The activists handed about 100 signed letters to the supermarkets’ managers, with the demand of removing Israeli products from its shelves. Activists were encouraged by many of the consumers’ messages that ‘it’s high time to act against Israel’.

Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign of the Limerick Branch Boycott Success
by Sean Clinton, a member of the National Executive of the Ireland-Palestine
Ireland, 25 November 2006.

On Saturday 25th November the Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign (IPSC) mounted a successful picket outside the entrance to the Limerick branch of the Atlantic Homecare chain store in Ireland. After refusing to move the picket when approached by security guards the protesters eventually agreed to call off their action after the store manager removed from sale all of the Israeli manufactured Keter Plastic products in the store. Within two hours of commencing the action, IPSC members witnessed pallet loads of the Israel made plastic storage boxes, wheelbarrows and garden sheds being taken off the sales floor. Some assembled garden sheds which were too large to shift right away had sales notices removed and replaced with Out Of Stock stickers. The store manager indicated that the items would remain off sale until management had an opportunity to discuss the matter further with the IPSC.

This latest success is part of the IPSC’s BDS campaign and follows the publication last August of a letter by 61 Irish academics calling for a moratorium on EU aid to Israeli universities, until Israel abides by international law and basic human rights norms. In the run up the Christmas shopping spree the IPSC is stepping up its BDS campaign to increase public awareness about the sale of Israeli manufactured good in some Irish shops.

ACADEMIC BOYCOTT

Right to Education Campaign – Birzeit University
Occupied Palestine, November 26th, 2006

In response to the Irish call for academic boycott, the Right to Education Committee at Birzeit University, gathered signatures from over 1000 students and 113 staff, endorsing a letter in
support of the academic boycott initiative started in Ireland. The letter thanked the 61 Irish academics who called for a moratorium on EU aid to Israeli universities until Israel abides by international human rights laws. The letter also calls for more organisations to join the Irish initiative and boycott Israeli academic institutions until Israel withdraws from the occupied Palestinian territories and upholds the rights of Palestinians, including their right of return.

Israeli academia has failed to denounce the illegal occupation, racist policies and war crimes committed in their name by the Israeli state, despite their position of influence and moral obligation to do so. Moreover, the Israeli occupation stifles the development of Palestinian education through arbitrary checkpoints, arrests, detentions and deportations. Palestinians face ongoing Israeli attacks on their educational institutions and there is a growing clampdown in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip. This includes the arbitrary detention of students, the prohibition of Gazans from studying in the West Bank, the harassment of foreign students entering Gaza and the West Bank and the increasing difficulties facing ordinary academic exchange between Palestinians and the outside world.

To read the letter and for more information on the Right to Education campaign see: right2edu.birzeit.edu/ or contact the Right to Education Student Committee: omar.deriah@gmail.com

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**New Study**

**ISRAEL’S FORCIBLE TRANSFERS DURING THE SECOND INTIFADA**

A new study by Al-Haq titled: *Israel’s Deportations and Forcible Transfers of Palestinians out of the West Bank during the Second Intifada* (November 2006) assesses the legality, under international law, of forcible transfers and deportations of Palestinians from the West Bank adopted by the Israeli government since the outbreak of the second *intifada* in September 2000. It documents two instances of deportations and/or forcible transfer, namely the Church of Nativity siege in 2002 and Israel’s “assigned residence” policy since 2002.

Under a secret agreement brokered with international assistance as a result of the siege of the Church of Nativity during Israel “Operation Defensive Shield”, 39 Palestinians were deported or transferred on 10 May 2002, 26 of them to the Gaza Strip and 13 others abroad, mainly to Europe. The study provides a thorough analysis of evidence that these “departures were coerced, in contravention of the international prohibition on deportations and forcible transfers of civilians in occupied territory, and not legalised by the existence of the agreement.”

A few months later, in the summer of 2002, Israeli authorities came up with a plan to transfer West Bank family members of alleged “terrorists” to the Gaza Strip. The transfers were presented as measures of “assigned residence”. The study shows why the transfers do not respect the conditions of lawful measures of assigned residence and cannot be considered as such. Rather, they must be classified as forcible transfers.

Under international humanitarian law, both deportations and forcible transfers are illegal. Under international criminal law, persons who engage in these practices incur international criminal responsibility. Clearly stated by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY): “Both deportation and forcible transfer relate to the involuntary and unlawful evacuation of individuals from the territory in which they reside. Yet, the two are not synonymous in customary international law. Deportation presumes transfer beyond State borders, whereas forcible transfer relates to displacements within a State.” The study also analyzes how direct evidence is misused before the “Israeli High Court of Justice”, and wrongfully interprets the law in order to absolve itself of any wrong doing, therefore upholding the demographic aims of the state.

*Source: Kate Coakley and Marko Divac Oberg, “Israel’s Deportations and Forcible Transfers of Palestinians Out of the West Bank During the Second Intifada”, Occasional Paper 15, Ramallah: Al Haq, April 2006.*
Letter to PLO and United Nations from Palestinian Civil Society

Monday, 11 December 2006

To: Riyadh Mansour, Head of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations.

Cc: Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General, United Nations Alvaro de Soto, UN Special Coordinator to the Middle East Peace Process

Subject: Response to the Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to General Assembly resolution ES-10/15 on the establishment of the UN Register of Damage in connection with paragraphs 152 and 153 of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice of 9 July 2004.

Palestinian Civil Society Concerned over the Working of the United Nations Register of Damage on the Wall and its Associated Regime

Palestinian civil society welcomes the United Nations Register of Damage caused by the Construction of the Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territories as a step towards the implementation of the International Court of Justice advisory opinion, but serious concerns remain over the working of the Register. Of particular concern are the purpose of the Register, the deferral of decision-making powers to the Board concerning eligibility criteria, scope of damages and the procedure of registration of claims, as well as the lack of participation of Palestinian victims, civil society and leadership. Unless these concerns are addressed in a transparent and consultative manner, Palestinian civil society will publicly denounce and actively boycott the Register of Damage.

Purpose of the Register

Although the Register of Damage as envisaged by the Secretary-General is not a claim mechanism, the establishment of a register that does not foresee reparation as a form of redress would be useless for the victims whose rights have been violated. It would also contradict the Court’s conclusion that “Israel has the obligation to make reparation for the damage caused to all the natural or legal persons concerned.” Hence, the inherent purpose of the Register is to lay the foundation for redress.

Registration of claims

The Register, as currently envisaged by the report of the Secretary-General, remains vague on the procedure for approval of claims because decision about eligibility criteria and scope of damages is deferred to the Board. Palestinian civil society is concerned that excessive power to shape the Register is left to the Board, whose composition is yet to be determined. Moreover, the claims registered will not be evaluated or verified by the Board, a procedure which diminishes the relevance of this Register as an official record for future claims.
Eligibility criteria
Equally important is the participation of Palestinian victims, civil society and leaders in the determination of eligibility criteria and the scope of damages as the terms of reference of the Register will directly affect potential beneficiaries. The eligibility criteria need to be flexible and inclusive, considering all available standards of evidence as developed by reparation mechanisms and international law.

Scope of damages
Similarly, the scope of damages must cover all violations of the rights of Palestinians, as stipulated by the International Court of Justice advisory opinion. The register, as it is currently envisaged, however, omits collective damage claims, such as damage to public lands and natural resources, civil infrastructure, commonly held properties, environmental harm and the destruction of regional economies. It also omits non-material damages such as effects on mental health and family life. As it is currently conceived, the most significant part of damages caused by the Wall would escape the Register’s purview. It is important, therefore, that the Register includes all material and non-material damages as well as collective damages, as human rights standards and international guidelines on reparation have established.

Field presence and participation
Lastly, the Register must maintain a fully functional operation in the occupied Palestinian territories, regardless of where the Board members convene. Furthermore, the UN General Assembly and Secretary General must ensure that, consistent with the Privileges and Immunities Convention, the Register’s Board members and functionaries have protected access to the field and the affected persons, without the interference of any third parties. Without such access, the participation of Palestinian victims and civil society will be seriously impeded.

Based on the above, we urge you to ensure that the Register is conceived as a step against impunity and adheres to the requirements of international law and best practice. Palestinian civil society will cooperate with a Register that abides by these standards.

Al-Haq
Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign
BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights
Habitat International Coalition (HIC)
Occupied Palestine and Syrian Golan Heights Advocacy Initiative (OPGAI)
Women’s Center for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC)
In **2007** al-Naksa turns 40

In **2008** al-Nakba turns 60

Let’s launch a **40 + 60** Campaign for

**100% Return & Freedom!**

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**2007 marks 40 years since Israel’s occupation of Palestine (al-Naksa)**

**2008 marks 60 years since the beginning of the Palestinian catastrophe (al-Nakba)**

Since **1948, 7 million Palestinians have been displaced.**

Israel continues to occupy and colonize Palestinian land through the construction of Jewish only settlements and the Wall in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip has been turned into a prison. Israel violates international law and commits ongoing war crimes and crimes against humanity.

**A CALL TO ACTION**

The future of the Palestinian people are at a crossroads. 2007 - 2008 marks a historic opportunity for faith-based organizations, individuals, community groups, the solidarity movement, unions and political parties to pool resources and activities and campaign for a rights-based solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Critical is the focus on the enforcement of the rights of Palestinian refugees under international law.

Now more than ever Palestinians are counting on local and global society to build pressure for the enforcement of international law – the foundation for a just peace between Palestinians and Israelis. 6 June 2007 marks the 40th anniversary of Israel’s occupation of the West Bank (including eastern Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip. 16 - 18 September 2007 marks 25 years of impunity of the perpetrators of the massacre of Sabra and Shatia, Beirut. 15 May 2008 stands for 60 years of the Nakba. This may well be the last decade anniversary when Palestinian eye-witnesses from the 1948 Nakba are still living. Let’s make 2006 – 2007 into ‘years of freedom and return’.

Not just the return (al-awda) of the refugees, but also a return to the rule of law and respect for human rights.

**A Rights-Based Solution**

The three elements of a rights-based solution to the conflict were set out in the July 2005 call by nearly 200 Palestinian civil society organizations for a campaign of boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) until Israel complies with international law and:

- Ends the occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantles the Wall;
- Recognizes the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality and;
- Respects, protects and promotes the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes, lands and properties.