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Between the Archival Forest and the Anecdotal Trees:

**A Multidisciplinary Approach to
Palestinian Social History**

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Between the Archival Forest and the Anecdotal Trees:

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Palestinian Social History**

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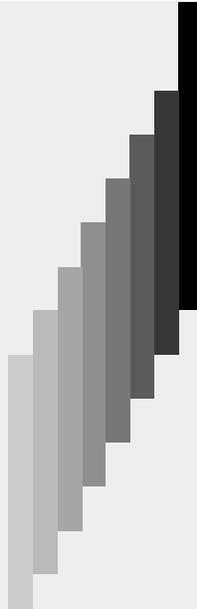
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Memory Research and the Autobiographical Past: Theories, Methods and Strategies of the Oral Historian of Palestine

*Thomas M. Ricks**

“Memory is the raw material of history. Whether mental, oral or written, it is the living source from which historians draw” – Jacques Le Goff, History and Memory, 1977

“There is widespread agreement that memory is an active, reconstructive process rather than a passive, reproductive process. In the process of constructing a memory narrative, errors can occur. At the same time, memory, for the most part, does its job; that is, memory descriptions usually are consistent with the general form and content of past experiences, even if particular details are lost, added, or distorted in the act of remembering” – David B. Pillemer, Momentous Events, Vivid Memories, 1998

“In challenging orthodoxies about historical sources, methods and aims, oral history has generated fierce debates; for example about the reliability of memory and the nature of the interview relationship, or more generally about the relationships between memory and history, past and present” – Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, The Oral History Reader, 1998

* Middle East and International Studies Specialist.

Introduction

Overall, historians' work is based on memory in researching historical changes and continuities over time and space. In addition, remembering the autobiographical past requires more than recalling past events, places, or people. Remembering is by definition, the creation and recreation of the *historical* actions, events and people gone by. The process of remembering, as psychologists have learned, is a conscious mental activity, improved over time by repetition and practice that shapes and defines the human character and personality.¹ Gender and age, essential parts of the social and cultural ways through which women and men remember the past, are part of the different ways of the remembering process.

Memory begins to be "complete" or comprehensive by the age of ten years. With practice and life experiences, memory improves over time so that it assumes a daily function in the person's social encounters and interrelationships becoming in time *historical* or fixed. Newer research into memory has found that what was first called "flashbulb" memory of a specific events, places or people is actually a long-term or "autobiographical" memory of personal encounters with places, people and events recalled through visual and sensual associations, certain words or figures of speech and landscapes or memorials. There now appears to be more to remembering than previously thought, according to researchers in cognition and memory learning. Indeed, the memory and life learning processes are now believed to be intertwined and supportive of each other rather than distinct mental operations.²

When historians begin to collect the memory or remembering of events, peoples and places, they may do so through archival research or oral history recitations. Seeking out a variety of historical memories, the oral historian begins by asking the oral history reciter to think about well-known events in the person's life, such as the principal events in his/her life, the social relationships that influenced him/her and the well-known natural phenomena that are fixed in his/her historical memory. The need to remind the oral reciter that time and place are critical in remembering their past becomes clearer as the oral history is recited. Indeed, such periodic reminding helps the oral reciter fix the historical memory more firmly in the remembering process, such as the date of an unusually cold winter, profitable olive harvest, an eclipse or an earthquake. Unlike archival research, the oral historian has the opportunity to question and then re-question the oral history reciter about an event, person or place. Sharing old photographs, sound recordings, written records and maps, accompany such re-questioning. The physical artifacts assist the oral history reciter in fixing the memory more firmly in mind, as well as to allow for associated images to remain in the historical memory leading to quicker recall at a later time.

Thus, time, place and memory are part of the historical research arsenal used by

the oral historian in working with reciters who speak either about distant events, people or places from an *oral tradition* handed down to them from the past or about their own personal historical or “autobiographical” memory of past places, events or people. The application of both oral history theories and methods to the remembering of Palestinian history has an additional advantage; that is, the remembering of a “community’s” history that goes beyond the individual and the immediate family. Communal history is the remembered history of Palestinian towns, villages, movements and seasonal activities, such as seasonal pilgrimages, dedications of churches or mosques or the various civil demonstrations and uprisings in Palestine’s 20th century past.

The present paper intends to survey a range of oral history theories, methods and strategies commonly used in today’s oral history or memory research both in the United States, Europe and in the Middle East. The review is followed by several examples of oral history research in contemporary Palestine. The conclusion offers some suggestions for oral history research projects into modern Palestinian history.

Theories, Methods, and Strategies of Oral History Research

Memory research is by definition *social history* in so far as the oral history reciter recalls a life of interactions and encounters not only in terms of their own actions, but also in terms of other people, events or places. The unfolding through recitation of biographical details inevitably entails the reciting of engagements with others both within the family, the neighborhood and the community at large. Since memory belongs to a person and thus, is also by nature *autobiographical*, the reciter is by definition defining his/her own past in terms of other places, events and people in ways that those places, events, and people have defined and shaped him/her and his/her persona. In addition, self or autobiographical memory defines his/her *cultural, economic and political selves* in the recitation of school life, religious and seasonal rituals, culinary experiences, his/her first memory of a public demonstration in British Mandatory Palestine, his/her first job and salary and the cost of precious youthful items, such as a bicycle, certain candies, the bus fare and dress up clothes. When such autobiographical memories are combined with viewing old photos, memorials, artifacts or recordings of those recited events, places, and people, the oral history and material evidence are verified and corroborated together. Indeed, it is the combination of oral history and material historical evidence that validates the oral history process in the same manner as archival data is validated with the historian’s corroboration with the physical space of the historical site, building or battlefield.

The methods of oral recitations usually follow a well-recognized pattern of meeting the reciter, establishing or strengthening a rapport between the historian and the

reciter, then sharing family and personal biography, including visits to familial settings, homes or towns and finally with the beginning of taping and/or filming the recitation. The visits are generally repeated over a period of time, then the tapes transcribed and shown to the reciter. If it is possible, both the cassette and videotapes are shared as well with the reciter with a follow up release form to ensure permission to use the oral data in a publication. The release form may also include provisions allowed by the reciter as to the deposition of the oral tape and transcript; that is, who and when people may hear or view the tapes and transcripts.

Oral historians generally set out either to find answers to a number of historical questions or to allow the reciter to create an historical record of past events, people or places in which they were actively involved. In the first instance, the oral historian may wish to explore the reciter's participation in an event, or his/her explanation of his/her thoughts at the time of the Palestinian *Nakba*, or his/her eyewitness accounts of historical people, places or events. In the second case, the oral historian is interested in the "history" of a social movement and the reciter's participation or the autobiography of the reciter as a principal participant in an historical period. In either case, the oral historian has a plan in collecting the reciter's memories, and, as much as possible, shares that plan with the reciter.

Oral History of Palestine

In 1988, for example, two of Birzeit University's historians, Drs. Adel Yahya and Mahmoud Ibrahim, began an oral history project on the youth or shabab who were directing and coordinating the Palestinian first uprising or *Intifada*.³ The project covered a three-year period and included over 200 interviews of Palestinian youth in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip who were active in the *Intifada*. The object was to let the youth, that were changing the course of Palestinian history, speak about their participation and analyze those changes in transforming movement. Between 1989 and 1992, the oral history reciters [the youth] were interviewed several different times in Arabic by a team of Birzeit University researchers led by Drs. Yahya and Ibrahim. The interviews were then transcribed and the tapes were copied and catalogued. In 1994, a preliminary publication was drafted with the assistance of the Tamer Institute and Dr. Mounir Fasheh. As part of Tamer's educational program, a one-week workshop on "How to Do Oral History" was then organized and conducted at Tamer Institute in Ramallah by Drs. Mahmoud Ibrahim, Sonia Nimr, Thomas Ricks and Adel Yahya. The publication of *The Oral History of the Intifada* finally occurred in the fall of 1994; the book is the first one in Arabic to study the theories, methods and applications of oral history in terms of the general subject and in terms of the *shabab*.⁴

In addition to the activities of the Birzeit University historians, others have completed oral history research projects in the West Bank and in Jordan.⁵ Dr. Adnan Musallam, a professor in the Humanities Program and now Dean of Arts at Bethlehem University requires his students to conduct oral history projects as an integral part of their course work. Furthermore, a younger generation of Palestinian archaeologists, trained at Birzeit University, as well as in European and US universities, are applying their skills and knowledge of Palestine in innovative ways including producing a television series on the ancient, medieval and modern history of Palestine based on both archaeological and oral history evidence. Others have established cultural tour agencies in Ramallah, Nablus and Beit Sahour for visits to Palestinian archaeological sites and have begun archaeological research institutes in the West Bank and Jordan Valley. The Birzeit and Bethlehem initiatives in oral history and in archaeology represent long-term interests in preserving and restoring the role of the Palestinian people in the historical records of the region. The Palestinian Ministries of Education, of Culture and of Antiquities under the Palestinian National Authority are building on these earlier initiatives in order to create the basic national institutions for the preservation and promotion of Palestinian history and culture.

Social History and Palestinian Memories of Schools

Oral history and material evidence are natural “allies” in the researching and writing of social history. Not only do both disciplines examine and seek to explain the range of social strata and institutions within a given community, but also both disciplines look at the various ways a set of communities react and interact with each other. The Palestinian villages, we are told from the *sijallat* or religious court records, interacted constantly with each other, as well as with the towns and market centers within a given region. They did so in terms of life rituals, particularly marriage, and in terms of religious and agricultural festivals in the springtime and autumn. The need to seek the assistance of each other in harvesting olives or almonds, which were labor-intensive activities necessitating the labor of many “hands”, or the temporary sheltering of families driven from their towns or villages by military forces or natural disasters, forced the apparently “closed” communities of the Palestinian coastal and hinterland regions literally into each others arms, fields and homes. The presence of guest rooms, granaries and stables indicate to an archaeologist, for example, the extent of material wealth and social status of the homeowner while the remembered histories of the village or town elders clarifies the social status, the extent of social intercourse and the role of a particular family within a larger community. Both the material and oral history evidence need to be corroborated by the written records of the courts and the personal records of the literati. Indeed, the material and oral history evidence may raise questions and issues not found in the archival sources on Palestinian social history.

Such was the case with Palestinian schools. After a lengthy investigation into the secondary and then primary Palestinian and European written sources, concerning Palestinian schools, it became clear that a persistent historical problem had not yet been solved. That problem focused on the contrarities of two well-known facts about 20th-century Palestinians; that is, while Palestinians both in the villages and in the towns of coastal and hinterland Palestine placed enormous emphasis on education for both their sons and daughters, neither the villager nor the townsperson eagerly sought out the Palestinian educators and their “national” schools. Instead, Palestinians from the upper and middle classes, as well as from other social sectors of the society, consistently sought out the foreign missionary schools for their children’s education if it was affordable. As a result of carrying out a three-year oral history project, however, the answer to the apparent historical problem became clear.

Christian Palestinian notables and urban elites had already sought the “protection” and assistance of the European merchants and foreign trading houses during the 18th and 19th centuries. They had done so throughout the Eastern Mediterranean coasts with greater frequency as the 19th century progressed and European attempts to penetrate the Ottoman hinterland increased in intensity. By the beginning of the 20th century, the Christian landlord, or merchant had also begun to send their sons and daughters to the Christian missionary schools in Ramallah, Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Prior to 1917 and the conquest of Jerusalem and Palestine by the British colonial forces under General Allenby, the Christian missionary schools flourished in the port-towns of Jaffa and Haifa and in the highland towns of Nazareth, Ramallah, Jerusalem and Bethlehem; that is, in the towns where the European mercantile houses carried on their trade and where the Christian community normally resided.

By the end of World War I, however, the role of the missionary schools had evolved into greater prominence than previously conceived. Under the colonial umbrella of the British Mandatory Government, the missionary schools began to experience an enrollment boom that included both Muslim and Christian boys and girls whose future as professionals and civil servants was nearly assured particularly if English was the language of the eleven years of schooling. Between 1920 and 1945, the number of girls and boys attending the private missionary schools tripled while the overall numbers of Palestinian children in the elementary grades from First to Fourth had gone from a few thousand to nearly 300,000.⁶ While the colonial published and archival records confirm the rapid rise in school attendance, it is only after extensive field work with Muslim and Christian oral history narrators that the reasons for the “educational boom” in Christian missionary and British government schools became clear.

Based on oral history field research,⁷ Palestinians in the Ramallah, Jerusalem and Bethlehem areas sought out the missionary and government schools, particularly during the 1919 and 1949 Mandate period for four reasons:

1. The job opportunities in the British Mandate's civil service and in other British institutions, such as the British Council's libraries, demanded oral and written proficiency in English, which made the British and American-run schools highly desirable for both Christian and Muslim boys and girls;
2. Instruction in one of the missionary or government schools also meant learning the subjects of importance to the European and US school systems, thus enabling the Palestinian boy or girl to continue their studies beyond the eleventh level into colleges and universities overseas in Lebanon, Egypt, England, France, Germany or the United States;
3. While overseas education was open to a select number of missionary or government-educated boys and girls, possibilities existed to continue on into the professional schools that sprang up in Jerusalem, Jaffa or Haifa since many of such schools were conducted entirely in a European language, such as the Evelyn Rothschild School or the YMCA classes in Jerusalem; in addition, the Christian and Muslim families were generally more lenient towards their daughters if they remained in Palestine for their post-secondary schooling, a job in the British civil service or, in time, marriage to one of those marriageable Palestinian doctors, professors or lawyers returning from overseas; and
4. The overall prestige benefits for the Palestinian Christian or Muslim family whose son or daughter had attended one of the Christian missionary or British government schools raised the social and economic status of the family within the Palestinian community.

One of the recurring themes during the oral history recitations by Palestinian women was the range of problems such academic and career "opportunities" provided the Palestinian female. The sisters watched with dismay as their brothers were given special treatment in terms of the schools they attended and the subjects they studied. Even when the sisters were sent to the few prestigious women schools, such as the Jerusalem Girls' College or Schmidt's College for Girls, the subjects they could study were limited, particularly if they had interests in the Natural Sciences. The women also found fewer career paths available to them although their educational background, linguistic skills and overall matriculation scores might be better than their brothers who went off to English and American schools to study Science, Engineering and Law while their sisters were sent to neighboring countries at best to study Humanities and Social Sciences. Two of the reciters specifically mentioned their interests in Natural Sciences, which they finally pursued only after years of arguments and angry parental confrontations. In some cases, the resentment of sisters towards their brothers and parents persist to this day.

On the other hand, nearly all the Christian missionary and British government schools had a "residency requirement" whereby the girls stayed at the school for one or two

years as a “boarder”, even though their families were within walking distance. The experience of being away from their families (fathers and brothers in particular), and the chance to meet girls from Christian and Muslim families from all over Palestine was truly exhilarating. Of all the impressions conveyed by the women oral history recitors, none is as strong as their love for each other, their newly discovered friends bonded together through the boarding years and their experience of “coming of age” beyond the reach of their families. If any time was more important to the Palestinian women with diplomas from the Christian missionary and government schools, it was their personal and academic maturity and empowerment during the final years in the Christian missionary and government schools.⁸ Their disappointment and deep frustration at having to choose subjects of less interest or attend neighboring schools of less prestige were compounded by the often-early career-ending marriage arrangements forced upon them in their budding twenties.

There are, of course, no written records of the Palestinian women’s joys of school days or classmate bonding, nor of their frustrations or aspirations, nor the moments of academic wonderment and maturity, following a lengthy research project or a flicker of intellectual awakening. All that we know beyond the pages of attendance records and curricular listings for the 1920 to 1945 Mandate period springs forth from the personal memories of the oral history recitors. Without the oral history record, there is little that one can say about Palestinians and the Mandate-period educational boom. With the oral history narration’s, however, the resilience as well as the inflexibility of Palestinian society emerges with clarity both in the lives of the men and women who studied, graduated and married partners from “their” school days.

Conclusion

The need to begin to utilize the techniques, theoretical assumptions and research methodologies of oral historians and archaeologists in the work of writing or “rediscovering” Palestinian history is clear. The “living memories” of the elder Palestinians pass from the historian’s reach at the moment of those people’s own passing away. At the same time, potential archaeological sites are continually in danger of being molested and tampered with in the passage of time. While the Palestinian universities and research centers are natural places for such training and investigations to occur, for depositories of oral history tapes and archaeological materials, and for public seminars and conferences to be held, the many Palestinian voluntary associations, societies and institutes in the villages, refugee camps and towns of the West Bank and Gaza Strip need to begin to focus on historical and cultural preservations.⁹ It is hoped that the Ministry of Education coordinates a comprehensive plan of oral history programs with the Ministry of Culture and Antiquities in order to insure long-term work and to finance collective remembering and oral autobiographical projects.

In his Introduction to his *Rediscovering Palestine*, Beshara Doumani comments on the use of oral history in his archival research project:

*“Finally, the reader will also note that I have occasionally made use of two other valuable but problematic local sources: published autobiographies and oral history. Both, of course, present difficulties stemming from the use of memory in the writing of history. My own skepticism about the usefulness of such sources for understanding the period under study was so ingrained that it was not until six years after I had started this project that I seriously considered probing them, and then only with narrow and carefully laid out limits. To my delight, they proved to be very useful”.*¹⁰

Professor Doumani, like many Middle Eastern and Palestinian historians, assumes the “problematic” nature of oral history to be overwhelming. Fortunately, for the reader of his and similar social histories of Palestine, the “experiment” with oral history was beneficial. It is hoped that others will follow his careful but resolute use of oral historiography in researching Palestine’s past and present. The rewards for the oral historian, the oral history narrator and the readership are immense.¹¹

Endnotes

¹ See the works of D. Middleton and D. Edwards, eds., *Collective Remembering*, London, UK: 1990; David B. Pillemer, *Momentous Events, Vivid Memories*, Cambridge, MA: 1998; David C. Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions*, Oxford, UK: 1995, and David C. Rubin, ed., *Remembering Our Past: Studies in Autobiographical Memory*. Cambridge, UK: 1996.

² See David Henige, *Oral Historiography*, London, UK: 1982; Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory*, trans. By Steven Rendal and Elizabeth Claman, New York, NY: 1992; Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds. *The Oral History Reader*. London, UK: 1998; Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, New York, NY: 1995; Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*. Oxford, UK: 1978 and Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*, Madison, WIS: 1985.

³ Among the many works now published on the *Intifada*, the following are excellent accounts of the major events in the West Bank and Gaza Strip from 1987 to 1993: Joost R. Hiltermann, *Behind the Intifada: Labor and Women’s Movements in the Occupied Territories*. Princeton, NJ: 1991, Zachary Lockman & Joel Beinin, eds. *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising Against Israeli Occupation*, Boston, MA: 1989, and Jamal R. Nassar and Roger Heacock, eds, *Intifada: Palestine at the Crossroads*, New York, NY: 1990.

⁴ See Adel Yahya, Mahmoud Ibrahim and Thomas Ricks, *Al-Tarikh ash-Shafawi lil-Intifada: Dalil lil-Mu’almin wa-l Bahthin wa-l Taliba [The Oral History of the Intifada: A Guide for Teachers, Researchers and Students]*, Ramallah: Tamer Institute for Community Education, 1994, 362 pp.

⁵ Three significant works in Arabic on Palestinian social history, which have appeared recently based primarily on oral historical research; that is, Rawan Daman and Dima Daman, *Atfal Filistin [Children of Palestine: The Daily Lives of Children of Palestine Before 1948]*, Amman, Jordan: 1994, *idem*, *Al-Tahjir fi Thakirat al-Tafula [Exile in Children’s Memories]*, Ramallah, 1997, and Hasan Sa’id Al-Karmi, *Al-’Ilm wa-l Ta’lim wa’l Kuliyyat al-’Arabiyya fil-Quds [Learning, Education and the Arab College of*

Jerusalem], Amman, Jordan: 1995. Rosemary Sayegh edited an issue of *Al-Jana: Arab Resource Center for Popular Arts* (Beirut, 2002), focusing on the international oral history research presently devoted to Palestine. In addition, a number of autobiographical and researched accounts of contemporary Palestinian life have been published in English and French, relying on the uses of oral history, remembered history and the autobiographical past; that is, Anisa Audi, *From Ramallah, Palestine to Lake Wales, Florida and In-Between* New York, 1992; Father Zacharie A. Farwagi, *Dans et aux alentours de Jérusalem Pendant le mandat britannique (1922-1948)*, Araya, Lebanon: 1994; John H. Melkon Rose, *Armenians of Jerusalem: Memories of Life in Palestine*, (London, 1993); Fouad Moughrabi and Munir Akash, eds. *The Open Veins of Jerusalem*, Bethesda, MD: 1997/1998; Hala Sakakini, *Jerusalem and I: A Personal Record*, Amman, Jordan: 1990; Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936-1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past*, Minneapolis, MN: 1995; Jamil I. Toubbeh, *Day of the Long Night: A Palestinian Refugee Remembers the Nakba*, Jefferson, NC: 1998, Bertha Spafford Vester, *Our Jerusalem: An American Family in the Holy City, 1881-1949*, (Jerusalem, 1988, and Adel H. Yahya, *The Palestinian Refugees, 1948-1998 (An Oral History)*, Jerusalem, 1999.

⁶ The data is based on the *Government of Palestine Annual Report on Education* published by the Government House in Jerusalem. See Sarah Graham-Brown, *Education, Repression & Liberation: Palestinians*, London, 1984, pp. 14-21, and *idem*, *Palestinians and Their Society, 1880-1946: A Photographic Essay*, London, 1980, pp. 152-155.

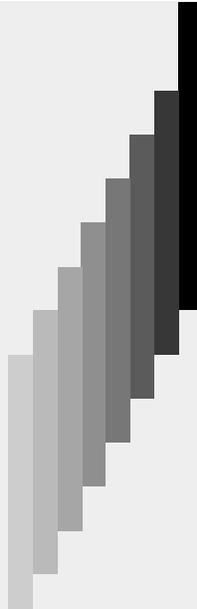
⁷ Ellen Fleishmann's preliminary doctoral research findings in her *Jerusalem Women's Organizations During the British Mandate, 1920s-1930s*, Jerusalem, 1995, pp. 12-20. The oral history field research used in this paper was carried out between 1993 and 1996 in the Ramallah-Jerusalem-Bethlehem areas, and funded by the Council for International Educational Exchange's Senior Fulbright Research Serial Grant. The research included 300+ hours of cassette tapes of eighty (80) Palestinian men and women between the ages of 45 and 95 years old who had been students, teachers and/or administrators in the 62 Palestinian national, Christian missionary and British government schools in that region of the Palestine from AD 1909-1989.

⁸ The descriptions of Palestinian women, their schooling and their aspirations are based on the oral history narrations of Joyce Nasir, Jean Zaru, Rita Giacaman, Hala and Dumiya Sakakini, Olge Wahbe, Abla Nasir, May Mansur and Aida Audeh with this author in Ramallah, Jerusalem and Beit Jala during the summers of 1994 and 1995.

⁹ The work of Umm Khalil and her society, *In'ash Al-Usrah [Family Rehabilitation Society]*, located in al-Bireh in the West Bank must be mentioned here. *In'ash Al-Usrah* has carried out a range of oral history projects over the past decade on Palestinian families, villages and neighborhoods while transcribing and preserving the tapes, and cataloguing the results. In addition, the Tamer Institute for Community Education in Ramallah, West Bank sponsored the *Intifada* project, a summer workshop and the publication of *The Oral History of the Intifada: A Guide for Teachers, Researchers and Students*. Finally, the research projects of the Institute of Jerusalem Studies, BADIL: Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, and Shaml: Palestinian Diaspora and Refugee Centre have begun to focus on the uses of remembered history and the autobiographical past.

¹⁰ Beshara Doumani, *Rediscovering Palestine: Merchants and Peasants in Jabal Nablus, 1700-1900*, Berkeley, CA: 1995, pp. 11-12.

¹¹ See the successful use of remembered history in the recently published monograph by Ellen L. Fleischmann, *The Nation and Its "New" Women: The Palestinian Women's Movement, 1920-1948*, Berkeley, CA: 2003.



From the Individual to the Wider Society: Translating Oral Accounts into Written Histories

*Kenneth Brown**

The famous injunction by England's historian of culture, G.M. Young – “go on reading until you can hear people talking” – ought to be turned upside down by those who do oral history. They should go on listening to talk until they can put it into writing. Another piece of advice to keep in mind comes from the French playwright Racine in a letter to Boileau in 1687 when both were royal historiographers' “I see quite well that the truth we are asked to produce is more difficult to find than it is to write.” The search for and the writing of ‘truths’ are an art that historians and social scientists presumably practice. In reading and listening, noting, analyzing our ‘raw data’, and finally in giving it written form we are engaged in interpreting and reconstructing what we understand to be true. We are, to some degree, at least, artists who recognize that life is, as Henry James put it, all inclusion and confusion, while art is all discrimination and selection.

Those who draw upon oral accounts practice discrimination and selection in three phases: 1) the original rendition by the informant, recorded, written down verbatim, or in translation; 2) extracts from and usages of the corpus inscriptionum, the

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transcribed text, and deconstructions of its latent meanings; 3) the author's reconstructions, commentaries and interpretations, his definitive text. These phases may merge in historical accounts or ethnographies. Our 'data' and our renderings are, as the interpretive school of anthropology puts it, our own constructions of the constructions of others. (cf. C. Geertz 1994:9).

I would like to draw upon some of my own experience in using oral accounts to write history and ethnography to illustrate the above declarations. The first example is an oral tradition concerning the earthquake that destroyed most of the city of Agadir in 1960. (cf. Brown and Lakhssassi, n.d.). Its form is a memorized poem in Tashelhit, the Berber language spoken in southwestern Morocco; it was composed by Muhammad U Ighil on the basis of accounts he heard following the earthquake. I recorded a recitation by the minstrel-poet in 1971 in his village of Tizounine, about 150 kilometers from Agadir.

The earthquake took place in the limelight of history. Primary written sources from the local and international press report the precise moment and scale of the earthquake, identify its epicenter, describe in some detail the destruction, loss of life and the human suffering. They chronicle the efforts of the Moroccan and foreign governments to rescue survivors, prevent epidemic outbreaks, maintain food supplies and public order. The journalists on the scene evoke the shock of victims and their own horror, usually employing such stock images and clichés as “a malediction” seems to have struck Agadir (*Le Monde*), “a scene of devastation and emptiness” (*The Times*), “houses falling like packs of cards: Bedlam as one would expect on the Day of Judgement” (*The Manchester Guardian*). From these sources, a historian may establish the chronology, quantify losses, and cite testimonies of eye-witnesses. As for explanation, there is little choice between ‘natural disaster’ or ‘fate and God’s will’, as well as references to unforgivable negligence in the choice of the city’s site, illegal constructions and the failings of rescue procedures. To evoke the event as a historian, demands descriptive and interpretive imagination, a narrative that makes the reader feel that he has been present. To do this by drawing upon oral accounts, the testimonies of witnesses, implies to quote one of the great practitioners of the art, Studs Terkel, the following’ “You get the truth and cut out the fact.” (in Grele 1975:33).

The poem about Agadir is oral history – a spoken, originally extemporaneous, then memorized, narrative in poetic form about a real event and based on the testimonies of eye-witnesses. It includes a detailed description of the city and its destruction, information about the social structure and the ways of life of its inhabitants, and perhaps most importantly communicates the sense of bereavement and desolation of those who experienced and survived the earthquake. In addition, the poet tries to make the disaster intelligible within a framework of religious values and beliefs, which include God’s punishment for people’s misdeeds, on the one hand, and the indiscriminate suffering caused by natural forces, on the other

hand: the earthquake is likened to a wild torrent rushing through the wadis of the desert, sweeping away everyone and everything in its wake (*ikhla zund asif*, “destruction is like a torrent”) – the good and the bad, Berbers, Arabs, Muslims, Christians, Jews, mosques, church mice. “What kind of punishment is it”, U Ighil asks, “which strikes guilty and innocent alike, yet spares those who are blameworthy because “their time has not come?” The account contains historical facts, but becomes an epic poem, a timeless myth about the nature of life and death and a moral tale, an admonishment to “accumulators of worldly possessions and revelers in the pleasures of this world”.

This oral text, like much Berber poetry, can be harvested by both the historically-minded and the structurally-minded to glean ‘data’, as well as ‘symbols’. The corpus of poems recited by U Ighil which includes compositions by his father and grand-father provide information on such matters as tribal structure, relations of power, taxation, security, urban growth, and they throw up many aspects of culture that can be usefully analyzed to further historical understandings. This view of oral poetry as a source for history as recited by insiders in their own terms, as perceived from within, needs to be defended.

In the ground-breaking discussions on oral tradition and historical methodology, Jan Vansina has been in the forefront (1960, 1996). In his view poetry was a type of tradition, which, because it was memorized, *might* contain reliable data for the historian’s reconstruction of the past. Scrutinized to bone out the facts, tested and controlled, oral traditions deserved, as he put it, “a certain amount of credence within certain limits”. But, he warned us, to the extent that these traditions were created by collective memory, they serve to contribute to a community’s cognitive orientation and are basically mythical rather than historical.. This may be the case, sometimes. My view of the uses to which Berber poetry can be put suggests that the level of credence for historical reconstruction can be raised a good deal. Some historians would go further. In regard to Somali poetry, Andrzejewski (1981) argues that a full understanding of the poems is a part of the nation’s oral history, that they are “an acoustic illustration and corroborative evidence of historical facts”. For Ruth Finnegan (1977), oral poetry depends on memorization. It involves composing and learning words *by heart*. She uses a wonderful metaphor for memory: it is like a bucket for salting herring. You put something in, and you can take it out when you please, preserved, otherwise unchanged.

Most of the information that I have gathered from oral testimonies has been in the form of narratives and interviews, rather than poetry. To mine this valuable resource demands, to be sure, plenty of prudence, and its employment depends on unbridled respect for the canons of scholarship and honesty

Let me offer some further examples from my own work:

1. In doing research on the social history of Salé, a Moroccan city (Brown 1976), I had a woman assistant record her two grandmothers' detailed accounts in their colloquial idiom of rites of passage that had been practiced in their families. These were then transcribed and translated. I have drawn upon them as texts for understanding and explaining in my writing ways of life in this community – processes of marriage, of socialization, of death and burial and for explicating concepts and their semantics – terms, signs, symbols heard in everyday talk.
2. One of my informants for information on the economic life of the city was Zion Hayot, a former merchant, then in his 80s. In his account of the trading links of the city and the countryside, he told me that he had always hoped one day to make the acquaintance of his younger siblings. I didn't understand. Hadn't he meant that he hoped to see them again? Then he narrated to me the following story: His father, a *swaqqi*, an itinerant market trader, would leave his home in Salé on Sunday morning, go from market to market in the surrounding countryside and usually return home on the Friday evening for the Jewish Sabbath. At times, business was good and he would prolong and extend his tour for months at a time, sending for additional goods and returning only for one of the religious holidays. However, at some point late in the 19th century, his father failed to return home for a longer period of time than was normally the case. His family became worried and tried to get news of him, but without success. Years went by with no word of his fate, and because of the insecurity in the country, the worst was feared.. It was only some twenty years later when Zion was himself already a grown man that his father reappeared. The old man had traveled, buying and selling along the way, across North Africa and into Palestine, stopping only when he reached Tiberius. There he settled and remained for many years, marrying and raising another family, until the day came when the journey was made in the opposite direction, and he turned up once again on his doorstep in Salé. I have no reason to doubt the veracity of this account, although some details may be suspect, and the story-telling techniques, his and mine, may be somewhat artful. But there are on the record, in documents and tales, similar stories of mobility, of disappearances and returns. The interest of this account, in any case, is grand if one is concerned with matters of space, of frontiers and borders, of geographical mobility, of a kind of 'cosmopolitanism'. At least, so it seems to me. The story lends itself as illustrative material to reflections upon the notion of Dar al-Islam, as a space in which people of various communities could move around relatively freely, without feeling that they were endangered or out of place, during this period of the beginnings of French colonialism in the Maghrib and the decline of the Ottoman Empire in the Mashriq.

3. Life histories recounted by informants have been one of the major sources for my writing. Vansina placed what he called “personal recollections” within the category of “tales” in his typology of oral traditions. He considered these prose narratives most suspect because they were aimed mainly at edifying, instructing, giving pleasure or vindicating rights. However in my experience and in the work of the best known practitioners of oral history (Studs Terkel, R.G. Grele, David Thompson, Ronald Fraser, Oscar Lewis, amongst others), these spoken autobiographical accounts may be precious testimonies for the historian and the ethnographer. In my research on social change in Ksibet el-Mediouni, a Tunisian town (cf. Brown 1972, 1990), I systematically elicited life histories. As an illustration of how these accounts can reveal important facts consider the following: In the course of explaining his kinship links, my neighbor, Muhammad al-Frigui, tells me that his paternal cousin was killed by Italian soldiers. He then goes on at my instigation to elaborate a story of a devastating attack on the town during the Axis occupation of Tunisia at the time of the second world war. In doing so he opens up for me a whole new avenue of research concerning the impact and the trauma of the occupation. An additional example of the value of life histories from fieldwork in Tunisia is my biography of Ameer Mog, a farmer, whose life reflects most of the major economic and political developments in the town, the region and the country since the 1930s. The retelling of Mog’s personal itinerary becomes a framework and a means for writing the social history of Ksibet.

One of the classic studies of history based on oral sources is Ronald Fraser’s *Blood of Spain. The Experience of Civil War (1936–1939)*, Allen Lane, London 1979. In the introduction Fraser explains to readers that he wrote the book because the subjective area of the civil war, the lived experience of participants, had not been articulated in previous studies. In his view, oral history reveals the intangible atmosphere of events, outlooks, motivations, conveys what it felt like to be alive and shows how ordinary people remember the past.

Subject of ‘memory’, of course, is by no means uncomplicated. How can we trust it? (A pundit friend of mine with some personal experience of adversity reminded me recently that survival may depend on forgetfulness and that memory may be the road to madness). It may be argued that memory becomes activated when an inscribed image is remembered, testified to, transmitted in a structured narrated form. Memory may be likened to a library which depends on a code. The importance of language and speech, the mnemonic code, is crucial for tapping memory. A good witness is expected to recall the past faithfully, vividly, accurately. It is a skill in narrative ability. A good historian or ethnographer is like a judge, able to probe, to uncover and recognize the genuine revelation of what has happened. For Geertz, he/she then fixes and inscribes the *noema*, the thought, content and gist of speech.

One gains access to others, to their conceptual worlds, so as to converse with them, and eventually to render their words, to translate their culture.

Rendering words heard or overheard in testimonies and as participant observers and conversationalists implies understanding others in (and perhaps on) their own terms. The ear complements the eye. This is necessary, but not sufficient. The French linguist, Marcel Cohen, formulated the matter with Gaelic wit and wisdom' "To identify language and thought is a trap. Those who exaggerate its role as an indispensable instrument in living in the world may admittedly be excused for falling into the trap." Nonetheless, trapped or not, I think that it is through words, speech, and language that we have privileged access to thought. Language gives to thought its bite. The starting point then, at least, should imply comprehending and inscribing what others say in their own words, then deciphering meanings, rendering them intelligible and biting in one's own tongue and conceptual language.

A further word on memory: it should be kept in mind that at its inception psychoanalysis was an inquiry into memory. For Freud one's personal history was an essential part of one's self. He searched for a picture of a patient's forgotten years that would be as trustworthy and complete as possible. His practice was a work of construction and reconstruction. He likened it to the archeologist's excavation of what has been destroyed or buried. It drew inferences from fragments of memories and associations. Through language, what was buried in the past was remembered, resurrected in the present. Perhaps, to let people talk is not only beneficial for them, but also for the historical record as well.

Personal reminiscences and memoirs, spoken or written, may also provide rich documentation for understanding and explaining the past and/or the present.. These memories may take the form of novels or autobiographies. The autobiographical novel of Muhammad Choukri, *For Bread Alone*, for example, provides unprecedented material for an anthropological portrayal of the lower classes in Morocco. Such texts also raise questions for the historian or ethnographer concerning the subject's consciousness, his self-consciousness, his identity and memory; questions familiar to literary history and literary criticism. The authors of oral or written texts of these sorts, like those discussed above, are not mirrors of their pasts. Their memories are selected and edited. Paul Bowles, the translator of Choukri and several Moroccan storytellers (oral traditionalists of a sort) has written that it was a relief to return to the "storytellers who had no thesis to propound, no grievances to air and no fear of redundant punctuation. Our Berber poet, U Ighil, always introduced his poems by a declaration of 'irresponsibility': *ur ax gummigh, ur ax ttarakh, lbdì' adsaleg, he would proclaim*, — "I neither read nor write, it's poetry that I practice." However, he was not at all innocent of grievous verbal attacks against those he disliked. The Berber poets were considered to possess a perspicacity that allowed them to get inside of

people's minds and penetrate the secret meanings of events. They had extraordinary gifts of stored knowledge, of memory and of inspiration, and, most importantly, of creative madness. These were the 'advantages' of illiteracy.

The translation of oral accounts into written histories is, in my view as can be seen, a challenge worth responding to. Oral traditions and oral histories can offer or contribute to narratives of events, biographies, descriptions of work, leisure, customs, beliefs, rituals, attitudes, opinions, prejudices, ideologies, etc.. By means of the spoken word we can hear and comprehend ideas and thoughts by means of which people construct their images of the past and the present. The interpretations that we eventually offer of the tenor and texture of everyday life and ordinary lives should be finer and truer as a consequence.

In conclusion, I would like to present some modest examples of oral and biographical accounts that may be drawn upon to contribute to the written history of Palestine. The first concerns what may be termed the sense of belonging. In the 1920s a Finnish scholar doing research in the Galilee published in English translation an old folksong from Buqī'a. (Pekin) which to my mind is an eloquent and poignant statement about dispersion and about friendship and attachment to a group and a place. It goes like this:

"One by one my dear ones went to Hauran,/ And for years for their sake I will stain my arms,/ And for years I am forbidden to laugh and to let my teeth appear./ Separation—while my friends are absent". ("Song of the Druzes" in *Studia Orientalia*, Helsinki 1932).

Another illustration of dispersion, this one tragic, comes from the 1997 autobiographical memoir of Mourid Barghouti, *I Saw Ramallah*. It concerns the death of his maternal cousin:

"Fahim, the son of Khali 'Ata was hit in the head by shrapnel in Shayyah after I left Beirut. He died a few days later. He was twenty-two. Afterwards I learned how they broke the news to my uncle. He was in Kuwait when 'Alaa called him from Beirut. Alaa's idea was to attempt to get my uncle to accept the news gradually: 'Khali, I'm calling to tell you about Fahim. He was hit by a stray bullet yesterday but the doctors say that God willing he will recover well".

"My uncle's calm response was: 'Where are you going to bury him?'". Barghouti interprets: "Mounif is calling me in America from Qatar about Fahim's martyrdom in Beirut and burial in Kuwait, and about the necessity of informing Sitti Umm 'Ata in Deir Ghassanah and his maternal grandmother in Nablus and my mother in Jordan...".

These two subjective accounts make vivid the experience and the emotions of dispersion in ways that objective statements or quantitative data by a historian or an ethnographer could never manage to do.

Finally, I cannot forget Khalil Hindi's 1991 article "Kurdistan, Palestine" (in *Mediterraneans*, n° 6, Autumn 1994) in which he recalls "the nightmare memory" of having been forced at the age of three to leave his native village of Tantura:

"I close my eyes and bury my head in my grandmother's bosom. The exodus begins. I often ask myself: 'Do you really remember all this?' Maybe, maybe not. Maybe I wove it all together from the stories told and retold while we huddled during long winter nights seeking warmth around a few embers burning in an open metal stove and reminiscing about the lost paradise, the land of sand oranges. But what does it matter? A great part of the collective memory of my people is made up of such harrowing nightmares".

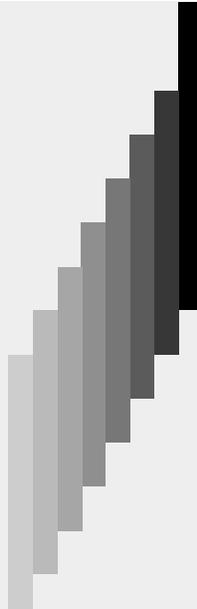
The questions of memory and the 'truthfulness' of the oral narrative probably have not been given a satisfactory answer in my somewhat rambling text. Its intention has been an excursion to demonstrate methods and problems. Memory, writing history from oral accounts, does, I think, "matter", but so too does the collective memory of nightmares.

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An Attempt to Reconstruct the pre-48 Arab Commercial Center of Jerusalem

*George Hintlian**

It was a cold October morning in 2001 when I met my school day Arabic teacher, Ustaz Missak Hagopian, coming out of *Jaffa Gate*. Out of the blue, I asked, “Do you remember the owners of the shops down the slope to the *Jaffa Gate*?” He said, “We had a wool shop near that palm tree, and besides this was the way to my school”. He pointed out to me each shop and shop as we climbed up the slope, and said, “Here stood your uncle’s shop”. At that moment, all my childhood memories and stories rushed to my mind. I remembered my father mentioning that every evening he dropped by at my uncle’s shop. There is no picture of my uncle’s shop neither of any of the individual shops down the slope. What survive today are some pictures of Bonfils of the last century and the palm tree. Today, it is a neat pedestrian walk along and around the city wall up to the *New Gate* known as Corob Walk.

I was overwhelmed by his extraordinary memory and asked him whether I could meet him the next day. Actually, we took the early walks together for a fortnight and he patiently described every owner for me. Then, he came up with sketches

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and described the whole Mamilla area, which was a bigger commercial center, contiguous to the *Jaffa Gate* slope. Until now, I remember the silhouette of Ustaz Missak within the *Jaffa Gate*, trying to warm himself up in the sun in the early hours of the morning. Ustaz Missak had blood circulation problems; he passed away in mid-November 2001 at the age of seventy-seven. Since his death, I've probably interviewed about a hundred of his contemporaries, but without prejudice to my respondents, his knowledge of the field remains unmatched.

I should admit that my interest in the site was a pure curiosity to find out what kind of shops operated there after seeing pictures of a gutted neighborhood after the 48 war. But the outcome of two weeks of walks with the Ustaz convinced me that I had come across the pre-48 Arab commercial centre of Jerusalem and that it is worth to deepen my research and try to reconstruct it.

Before proceeding further, I would like to give a brief history of the site.

Up to the early 1850's, Jerusalem was a walled city, with its six gates closing at sunset. Outside the walls, there were very few summer residences dispersed in the valleys and orchards used during harvesting of olives and fruits. After 1850's, a movement started to purchase land outside the walls on the part of the different communities of Jerusalem.

We know of Montefiori buying and then, constructing dwellings for poor Jews near the present King David Hotel. Greeks and Armenians bought land especially after the Crimean War (1856). The Greeks purchased the plot of land from *Jaffa Gate* to the *New Gate* area from the Anabosi family. The Armenian Church bought the land along the Jaffa Road and the Russians around the Russian Compound.

In 1889, the Ottoman government ordered the opening of a new gate, which was known later on as the New Gate to facilitate the access of pilgrims from the French and Russian Compounds into the city. As pilgrims and visitors increased, the Greeks constructed two hotels inside the *Jaffa Gate*, the present "Petra Hotel" and the "New Grand Hotel", were renamed "Imperial Hotels". The Armenians built a luxurious hotel just outside the *Jaffa Gate* known as "Fast Hotel" and another one known as "Howard" at the beginning of Jaffa Road. The French built the "Notre Dame Hotel" and the Russians the extensive Russian compound, which could accommodate thousands of pilgrims. In the 1880's, the Greek Church had the idea of building big stores and shops along the wall stretching from the *Jaffa Gate* to the New Gate. According to some sources, they were eighty in all. In the 1890's, Armenians constructed "Fast Hotel", which consisted of three floors; the first floor was composed of shops (numbering about 30) and the two other floors were hostelry.

We learn from different sources that the tenants of the Greek-owned shops and stores up to World War I were a reflection of the mosaic of the Old City, Moslems, Christians, Jews (it is worth mentioning Itzhaq Schirion's furniture's shop), the Berman brothers

(Bakers of bread) and the Zilbersteins (who were in stationary). We also, find German Templars who possessed refined technical skills. They made carriages and modern agricultural instruments. We know of the stores of Paul Avrallah, who had a shop of iron objects and dealt in shipping, and August Bianzella who had a huge blacksmith store.

At about the same time, the Mamilla Street began to be developed. The present street was opened by the owners of the plot of land (the Awkaf and the Husseinis) where buildings and shops began to be constructed. Around 1900's, the Sisters of Vincent du Paul constructed a huge compound with a line of shops along Mamilla Street.

We find through our research that beginning with the Mandate from the early 1920's, Arab business concentrated around the *Jaffa Gate* and Mamilla while Jewish business began moving up along Jaffa Road to Ben Yehuda and King George; the 1936 uprising should have been a factor too.

The parameters of our research are the *Jaffa Gate* slope up to the former Barclays Bank, the opposite line of shops terminating with "Dan Pearl Hotel" and "St. Vincent du Paul", the Mamilla street up to the traffic lights and from the South, the Citadel or former Hilton Hotel; roughly, an area of about 20 dunams.

The Anatomy of the Research

The sudden death of Ustaz Missak was a serious blow to the smooth progress of the research. However, he had managed to pass on a substantial amount of data to provide me with enough motivation and self-confidence to launch an extensive research. I attempted to find a person with a sense of history and knowledge of the Mandate period. I was lucky to bump into Mr. Maroun Tarsha, an extremely knowledgeable person in his early eighties.

The fact that Mr. Maroun Tarsha comes from a prominent family of merchants and constructors, who had extensive projects and properties in Jerusalem and Palestine, equipped him with an intimate knowledge of the important families of Jerusalem. He agreed to be my mentor and for at least three months, we met regularly everyday at 11 o'clock in a *Jaffa Gate* Café.

The names of shopkeepers were growing steadily between owners and apprentices. I felt I should begin to put some order in my findings. I took a break and resumed work in autumn of 2002.

I have been engaged in oral history of Palestine since two decades, yet every case study needs a different strategy. In autumn of 2002, I decided to verify my findings and I began my random meetings on all levels of society. Usually people have selective memories and those who are in the same occupation remember their

colleagues easily. So, I began with greengrocers. I came up with twenty names; they were called in Arabic *commissiondji* (big suppliers). To mention few: Fakhri Zaatara, Abdel Hai Attieh, Haj Suleiman Hazina, Salim and Arafat Bitar and Yunes Totah. They were all on Mamilla Road.

The Said family and the late Noubar Arsenian provided me with the definitive list of pharmacies in the area. There were at least ten. To mention few: Jack Stephan, Attalah, Mahfouz Said, Haramy/ Arsenian, Shakhshir and Kramer.

I approached tailors; the list was long. They had many apprentices; the most noted were Stephan Tutundjian (who had graduated from London and Paris schools), Kevork Keshishian, Tewfiq and Attalah Freij.

Issa Habash, the owner of the Commercial Press gave me, besides other information, the names of 3 printing concerns, all located in Mamilla, which are Beit el Maqdis (owned by the Mushahwar family), the Commercial Press owned by Tewfiq Habash, the printing house of Philip Derderian who had also a paper factory. The sweet makers mentioned two famous sweetshops. One was Abou Shafiq el Shami's, and the other Abdel Rahim Hab el Rumman's (they also gave me the price rates of each Wakieh of Kneifeh).

In this connection, one day, a study should be conducted with the historical 20 or so families engaged in sweet making, who retain the secrets of the profession to investigate the provenance of some sweets.

When it came to gastronomy, most interviewed could identify easily the different categories, the restaurants and the cafes. Most indicated that the Amad Restaurant called "Mata'am Souria-Falastine" was the best and that Abou El Haj Restaurant, which was on the same line opposite the wall, was also known for its good Kebab. Situated on *Jaffa Gate*, slope was Abou Petro Restaurant belonging to the Sahhar family. It was also known as utility for the British during the war, subsidized meals for the public (meat x rice) for 7.5 Kirsh. Abou Petro was described as a short, fat, mustached person with Chinese eyes. He had a garden where you could have Nargileh and a space for a 100 persons. Near *Jaffa Gate*, there was a restaurant called Nassreddin, then, the best Hummos was at a small restaurant known as Afghani. There were about 20 big and small restaurants serving hundreds of shopkeepers, clients, pilgrims, and peasants. The most famous café was the Muallakah (the suspended café, almost at the mouth of *Jaffa Gate*, on the second floor with a wooden balcony), which was a landmark. In the Muallakah, there were a lot of social and political activities. Next to it, on the ground floor, there was the Maaref café, operated by the Akermawi family who owned two other shops on the same line. Moussa Akermawi, one of my chief, respondents told me that they would often have singers from the Arab world (especially Egypt) and

mentioned the visit of Sheikh Amin Hassanein who would recite Muwashahat. They had a stage and a garden.

Then, there was the café of Abou Said, the café of Abou Kamel Kleibo and the café of Abou Issa Karmi, also known as Taltawa. One can easily write an article about the *Jaffa Gate* and Mamilla cafés and the social life there then, compare it with the clientele of the rest of the cafés of the city. After that, there were the café servers or *Kahwedji* who did not have a shop and had a corner under a staircase. I've found about ten of them; a good number of them were Armenians (Armenians had just arrived to Palestine as refugees in the 1920's). There was also café Bristol, where there was some gambling and there were women dancers.

In short, it was known for entertainment. Many did not volunteer to talk about it. Some interviewed said that it was owned by a Greek and managed by an English woman called Rose. I was curious to find out who owned Muallakah, I was given three names, Abou Ali, Abou Abed and somebody from Dar Mitwalli (here very few remembered, but most agreed on the Mitawallis). I met his engineer son and I still remember that Mr. Mitwalli had a greengrocer shop at the old bazaar in the Old City; he was a robust and mustached person.

The biggest numbers of shops were nouveaute shops, about 40 of them. At the beginning of the century, this market was known as "Souk el Franji", on account of the European Commodities. I do not wish to mention them as by omitting some I may do injustice to the rest. Nevertheless, most people agree that in the Arab Sector this was the fancy section of town for shopping.

In order to find out about the different nouveaute shops I sat long hours with the ladies of Jerusalem who spent a good part of their life window shopping or shopping. In this connection, I wish particularly to thank Mrs. Arshalouys Zakarian, who is now in her nineties. I have visited her at least for six months, 3 times a week; she was most helpful also pointing out the best shoe and perfume shops. Her favorite perfume shop was Muhtadi. Mrs. Zakarian was a close friend to Mr. John Rose and a great source for his book on Palestine. Another effective method of finding out about certain shops was to talk to people who were school children then, who would cross the area daily, or those who would shop there buying nuts and chocolates. One such respondent, Hagop Koukeyan, provided me with many names. One day, I asked him, how did he retain so many names? He answered, "On my way to school I read the names of the shops; that was my way of learning spelling and learning English".

The late Dr. Daoud Tleel provided me with a lot of Greek shops. Most of the delicatessen shops belonged to ethnic Greeks. The imported quality chocolates and liqueurs. The Louisides firm was a beautiful green-marbled building, not far

from “Fast Hotel”. The Louisides were several brothers, with branches in Jaffa and Haifa. Zafariadis was another supermarket on Mamilla. Moreover, Basile Stranghelis and Nicholas Moustaklefs were in the Fast Building. The Moustaklefs had a bread factory and provided quality white bread.

Before proceeding, few words should be said about “Fast Hotel”, a landmark of Jerusalem. It was set up in the 1890’s by the Armenian Patriarchate and leased to two German Templar brothers called Fast. In the First World War, the German Officer Corps spent their leisure time there. When Allenby captured the city, it was renamed “Allenby Hotel”. In the Second World War, Australian troops stayed there. Between 1948 and 1967, immigrant North African Jewish families stayed there. In 1967, the building was in terrible disrepair. The Jerusalem municipality confiscated it claiming that it will be made into a public garden facing the walls. It was learnt later that after demolishing it, the Jerusalem municipality had sold it to a Tel Aviv Hotel Company. Today, a hotel has been constructed there and renamed Dan Pearl.

The arrival of Australians and foreign troops in the Second World War invigorated the economy and on the whole the Second World War was considered a prosperous period for the local market. One shopkeeper, Hagop Razzouk, was doing very well in “Fast Hotel”; a tattoo-man with his assistants; Greta (a German woman) and Mr. Hishmeh (a local). The Australian soldiers were great fans of tattoo and would decorate their bodies with all kinds of designs including woman figures.

There were other hotels in the business centre mainly on Mamilla; Hotel Falastin (belonging to the Kiresh family) and the two-floored Hotel Majestique (which was better known). Merchants from other towns of Palestine and visitors from the Arab World, Lebanon and Egypt, stayed in these hotels. The late Khamis Qiresh was extremely helpful with transport related information. The buses to Bethlehem and Hebron were on the slope of *Jaffa Gate* towards the valley; the buses to Katamon, Bekaa and Talbieh were on the opposite side of the street from “Fast Hotel”, behind the Ottoman Bank (or presently Discount Bank), and he remembered the bus numbers. Bahu, Zananiri and Faraj families jointly owned Shirket Basat al Watania.

There were taxi companies, which would take you to trips all over Palestine, Syria and Lebanon. There were at least seven of them, the better known were Aweida (White Star), Alamein, al-Mani, Bamia, Rashid Dakkak and Wadi Snunu.

One of the charming persons I met was a photographer called Jamil Faraj (Abou Issa), introduced to me by Hanna Malak, a Jerusalem historian and a friend. Abou Issa learnt the profession at Krikorian, then moved on to the shop of Daoud Abdo and at the end bought his shop when the latter began to work for Jerusalem antiquities. Jamil who is in his 90’s took a daily walk from *Damascus Gate*, *New Gate*, down the *Jaffa Gate* slope and would sit at the foot of the palm tree, the nearest spot to his

shop. I usually met Abou Issa at that spot where he would graphically describe the area. Before writing this paper, I sat with him reviewing the material.

There were at least ten photographers in the area; Krikorian, Zerounian, Savidis, Khalil Raad, Studio London (Apraham Aghabekian), Studio Paramount (Guvlekdjian), Tewfiq Hanania, Yussef Shamia and Khalil Rasas. Not all had studios; there were roaming ones who gained their livelihood by taking pictures of Australian soldiers and visitors from the surrounding villages. The activities of these photographers are worth a paper in itself.

As I needed more verification, I consulted a friend, Amin Daana from whom I buy my magazines. It happened that he was a distributor of newspapers at an early age at the *Jaffa Gate* area and worked for Yaacoub Joulani's newspaper distributing office. Amin knew each shop and shop as he daily delivered papers. Mr. Daana was of the few survivors of a bomb explosion at *Jaffa Gate* planted by the Haganah on January 7th, 1948, which killed 25 Arab civilians.

The *Jaffa Gate* area saw the beginnings of Arab banking in Palestine; the first offices of al Bank al Arabi of Mr. Shuman and Bank el Umma, which were there near el-Amad Restaurant. There was also an English-owned Spinney down the stairway of Mamilla; one branch dealt with meat products and the other with clothing. At the end of Mamilla, stood Picadelly, which was between a café and a bar and was popular with mandate troops. It was one of the landmarks of Jerusalem and the arched building is still standing.

One day, as I was walking in Dabbagha, I noticed an eye-glassed old gentleman sitting in a leather shop. I dropped in and asked about my topic. He was most obliging and in a matter of half an hour provided me with 70 names. I will never forget that meeting and I still wonder how some people are blessed with such phenomenal memory. Haj Dib Sleiman Abou Meizar, sitting in his leather shop, can match or surpass any social historian of Palestine with his reservoir of knowledge on Jerusalem. I wish to thank also Yussef Salehi, who remembers the whole area vividly.

We have to mention "Maktabat Lorenzo" and "el Maktaba el Ilmiya" of Boulos Said the father of Professor Edward Said. There is a consensus that the Said Bookshop was sought after by all the citizens of Jerusalem and stood out for its quality.

I also talked to porters. Two of them provided me with precious information. One told me that the Qala'a (citadel) Mosque was active until 1948 and that a *muezzin* from the Afifi family (living in Haret el Saadiyeh), called people to prayer five times a day. At the lower end of Mamilla, were the mechanics. They are too many to be mentioned, but the most successful ones were Aschdjian, Leon and Garage Champion. At a later point, I consulted Mr. Naim Tarazi, Issa Habash, Anton Siniora and Subhi Tutundji who provided me with valuable insights.

I'm particularly grateful to Hamadeh Dajani and Khalil Abdallah Dajani who provided me with detailed information about the businesses of the Dajani clan, the main one being Tewfiq Dajani, the owner of the "Maarad el Arabi".

Time and space do not allow going on. What I have offered today is a foretaste, but I wish to stress that this is only a preliminary report, considering the amount of data I collected. If I have left out names, the omission is not deliberate. This is a first attempt at putting order into my findings.

I wish to end with a humorous story. At the very entrance of *Jaffa Gate* there was an animal pet shop, belonging to a person called Totah. He had also 30 cages of birds, which he had imported from Egypt. In order to attract clients, he had patiently trained a parrot to invite clients in by saying Faddalou, shou Toumur and shukran. Abou Ali told me that some schoolboys managed to reeducate the parrot to curse the clients instead of greeting them, saying terms like "In an Abouk"!! Some peasants took it to heart and thought that it was a deliberate policy of the owner. The parrot had become a liability. In the end, poor Mr. Totah had to terminate the services of his assistant, the parrot.

Conclusion

I will not discuss any more matters of methodology. I could so far locate ten persons who owned shops and twenty who worked there as apprentices, the rest were relatives (sons, daughters, or cousins of shop-owners). After the passage of 55 years, the research has its limitations. It is still possible to go on, obtain more names, more information and even publish a volume. In that case, you need photographs and written records.

I have investigated the names of persons who occupied these shops the last decade before 1948. By the 1930's and 1940's, the Jewish business community was settled in the present centre of town in West Jerusalem. I could still find names of Jewish shop owners around *Jaffa Gate* or further West in the Fast building like Kramer, Itzhaq Levy, Klein or Salamander shoes, but on the whole, the ethnic demarcation lines were there.

The Arab Middle Class and rich businessmen were concentrated around *Jaffa Gate*. However, in the 1948 earthquake, the earth swallowed everything.

This was the Jerusalem Arab entrepreneur class. Who were they? What happened to them? This was not the topic of my research, but in my conversations I tried to follow them up.

Overnight, many resumed in the Old City. Though they had lost everything, they had enough cash to start again. Those who had certain skills like tailors, photographers, shoemakers, and mechanics moved to a new locale. One can notice

this happening in the Armenian Community. The Greek delicatessen shops were to be found again inside New Gate. For few years, as Said Husseini, who was a high-school student at St. George's, put it, "the Christian Street, Haret el Nassarah was our Champs d'Elysee. After school, we walked up and down the Christian Street". It was in the late 1950's and 1960's that the main business centre moved to Salaheddin Street. The impression of my respondents is that about 50% stayed; the rest moved on to Amman or further. In the 1950's, people stayed on in Jerusalem, but in the 1960's people began to move on again; it would be interesting to investigate this development. In the words of Jamil Faraj, those who had "Dur and Mulk" stayed on and others left for greener pastures.

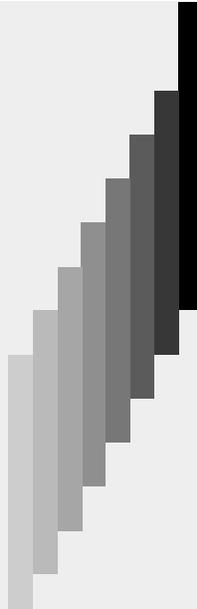
My next wish would be to obtain pictures of individual shops, but documentation is leaving Palestine to sons, cousins and relatives beyond the Atlantic. This trend has to stop and that is only possible by the creation of a national photographic archives where people will volunteer copies of photographs they smuggled out of the homeland for nostalgic reasons. It's time for albums and pictures to come home.

This paper has attempted to provide a partial profile of the Arab entrepreneur class of Jerusalem. Researching has not been easy; sometimes time-consuming, contradictory, confusing and above all depressing. I hope this may serve as a case study and other social scientists reconstruct other pre-48 Palestinians business centers of other towns.

I wish to thank four persons who have constantly encouraged me in my work. Salim Tamari, whose work has been a source of inspiration, Roger Heacock, Albert Aghazarian and Issam Nassar for their moral support.

1948 was a defining moment for the Jerusalem Arab business community. There is a new landscape around *Jaffa Gate*, hardly recognizable. Nevertheless, stubbornly, Jamil Faraj (Abou Issa) will take his daily walk dressed in his impeccable suit and rest under the palm tree.

I never asked him what crosses his mind as he looks at the new landscape.



Survivors of the 1948 Expulsions: A Second Call for a 'Race Against Time'

*Rosemary Sayigh**

Introduction

I would like to begin by appreciating the innovative spirit of Birzeit University and its Arab Documentation and Research Centre in encouraging oral history work, both through class-room teaching and through the Centre's work on the destroyed villages. It was the Birzeit Review that published a paper on the problems of Palestinian oral history by one of its early practitioners, Ted Swedenburg, a paper that still has relevance today¹. I would also like to acknowledge that Saleh Abdel Jawad, a lecturer at Birzeit University, first used the phrase "Race Against Time" in relation to Palestinian oral history. He used it to entitle a project proposal aimed at recording with remaining survivors of the expulsions of 1948, a project which up to now has not found institutional support.

In his Foreword to one of the great works of oral history, *Blood of Spain*, on the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39, Roy Fraser wrote:

* Anthropologist and Oral Historian.

¹ Ted Swedenburg, "Problems of Oral History: The 1936 Revolt in Palestine", *Birzeit University Research Review* no2, winter 1986/7.

Major historical works...have charted most of the features of that conflict and it would be vain to hope to add anything new to the overall map of the period. But within the general and even detailed knowledge, one area has remained unarticulated: the subjective, a spectrum of the lived experiences of people who participated in events².

Fraser speaks further of the importance of capturing the 'atmosphere' of events, of discovering the outlook and motivations of the participants, and adds, "Never more than at a time of extreme social crisis does the atmosphere become a determining factor in the way people respond to events. For however intangible, it is never abstract and distant. It is what people feel. And what people feel lays the ground for their actions".

To write *Blood of Spain* Fraser recorded 300 personal accounts, taken from both the nationalist and republican sides, in five regions. The recordings were carried out over two years, between June 1973 and May 1975, that is 35 to 40 years after the civil war, in the "twilight of the Franco era", when people were less afraid to speak, but when memories of the civil war were still relatively fresh. Fraser underlines the aim of the oral historian: not to say, "This is how it was" but, "This is how it is remembered as having been". (p32).

Recently, in 2001, a new collection of studies in Palestinian history appeared, entitled *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948*.³ I do not wish to derogate from the value of a book that brings new material on the motives and actions of the Arab states that intervened in Palestine, as well as on previously unresearched topics such as the Zionist-Druze invention of a 'historical friendship'. Rashid Khalidi contributes a valuable historical-structural analysis of Palestinian weakness, and Benny Morris revises his 1987 study of the creation of the refugee problem with new evidence from IDFA and Haganah archives. Yet the term 're-writing' used in the title suggests a degree of new vision that is lacking here. The events of 1947/1948 are still described in classic military history terms such as 'war', 'defeat' and 'rout', with an almost exclusive focus on state or proto-state actions. This fundamentally misrepresents what happened in 1948, for which the Israeli historian Ilan Pappé has claimed the term 'ethnic cleansing', a usage justified by Nur Masalha's researches on the idea of 'transfer' in Zionist archives.⁴ But what is entirely missing from *The War for Palestine* is the experience of ordinary Palestinians of the expulsions of 1948.

² Ronald Fraser, *Blood of Spain: The Experience of Civil War 1936-1939*, London, Allen Lane, 1979, p 29.

³ Eugene Rogan and Avi Schlaim eds., *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁴ Nur Masalha, *Expulsion of the Palestinians*, (Washington: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992).

Not only is this vital element missing, but also the editors show no consciousness of its absence, no sense that it should be there. It seems as if for them displaced Palestinians are simply statistics, not political actors, and not potential chroniclers of events. This Olympian perspective is underlined by the conclusion to their Introduction, where they look forward to the time, in another fifty years, when a new generation of historians will 'revisit' the war of 1948 on the occasion of its centenary, with new archival revelations. What a gap yawns here between the meaning of 1948 for displaced Palestinians and its representation by historians, even historians who challenge the dominant Zionist/Israeli version.

There is surely another paradox between the cultural importance of orality as medium of Palestinian historical transmission, and the absence of interest in it on the part of most Palestinian historians and national cultural institutions. Decades after the Nakba*, in spite of rising levels of literacy, orality remains a powerful means of diffusion of understandings about past and present among non-elite Palestinians. In the words of Saleh Abdel Jawad: "The people remain dependent on oral sources as the principle source of their knowledge of history in the spite of the emergence of the first Palestinian historical accounts". Factors that have impeded the writing and diffusion of a Palestinian national history include occupation of the land and dispersion of the people. Thus "the oral transmission of knowledge remains a major aspect of Palestinian culture".⁵

It is surely true that, until now, there has survived a generation of Palestinians who carried with them a rich stock of memories of Mandate Palestine, of the *hijra**, and of the early years in exile, or under Israeli rule. In all Palestinian communities there was and is a strong and lively habit of talking about Palestine and events of national struggle. This could be within families or in larger groups, for example at condolences, or weddings, or on national commemoration days. I remember that the day Yasser Arafat made his famous olive branch speech in the UN General Assembly (1974), I happened to be in Bourj Barajneh camp (near Beirut), in a gathering of neighbours who had been listening to his speech. Older people present there began to reminisce about 'ayyam Filasteen'. Several of them wept. Though moved by their tears and their words, I did not have the sense then to change my research topic and start doing oral history. Sadly, this tradition of oral remembering thrived at a time when few researchers or national cultural institutions had any interest in recording testimonies.⁶ But perhaps it is not too late. These oral traditions

⁵ Saleh Abdel Jawad, "Le Témoignage des victimes palestiniennes entre l'historiographie israélienne et l'historiographie arabe: Le cas de 1948", Colloquium: l'Histoire trouée, négation et témoignages, Paris Sorbonne, October 16, 2002.

⁶ Nafez Nazzal is an exception to the acknowledgement. He did the fieldwork for *The Palestinian Exodus from Galilee, 1948* in 1973, though the book was not published until several years later.

have persisted, even if they are not as fresh today as they were in the first decades, and have been influenced by Resistance movement discourse and the media.

It needs to be remembered that there were a few efforts in the early years of exile to record refugee narratives. I would claim that the following anecdotes have a place in the post-1948 history of the Palestinians. It would be worth the effort to collect such stories – there are surely many others – since they reveal much about the difficult birth of modern Palestinian history.

- a. In an article about Palestinian families in Kuwait, Shafiq Ghabra acknowledges his debt to a certain Ibrahim Abu Higlih, who “has been collecting data on pre-1948 over the last few years, peasant culture and folklore. He has acquired many stories, themes, proverbs, and family histories by listening and recording carefully what is said during gatherings”.⁷ I have asked many Palestinians from Kuwait if they knew Ibrahim Abu Higlieh. What has happened to him? And where are his precious records? Has any Palestinian cultural institution tried to search him out?
- b. Once in Damascus I met a Palestinian woman, a Fateh cadre, who told me how, when her generation first became politically active in Syria, in the early 1970s, they began recording refugee stories of the Great Rebellion. Unfortunately, lack of support from their organization – they needed transport to visit camps far from Damascus – had forced them to abandon their project.
- c. In Lebanon before the invasion of 1982 a group of Palestinian scholars tried to form an oral history committee. A first meeting was held under the aegis of the PLO, but the group was discouraged from meeting again.
- d. The last anecdote is a personal one. In 1981, I submitted a proposal to a national cultural institution to record with women who had been leaders of the Arab Women’s Union in Palestine before 1948. A number of them were still alive and living in Lebanon at that time. The proposal was politely turned down, and instead, I was invited to do a projection of the probable stand of the British Labour Party on the Palestine issue in the year 2000. None of these women leaders are alive today.

I would suggest that a great opportunity for recording popular memories has been lost for a variety of reasons that are in themselves a topic for research. What cultural,

⁷ Safiq Ghabra, “Palestinians in Kuwait: The family and the Politics of Survival”, *Journal of Palestine Studies* Winter 1988, vol 17 (2), see fn 25, p 82.

political and social factors combined to produce this neglect? Elie Sanbar has suggested that in the early years after the Nakba, Palestinian historians were most concerned with understanding the reasons for the 'defeat', which they mainly sought in external forces.⁸ One can understand that the Resistance movement would have had reservations about oral history because of its potential for resuscitating old splits and scandals. Blockages also existed at the level of ordinary people: in his *Memories of Revolt*, Ted Swedenburg has explained how local feuds often prevented Palestinians he was recording from giving him full accounts of the Revolt and its aftermath.⁹ Another factor in the first decades may have been belief in early return to Palestine. The growing interest in oral history among camp refugees is surely linked to the decline of this belief, and the consequent desire to protect their claims and interests.

Values of oral history work for Palestinian history

Though I think it would be a valuable addition to Palestinian historiography to analyze the productions of Palestinian national cultural institutions with a view to understanding their neglect of oral history, I do not propose to attempt this here. At this moment in time it is surely more important to think carefully about the values recording with remaining survivors of the expulsions of 1948 could offer future historians, and what will be lost if this is not done. Though there appears at the moment to be no collective concern for such a project, I hope that a momentum for recording with survivors before it is too late will build up among scholars, cultural institutions, NGOs and local communities. I will argue here that many questions future historians will raise about the expulsions can only be answered by personal testimonies; and that a primary value of recording both Palestinian and Israeli testimonials is to offer resources to future history writing. We need to know more about many aspects of the expulsions of 1948 that are still not clear:

- a. The build-up to the expulsions, which began in late 1947: pre-1948 Zionist attack plans and preparations that ordinary people could observe, such as Zionist scouting expeditions to reconnoiter the countryside; weapons and methods in different phases of the year-long struggle (e.g. air strikes, when and how these were used, with what objectives); the use of psychological warfare, rumours, radio propaganda, spies; the use of Jewish "mukhtars" to convey messages; reactions of local populations to these methods.

⁸ Elie Sanbar "Le vécu et l'écrit: Historiens-réfugiés de Palestine" *Revue d'Etudes palestiniennes*, no 1, Automne 1981.

⁹ Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936-1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995) p 24.

- b.** Did the Zionist/Israeli forces use a similar pattern of attack against villages, as a researcher in the Galilee area suggests?¹⁰ Was this pattern restricted to one area, or one stage of the expulsions?
- c.** Variations in methods and degree of intensity of expulsions in different areas, or under different commanders, or at different stages and expulsions during truces.
- d.** Massacres: According to the historian Michael Palumbo,¹¹ Israeli brutality increased in the last phase of war. There is a need for knowledge of massacres that are still not widely known even to Palestinians, for example Safsaf, 'Eilaboun, Tantura, Majdal Kroom, al-Jish, the 'Arab al-Sbeh (near Kfar Kana), al-Dawayima, Beersheba and other parts of the Nagab.¹² Recently some evidence has come to light of a previously unknown massacre at al-Bassa.
- e.** Rape: Palumbo cites a number of testimonials to the incidence of rape, though this is a topic that has hardly been dealt with up to now by Palestinian historians, except in relation to Deir Yassine. The recent revelation in Haaretz of the rape and murder of a young Bedouin woman in 1949 should alert us to the need for further research, also to the value of Israeli testimonies.
- f.** Prevention of refugee return: Palestinian research has focused on the destruction of villages; but other methods were used as well, such as bombing areas of refugee concentration, and booby-trapping homes. These also need to be recorded.
- g.** Variations in Palestinian reaction: for example why did residents of the same area make different choices, some choosing to flee others to stay? What were the trajectories of leaving Palestine? Where did people go and why?

¹⁰ Sahera Dirbas in *Al-Jana*, special issue on Palestinian oral history, 2002, p 23.

¹¹ Michael Palumbo, *The Palestinian Catastrophe: The 1948 Expulsion of a People from their Homeland* (London: Faber, 1987).

¹² Benny Morris mentions new documentation revealing atrocities in al-Husayniyya in Galilee, and at Burayr, near Beersheba: "Revisiting the Palestinian Exodus of 1948, *The War for Palestine*, p 49.

¹³ Sabry Jiries was an early writer on the legal, military and institutional measures of the new Israeli state to control Palestinians: *The Arabs of Israel 1948–1966* (Beirut: The Institute for Palestine Studies, 1968.) For personal reminiscences see Fawzi al-Asmar, *To be an Arab in Israel* (London: Frances Pintner, 1975.) Also, Gaby Abed, Jamil Arafat, Sahera Dirbas, Sharif Kanaana, and Awatef Shiek in *Al-Jana*, 2002.

- h.** The early experiences of those who stayed in what became Israel. Some work has been done here, mostly by individual researchers.¹³
- i.** Most work so far has been with people originally from villages, except for some individual research in Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa and Nablus. There is a need to fill gaps in knowledge through recording with a broader span of social sectors. We need to add to the record the recollections of: women – their memories of the *hijra* and the aftermath certainly differ from men's; city people of all classes; Bedouins from different areas; minorities of different kinds – e.g. Bahais, Armenians; prisoners of war and labour camp workers; the blind or otherwise handicapped;¹⁴ refugees who were children during the *hijra*.¹⁵
- j.** We have little information about political or factional struggles going on during the Nakba and continuing in its aftermath, whether originating in Arab governments or from within the Palestinian arena. While recording with refugees, I have come across evidence that at least one Arab regime that intervened in Palestine during 1948 (Egypt), and one of the regimes hosting refugees (Lebanon), arrested Palestinian communists. Was this phenomenon widespread? Coordinated? Were all the Arab states neighbouring Palestine involved in such actions? Did arrests extend to other political formations?

Research on the first years after the Nakba remains a black hole in Palestinian studies, even though somewhat covered by individual memoirs and special sector studies.¹⁶ Many questions await investigation, for example:

- a.** In regard to settlement patterns in exile, what forces and motivations were at work in refugee movement; what were host government policies and to what extent did they predominate over refugee 'clustering'? What controls were set on refugee movement within countries and across national borders?
- b.** How were the refugees' social relations affected by exile and separation? How did scattered families and localities re-establish connection? Why

¹⁴ See Rawan and Dima Damen in *Al-Jana*, 2002, p 17, 18.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ e.g. oral histories of women activists, Faiha Abdulhadi, ed., (1999) *Al-mara' al-Falastiniyya wa al-dhakira: Awraaq Warshat 'amal hawl al-tarikh al sahfwy al siyasi lil mara' al-Falastiniyya* (Directorate of Gender Planning.) Autobiographies have helped fill this gap, e.g. Fawaz al-Turki, *The Disinherited: Journal of a Palestinian Exile* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972); Fawzi al-Asmar, op cit; Ghada Karmi, *In Search of Fatima* (London: Verso Press, 2002).

are some villages collected in one country or one camp, while others are far more scattered? How did families and villages make and sustain contact with each other?¹⁷

- c. Why was there a collective silence on the part of Palestinians about the massacres and, in some cases, rapes that accompanied the expulsions? Why was Deir Yassine remembered and the others ‘forgotten’? Why was there silence about the labour camps through which the Israeli state filled their shortage of construction labour, a contravention of the Geneva Conventions unmentioned before Salman Abu Sitta’s recent research?¹⁸
- d. How was connection with Palestine maintained in the early years? How did some people manage to return, some to stay others to be expelled?
- e. Who was blamed for the defeat, and how was it explained at the popular level?
- f. When and by whom was the term ‘*hijra*’ used first for the expulsions from Palestine?

These and a host of other questions about the destruction of Palestinian society in Palestine and its and reconstruction in exile, or under occupation, wait to be posed and to be answered.

The Value of Personal Testimonies in Political Advocacy

The testimonies of the survivors undoubtedly have importance in the sphere of international politics and advocacy. Elia Zureik called attention in a recent article to the exceptional degree to which Palestinians “live under constant surveillance”.¹⁹ Besides UNRWA and other UN bodies, dozens of governments (including the PLO and PNA), countless national security councils, immigration departments, research units and ‘think-tanks’ produce data on Palestinian educational levels, fertility, movement and ‘attitudes’. In this ocean of statistics, until recently, there was no subjective element except that of creative writers and artists. There is the need to counter population statistics with human voices. The political centrality of the

¹⁷ Susan Slyomovics has given us a model for this kind of study: *The Object of Memory: Arab and Jew Narrate the Palestinian Village* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998).

¹⁸ Paper in preparation.

¹⁹ Elia Zureik, “Constructing Palestine through Surveillance Practices”, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (2001) 28 (2).

refugees and internally displaced to the Palestine case means that it is not just their numbers or their objectively defined situation that is historically important, it is their experience. We cannot make this known without eliciting and recording it.

Personal testimonies can be used effectively in advocacy.²⁰ Personal testimonials transform a political situation from the abstract and faraway to the concrete and close. Writing of the effect of San Salvadorian refugee life stories on North American audiences, William Westerman says, "Refugee testimony... included the essential function of conveying a part of history that was not recorded in the official media of the state and dominant culture".²¹ He contrasts the empathy created by personal narratives with the negative effect political speeches often have on audiences. If public opinion in the United States is more aware today of dictatorial regimes in Latin America, it is partly due to the rise of testimonial literature. Yet Palestinian refugees from camps have almost never been invited to speak at conferences, or sponsored on speaking tours. Nor in fifty five years of refugee existence has any nationalist intellectual proposed training programmes for refugee youth.

If recently we have begun to read refugee testimonials, why and how has this change come about? Bibliographic investigation shows that early work in Palestinian oral history was done by individual researchers unsupported by institutions, but that more recently – from the 1980s – group-recording projects have made an appearance. This change in Palestinian 'cultural politics' may be attributed to the formation of a generation of community-based organizations, the Palestinian NGOs. With varied political affiliations and cultural programmes, but above all with a greater closeness to marginal communities, these have shown more interest than the cultural institutions in the recording of popular experience. In'ash al-Usra was a pioneer in this line, starting to record rural traditions soon after the occupation of the West Bank, and producing the first of the village studies, *Termisa'ya*.²² Uprooting and village origin seem to have formed the activating hub of much oral history work by individual researchers both in Palestine and in exile. For example, The Arab Documentation and Research Centre's 'Destroyed Village' series begun in the 1980s, and more recently, the publishing project devoted mainly to village studies, Dar al-Shajjara, in Yarmouk camp in Syria. Sohmata in Galilee has its own committee, which helped

²⁰ See May Seikaly on the effectiveness of personal testimonies in lecturing to American audiences: Al-Jana, special issue on Palestinian oral history, 2002.

²¹ William Westerman, "Central American Refugee Testimonies and Performed Life Histories in the Sanctuary Movement" in Rita Benmayor and Andor Skotnes eds., *Migration and Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p 179.

²² Dirasat fi al-mujtima' wa al turath al-sha'bi al-Filastini: qariya Termis'ayya (Beirut: Palestine Research Center, (1973).

organize a play written and performed by ex-residents in the village itself, symbolically reclaiming it. Still and movie camera work has been used by other groups in Israel, formal and informal, to document Arab city quarters and destroyed villages. The refugee-based NGO Shaml has an extensive oral history programme that includes work with peasant farmers on their land holdings and land use before 1948.

Research using oral data from non-elite Palestinians has increased so much in recent years, that there is a real danger of over-stretching the patience of respondents, and overlooking their situation. Perhaps for the first time, researchers are encountering skepticism about the value of 'telling the world our story'. At a recent meeting of researchers in the West Bank, someone working in the village of Silwan noted that reticence is far greater today than it was five years ago. In Lebanon also researchers are facing probing questions about the purposes of the research, and whether it will help people in the camps. Clearly the time has come to think more about ways through which communities can be involved in the planning and outcomes of research projects. It was reassuring to hear, at this same meeting, a refugee-researcher from Jalazone camp assert that oral history work "is a protection of my rights and future" and that it "has a political purpose".

Conclusion: The 'Race Against Time'

The dwindling number of Palestinians who can remember Mandate Palestine, or the expulsions of 1947/48, or the period immediately after the Nakba, gives an extra urgency to the question of recording with survivors. Saleh Abdel Jawad was right when (eight years ago) he called such a recording project 'Race Against Time'. A demographer's estimate of the total number of Palestinians aged over 70 is around 2% of the whole population (there are slight differences between regions). This would make a 'pool' of around 205,456, counting only Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, the Occupied West Bank and Gaza, and Israel.²³ This number seems substantial until you remember that it is diminishing daily. The danger of further delay is highlighted by the experience of a refugee-researcher in Lebanon. After a search in all the camps in the late 1990s, Ibrahim Othman was able to locate 51 elderly people from his village, Deir al-Qassi (in Galilee), but "Some passed away a few days after the interview and others died before I had the chance to reach them".²⁴ There is no question that we are now in the very last years when recording with older Palestinians is still possible.

²³ An estimate from 1995. Area breakdowns are: Jordan: 39,393; Syria 6,297; Lebanon: 18,493; The Occupied West Bank and Gaza: 79,479; Israel: 66,774. (The figure for Israel is for the whole population, not Palestinians alone.) Marwan Khawaja: personal communication.

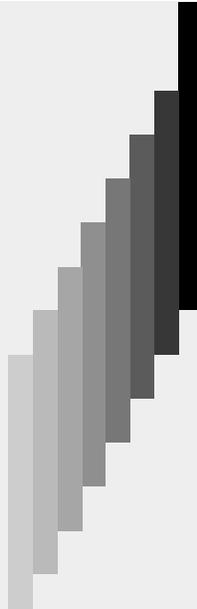
²⁴ Reem Haddad, interview with Ibrahim Othman, *Daily Star* May 20, 2001.

Some of this work is being done by individual scholars such as May Seikaly, Saleh Abdel Jawad, Jihane Khayat and Diana Allan in Lebanon, Mustafa Kabha and others in the Karmel area. The 'Palestine Remembered' group is carrying out extensive recordings in Jordan. So the canvas is not entirely empty. It is more a matter of connecting and expanding, filling in gaps, suggesting important questions and networking. This is a project that could not be managed by any one Palestinian cultural institution or NGO. Rather it requires trans-diaspora cooperation between institutions, local groups and individual scholars, as was called for in the workshop on oral history held in Nuffield College, Oxford, in September 2002. E-mail networking and websites can be used to discuss problems, find solutions, and display data. We need to think about the crucial questions on which testimonial material would serve future historians. We need to look for specific kinds of speaker in terms of locality, social status, occupation, gender, sect, ethnicity. There needs to be an exchange of advice about methodological and technical problems, such as how to train interviewers, create rapport, use video cameras and digital recorders. Also funding: where to look for it, and how to write proposals. Data storage is an important and neglected question – how to store and label tapes, how to transfer them to CD for longer life, how to digitize them and index them for easier access, and how to disseminate them to a wider audience.

I would like to end this essay with a justification of oral history proposed by the historian Henri Laurens: "The interest of testimonies for the historian is that they present themselves as an individual or collective step of revelation, one that proclaims a history or a hidden truth. Whether written or oral, the testimonial gives access to a dimension that often escapes the historian, the interiority of emotions, of joy or suffering, and is, through its claims to disclosure, an affirmation of authenticity".²⁵

*The origins of these two words for the same event needs to be investigated. In my experience 'Nakba' was originally used by middle class educated Palestinians, while 'hijra' was used by Palestinians in camps. My impression is that now 'Nakba' is used by all classes and in all diaspora regions, whereas 'hijra' has almost died out.

²⁵ Henri Laurens, lecture given at the French Cultural Centre, Jerusalem, 1998, quoted by Saleh Abdel Jawad, 2002. The original French: "l'intérêt du témoignage pour l'historien 'est de se présenter comme démarche individuelle ou collective de révélation: il dénonce une histoire, une vérité caches. Ecrit ou oral, le témoignage donne accès a une dimension qui souvent échappe à l'historien: l'intériorité des émotions, de la joie et de la souffrance ; et par ailleurs, pas ses prétentions ont la révélation, il est une affirmation d'authenticité.'"



From Haifa to Camden Town – and Back Again

Episodes of Home and Heritage in the Cases of Ghassan Kanafani and Ruth First

*Barbara Harlow**

On 11 July 2003, Nelson Mandela visited 13 Lyme Street, Camden Town, in London. The occasion was the unveiling of an English Heritage “blue plaque” on the outside wall of the home that Ruth First and Joe Slovo had lived in for more than a decade, from 1966 to 1978. “South African freedom fighters lived here,” the plaque declared. The unveiling event was not insignificant, hosting as it did legatees of the South African anti-apartheid struggle, a former head of state, parliamentarians and politicians, the daughters of the “freedom fighters” who had shared the space with their parents, and interested invitees. It was a “return” – and a renewal.

The designation of the First/Slovo London home as an English Heritage site poses, however, important questions about the very idea – and ideals – of home and heritage. These issues were raised importantly, dramatically, if not yet quite decisively, more than three decades earlier in Ghassan Kanafani’s novella, *Return to Haifa* (1969), in which the Palestinian refugees from 1948, Said S. and his wife Safiyya, following now the 1967 war, return to their once abandoned – presently occupied – home, only

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to discover within its very walls the drastic changes that had been wrought by the passage of time in the circumstantial reconstructions of “home and heritage”. Their own son, once Khaled, now Dov, was there to meet them on their return.

What might the public event of the unveiling of the English Heritage blue plaque in Camden Town have to do with the literary rendition of the “return to Haifa” in an immediate post-war situation, and the issues of “home and heritage”. The divides that must be crossed and re-drawn, articulated and contested by the passage of time – and the passages of peoples – are critical. Indeed, the much-vaunted – but equally vexed – comparisons between the South Africa/Palestine-Israel histories are no small part of the story.

After all, and in other words: Haifa, Camden Town – home, heritage: where does one visit – reside – when it’s been said and done...?

“Resistance Literature” in an Age of Globalization/Post-colonialism

In the immediate post-World War One period, the German philosopher-critic Walter Benjamin reflected on the fate of the “work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction”. That fate, of the “work of the art” and its relation to modes of production, would reflect in turn on the character of both its producer – the artist – and its consumer – an audience. As the twentieth century turned into the twenty-first, however, and the Berlin Wall came down, and with it, the Soviet Union along with the “second world” that it represented, and when the first world war had been followed by still another, and then a cold war after that – not to mention decolonization – and when a post-bi-polar world order of globalization was being heralded, and a “war on terror” had been launched, the political commentator Tariq Ali was led, paraphrasing again Walter Benjamin, to wonder about “colonialism in the epoch of neo-liberal capitalism”. The United States was occupying Iraq, and Ali was concerned that Iraq had already “become an oligarchy of crony capitalism, the new cosmopolitanism” (Guardian 2003). He maintained instead that “resistance is the first step towards Iraqi independence”. Such questions, about the work of art and its place in time, underwrite both long histories and short stories, and they raise again the issue of the time and the place of resistance and “resistance literature” in that narrative.

The term “resistance” (muqawamah) was first applied in a description of Palestinian literature in 1966 by the Palestinian writer and critic Ghassan Kanafani in his Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine: 1948-1966. But, what has become of “resistance” and its literature in the intervening decades? Kanafani’s critical essay was, significantly, written in 1966, before the June War of 1967, that is, whose culmination in the defeat of the Egyptian and Jordanian armies by the Israeli forces resulted in the Israeli occupation of the West Bank of the Jordan River and the Gaza Strip and the opening at

the time of the border between these territories – now “occupied territories” – and Israel. As such, it proposed an important distinction between literature written “under occupation” (taht al-ihital) and “exile” (manfa) literature. Such a distinction presupposed a people’s collective relationship to a common land, a common identity, or a common cause on the basis of which it would become possible to articulate the difference between the two modes of historical and political existence, that is, between “occupation” and “exile”. The distinction presupposed furthermore an “occupying power” which had either exiled or subjugated, in this case both exiled and subjugated, a given population and which had in addition significantly intervened in the literary and cultural development of the people it had dispossessed and whose land it had occupied. Kanafani, in other words, presented literature, as an arena of struggle.

In 1966, when Kanafani composed his critical essay, the literature of occupied Palestine (Israel) was, because of official repression and censorship inside Israel and studied neglect throughout the Arab world, largely unknown outside the borders of the then 18-year-old state of Israel. Much of Kanafani’s research and work was thus concerned with documenting the existence and material conditions of production of Palestinian literature under Israeli occupation in the face of what he designated as a “cultural siege” (hisar thaqafi). The same political conditions, furthermore, which determined Palestinian literary production under Israeli occupation played a no less significant role in defining the parameters and approaches available to the Palestinian literary critic writing in exile. Kanafani problematized these conditions by opening his literary critical study with an apparent disclaimer: “this study is wanting in one of the basic elements on which an essential part of the results of research generally depends, and that is an abundance of sources” (LROP, 11).

The very conditions of research into the literature of occupied Palestine in 1966, however, like the conditions of production of that literature, provided the very basis for a re-examination of literary-critical methodologies and the definitions whereby a literary corpus is constituted and consolidated. Kanafani’s opening disclaimer was in fact a theoretical argument, one which summoned attention not only to Palestinian resistance literature but also to the critic’s own ideological approach and historical disposition with regard to that same literature. According to Kanafani:

The attempts at a history of the resistance literature of a given people are usually, for reasons that are self-evident, accomplished after liberation. With respect to the literature of resistance in occupied Palestine, however, it is necessary that the Arab reader in general and the Palestinian emigrant in particular study its persistent continuation, because it is fundamentally to be found in the language itself and speech of the Arabs of occupied Palestine. The resistance springs from these linguistic initiatives, working together with the rigidity of the conditions of the situation (LROP, 11).

Furthermore, the critic went on, “No research of this kind can be complete unless the researcher is located within the resistance movement itself inside the occupied land,

taking his testimony from the place in which it is born, lives and is propagated: the lips of the people” (LROP, 12). Kanafani not only disclaimed, indeed discounted, any pretense to “academic objectivity” or even “scientific dispassion,” he rejected too the very relevance in a study of resistance literature of such critical stances, postures, or poses.

*Ghassan Kanafani, in referring to Palestinian literature as “resistance literature,” however, was writing within a specific historical context, a context that was immediately and emphatically situated within the contemporary national liberation struggles and resistance movements against western imperialist domination of Africa, Central and South America, and the Middle and Far East. The very immediacy and specificity of that historical context reveal, nonetheless and even now, the broader role played by resistance literature in particular, but more generally too by what came, for a time at least, to be referred to as “third world literature”. (Adapted from Barbara Harlow. *Resistance Literature*, 1987.)*

Interlude: Continuities/Periodicities/Historicities: Towards Bandung At 50

When the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) held its 11th conference in Durban, South Africa in September 1998, there were front-page photos in all the local newspapers of Nelson Mandela, Fidel Castro, and Yasser Arafat arm-in-arm, celebrating the occasion of more than four decades of non-aligned solidarity. Mandela, then become president of the recently liberated South Africa, had just celebrated his 80th birthday and announced his marriage to Graca Machel, widow of the assassinated president of Mozambique, Samora Machel. Fidel Castro, railing against and reeling from the continued sanctions against his country, nonetheless spellbound audiences from Soweto to Parliament. Yasser Arafat too continued to contest persistent opprobrium from significant sectors of both the Palestinian people and the international community. The Durban event, however, was the continuation – albeit in discontinuous historical terms and on disconnected geopolitical terrains – of the 1955 Bandung Conference at which celebrated leaders of the decolonizing world, from Nehru of India, to Nasser of Egypt, Tito of Yugoslavia, and Sukarno of host-country Indonesia, had launched the Non-Aligned Movement. According to Richard Wright, who attended the conference, “This was a meeting of almost all of the human race living in the main geopolitical center of gravity of the earth. [...] The despised, the insulted, the hurt, the dispossessed – in short, the underdogs of the human race were meeting. [...] This meeting of the rejected was in itself a kind of judgement upon that Western world” (*The Color Curtain*, 1956, 12). Nearly half a century later, Michael Hardt proposed that “[r]ather than opposing the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre to the World Economic Forum in New York, it is

more revealing to imagine it as the distant offspring of the historic Bandung Conference that took place in Indonesia in 1955”. But, Hardt went on, “the differences are immediately apparent” (NLR, 14, 2002 12). Bandung – its chronologies, its cartographies, and the genealogies that came of it – as its fiftieth anniversary (April 2005) approaches – “Bandung,” the very term itself, should be raising issues not only of non-alignment, but of realignment, in the 21st century, a century that so desperately opened with the threat of U.S. unilateral hegemony. Internationalism, non-alignment, cosmopolitanism, globalization, intellectual elites, public intellectuals, the wretched of the earth, colonialism, decolonization, post-colonialism, chronologies and cartographies are at stake. The makings of a plot, or, in other words characters competing over settings.

“Returning to Haifa”

*When Said S. returns with his wife Safiya to Haifa twenty years after leaving it, he is only then able to recover his memory of the events that had forced him to leave. **Return to Haifa (1969)**, is set in 1967, following the June War. Israel has opened its borders to the now-occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza. Said and his wife, who have been living in Ramallah, are seeing Haifa for the first time since they left the coastal city in 1948 when it was attacked by Jewish forces on the eve of the founding of the Israeli state. Historical time and narrative time are again conflated – and extended. The journey made by Said S. and his wife through the Mandelbaum Gate and across the borders takes place over a period of twenty-four hours, from 30 June to 1 July, 1967. The history that they relive during those hours is nearly twenty years long, from 21 April 1948, when Haifa was attacked, to 30 June/1 July 1967, the date/s of their return visit. The husband and wife are returning to look for their son, Khaldun, left behind twenty years earlier, and the house they had once lived in. From this conflation of historical and narrative time, a future possibility emerges. Said S. and Safiya find their house inhabited by Miriam, the widow of Evrat Kushen, themselves both post-World War Two refugees from Nazi-occupied Poland. Their son, who has been renamed Dov, is now a recruit in the Israeli army. Return to Haifa was Kanafani’s vision of a “democratic solution” for the future of Palestine. “When we came here,” Said says to Miriam at the conclusion of their meeting, “we were going against history. And also, I admit to you, when we left Haifa. But all of this is temporary. Do you know something, madam? It seems to me that every Palestinian will pay a price. I know many who have paid with their sons. I know because I too in a strange way paid with my son. But I paid with him at a cost... This was my first lesson and it’s a difficult one to explain” (RH 138).*

What Said learned upon his “return to Haifa” twenty years after his exodus from that city, is, as he hears it from his son Khaldun, now named Dov, that “it’s man who is the

issue [cause]" (RH 133). The democratic solution to the question of Palestine is suggested in the encounter between father and son. "Ever since I was a child," the son tells the father, "I've been Jewish. I went to the synagogue and to Jewish school. I ate kosher food and studied Hebrew. When they told me after that that my original parents were Arab, still nothing changed. Nothing at all. That much is certain...In the end it's man who is the issue [cause]". And in the end Said tells his son:

No, I'm not talking to you to insist on your being an Arab. Now I more than anyone know that man is the issue [cause]. There is no flesh and blood which gets passed on from generation to generation the way a merchant and his customer may exchange cans of dried meat. But I am talking to you and insisting that, when all is said and done, you are a man. Jewish. Or whatever you like. But there are things you have to understand. It's necessary...And I know that the greatest crime any man, whoever he is, can commit is to think, even for a moment, that the weakness of others and their mistakes gives him the right to exist at their expense and that this absolves him of all his own mistakes and crimes (136).

(Adapted from Barbara Harlow, *Introduction to Ghassan Kanafani. Palestine's Children*, 1984).

“South African Freedom Fighters Lived Here”

“There is a word,” Ronald Segal remembered in his remarks at the memorial tea following the English Heritage dedication of the blue plaque to Ruth First and Joe Slovo, “South African freedom fighters,” at their once-home of 13 Lyme Street, Camden Town, in July 2003. The word was “Yiddishkeit,” and for Segal, it stood “for the Yiddish-language culture of the Jewish communities in Eastern Europe, in particular Lithuania, which was the cradle of militant trade unionism in the Russian empire, and the country from which most South African Jews, including Joe’s family – and Ruth’s too – came. It was a culture battered by persecution, which generated a technique of survival in a humor of irony, a wry, a most surreal management of contradictions”. Contradictions, if not ironies, indeed – Lithuania – if not the country, at least the same part of the world, from which Miriam and Evrat Kushen had traveled perhaps half a century later before taking up occupancy in Said and Safiya’s Haifa home. Ronald Segal meanwhile, had left South Africa in 1960, bringing Oliver Tambo to safety and ANC-leadership-in exile. Segal was also a mentor of Ruth First, encouraging her writing and her activism following her own arrival in London on release from 117 days of detention in South Africa, with her three young daughters, to join her husband Joe in exile.

The invitation to the English Heritage blue plaque street event carried quotations from

both Joe and Ruth. Joe's memorial words, it seems, were straightforward: "As far as I am concerned," Joe Slovo is quoted on the discreetly elegant card, "what I did, I did without any regrets. I decided long ago in my life that there is only one target and that target is to remove the racist regime and obtain power for the people". For Ruth, however, the choice was more difficult, Ruth First of the "sharp tongue," she who "didn't suffer fools gladly". If Joe had been the cheerleader of the resistance, Ruth, the critic, had only too often rained on its parades. Even so, it was the other side who killed her, with a parcel bomb sent from Pretoria to her office in Maputo, Mozambique, in 1982. In the end, and in any case, Ruth First is quoted on the invitation in words taken from the introduction to her 1970 study of coups d'état in Africa, *Barrel of a Gun*: "[my work] is primarily directed not to the criticism, but to the liberation of Africa, for I count myself an African, and there is no cause I hold dearer".

"What", Said S. had asked, "is the homeland?" (RH 134). And where is it to be found?

* * *

"I've been trying to recall," Nelson Mandela began his letter to Ruth First, "when in '62 I last saw you. I well remember," the Robben Islander and future South African president continued, "one bright Sunday morning in late July that yr when I welcomed you, your hubby & friends I'll never see again. You came out of the vehicle in all your glory, confidently tossing about that pruned figure of yours & looking an inch taller than you actually are". Mandela went on to say to the reader of his letter, "It will come as no surprise for you to know that I've thought of you repeatedly over the last 13 yrs & hope the kin is still holding tight together". As he more immediately recalled, however, Mandela had caught a glimpse of Ruth First in a photograph that had found its way into his Robben Island prison cell: "About 6 mths ago," he wrote, " I saw pictures of a women's indaba in Paris & the eye was immediately caught by a photo in coat and slacks, resembling a face once very familiar at cor. Commissioner & Von Nielligh. Bespectacled & hawknosed & with a sheaf of papers as usual, she sat almost flat on the floor, & even looked humble & soft & nearest to me than she has ever been before. Seeing that picture after so long evoked pleasant memories & made me forget about her flashes of temper, impatience & barbed tongue. Does that ring a bell? If I've guessed well, then she seems to have kept her age well. By now, I expected to see a matronly ouma, ravaged by more than a decade of hard thinking, hard work, unfulfilled expectations. I never suspected that today you'd appear so trim & young". (Nelson Mandela to Ruth First: 20.10.75).

More than a decade of hard thinking, hard work, unfulfilled expectations.... In October 1975, when Ghassan Kanafani was already three years dead, when Nelson Mandela wrote to Ruth First, he had spent that more than a decade on Robben Island, in fulfillment not of expectations of liberating South Africa from the hold of apartheid, but in completion

of the terms of a life sentence. Ruth First, for her part, had spent that same more than a decade in London exile, where she had fled in early 1964 with her three young daughters to join her husband who had escaped South Africa just before her detention. Ruth First, that is, left South Africa shortly after her own release from 117 days in a South African prison, and only months before Nelson Mandela and his fellow Rivonia trialists were spared the death penalty and sentenced instead to life imprisonment. As it turned out, Mandela would see First's "hubby" and many of those friends again. SACP leader and head of MK (Umkhonto we Sizwe, the armed wing of the ANC), Joe Slovo joined — over the objections of the representatives of apartheid — the negotiating team of the anti-apartheid movements following Mandela's prison release and the unbanning of the ANC and the SACP in 1990; he went on to become Minister of Housing in the Mandela-led Government of National Unity (GNU) elected to power in 1994 in South Africa's first-ever democratic elections. But Ruth First was not there to celebrate in the post-apartheid party. She had been assassinated in Mozambique in 1982 by a letter bomb sent to her from Pretoria — even as the Israeli army was laying siege to Beirut.

* * *

Life and Death Issues

The story of Ruth First's untimely death, like that of Ghassan Kanafani just a decade before her, is also the story of her life. Where does the responsibility lie? First's assassins, for example, invoked details of her biography and items from her bibliography, to warrant her identification as a "legitimate target" of the South African apartheid regime. The two men — Craig Williamson, the security agent, and Roger "Jerry" Raven, the bomb-maker — were eventually granted amnesty for First's murder by South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Their deed, it was determined, had been "politically motivated". After all, Ruth First was a member of the African National Congress (ANC) and of the South African Communist Party (SACP). In South Africa, she had been active in the resistance to apartheid; in London, she had spoken publicly against the South African regime and written numerous books and articles that engaged questions of internationalism, communism, and social justice; and in Mozambique she was assisting the newly independent state — South Africa's near neighbor and close enemy — in preparing cadres of educated and involved contributors to the country's infrastructural development. Ruth First's death, in other words, was critically implicated in the struggle for the liberation of South Africa. But her life story — the biography — and her written record — the bibliography — provide significant grounds for a review of the historical past and the prescient analyses of a later historiography that she herself represented, both in her own work and in the ways in which that work worked for others. (Adapted from "Looked Class, Talked Red").

First's story, moreover, and once again not unlike the assassination of Kanafani by Israeli forces, intersects with a set of crucial narratives – both macro- and micro- – that describe the long transition from imperialism's "civilizing mission" of the nineteenth century to a late twentieth century neo-imperialism's "humanitarian interventionism," establishing the grounded continuities that connect colonialism, anti-colonialism, and post-colonialism, with particular reference to the African continent. (Indeed the two critics might have met in Beirut in 1970 or thereabouts, when Ruth First was researching her study of Qaddafi's Libya, *Libya: The Elusive Revolution* [1974] – or so her notebooks would suggest.) The longer story meanwhile tells too of the linkages between the "scramble for Africa" waged by European nations after the 1884-85 Berlin Conference and the "scramble for contracts" fought out at the end of another century among equally predatory multinational and transnational corporations for the continent's material resources and human prospects. Hers is also the more intimate story of generational succession in the struggle, the competition over its outcomes, the contest over its legacies, and the trials and tribulations of personal after-lives and political aftermaths

In other words, Ruth First's and Ghassan Kanafani's stories are writ both small and large across these narratives: the role of the intellectual in the traversals and reversals, from imperialism to globalization, from internationalism to cosmopolitanism, from colonization to decolonization, from "three worlds" to a "post-bi-polar world order". These are the story lines, fine and then not so fine, of the intersections of personal lives and political processes. Red lines and green lines – and apartheid walls. Homes and heritages. Archival forests and anecdotal trees.

Remember The Solidarity Here And Everywhere...

With the loss, on 25 September 2003, of Edward W. Said, the front lines of struggle, the struggle over Palestine, for global justice, for "just causes and noble ideals," in our contemporary world have been desperately depleted. But Said's example remains, an example of the critical – indeed vital and vivid still – importance of comrades-in-arms to reinforcing and re-articulating those very lines, lines that Edward Said both wrote and lived, and continues to stand for.

...we have to see the Arab world generally and Palestine in particular in more comparative and critical ways... [...] The Palestinian struggle for justice is especially something with which one must express solidarity, rather than endless criticism and exasperated frustrating discouragement, or crippling divisiveness. Remember the solidarity here and everywhere in Latin America, Africa, Europe, Asia and Australia, and remember also that there is a cause to which many people have committed themselves, difficulties and terrible obstacles notwithstanding. Why? Because it is a just cause, a noble ideal, a moral quest for equality and human rights. ("Dignity, Solidarity and the Penal Colony" 2003 [emphasis added])

*“More comparative and critical ways...” Whether in observation of the Arab world or out of concern for the fate of Palestine, or indeed in a close scrutiny of the literary and cultural landmarks of imperial missions, the historic crossroads they narrated, these “comparative and critical ways” were the very signposts, the directions, the imperatives, that Edward Said’s lifework, his life and his work, indicated for his readers – readers, that is, in the very largest sense of the term, for reading, after all is said and done, after all that Edward Said has said and done, is its own contribution to writing. And Edward Said was a writer, a worldly writer however, a critic of both the world and the text, to paraphrase the title of an important collection of his essays, *The World, the Text and the Critic* (1983). Whether championing the literary-critical consequence of Joseph Conrad within the imperial resumé of the Euro-American academy or challenging the PLO leadership for its catastrophic shortcomings in a world-historical contest, Said wrote. He wrote books and he wrote essays, critical and polemical, and he wrote to excoriate the villains who demean the struggle for a “just cause, a noble ideal, a moral quest for human rights”. Palestine came to be in Edward Said’s writing – and for his readers – just such a cause, just such an ideal, just such a quest – for social justice.*

But Edward Said also wrote obituaries, testimonies to the legacies of lived lives and reminders to their – and now his – legatees. Those memorials for his friends, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod and Eqbal Ahmad, who, Said acknowledges, led him to the front lines of “comparative and critical ways” and who passed on before him, anticipate the remembrance that is owed in turn to Edward Said’s own decisive instantiation of those same comparative and critical ways. In the tributes to his colleagues, those comrades, and the example that they set, Said continues to remind his readers-cum-writers of the importance too of his own exemplarity of the imperative to “remember the solidarity here and everywhere”.

Comrades-in-Arms

“What dismays me,” Said wrote in “My Guru,” his memorial to Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, “is that they [Eqbal Ahmad and Abu-Lughod] should have died before me – particularly now, when their voices would have been so telling and humanely informative”. Eqbal Ahmad died in Islamabad, Pakistan on 11 May 1999. Ibrahim Abu-Lughod died just two years later, in Ramallah, on 23 May 2001. And just over yet another two years later, on 25 September 2003, Said himself joined his comrades in their passage. Their collective, like their individual, contributions to the international struggle against imperial projects from Palestine to Pakistan and on behalf of “just cause[s], noble ideal[s], and

[the] moral quest for human rights” on a global scale, were at once legion and legendary. It was Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, Said recalls in “My Guru,” who “introduced [him] to the subject and the experience, as it were, of Palestine”. And it was “thanks to Ibrahim” too, their mutual friend continues, “that in 1970 I first met Eqbal, the other comrade-in-arms whose untimely death has left me so diminished” (“My Guru” 2001).

All three men, Edward Said, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, and Eqbal Ahmad, spent a significant part of their lives in exile in the United States, the late twentieth century imperializing successor to the nineteenth century British prototype of empire that had dispossessed their peoples and partitioned their homelands: India in 1947 and Palestine in 1948. They were “dark times,” as Said identifies the last half of the twentieth century, or “scoundrel times,” in Ahmad’s words (Said, “Cherish the Man’s Courage,” xxvi). And if Ibrahim and Eqbal died at least close to “home,” Edward ended his days in continued exile, in New York City, and was buried in Lebanon. The times remain dark; the scoundrels still abound. But the heritage of these luminaries – “comrades-in-arms” – is to have reconstructed the parameters and premises of the very idea of “home” and the possibilities of homeland for their twentieth-first century descendants.

*“Writing about Eqbal at the time of his death two years ago,” Said maintained in “My Guru” in 2001, “and now about Ibrahim, I have found it hard to give an account of their essentially performative achievements. Both men made a lasting impression on everyone they met; their memorial is not embodied in a body of work, however, but scattered through several societies, groups, associations and families, all of which have been changed visibly, and imperceptibly, by the nature of these men and their achievements”. Abu-Lughod, for example, founded the Association of Arab-American Graduates (AAUG) in the United States in 1968, and its journal *Arab Studies Quarterly* shortly thereafter. He was active in the projected creation of a Palestinian Open University, and in the last years of his life served as vice-president of Birzeit University in Ramallah, whose Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute of International Studies now bears his name. Finally, “Abu-Lughod’s funeral in Jaffa [his native town] was an unprecedented Palestinian event in which thousands of people participated. For the first time since 1948, the flag of Palestine could be seen flying over the rooftops of Jaffa” (*Jerusalem Quarterly File*, 11-2 [2001]). Indeed, as his daughter Lila remembered of her father, “He was eager to show us the whole of Palestine, from Nablus to Nazareth, Jericho to Haifa. He especially wanted us to go to Jaffa” (Leila Abu-Lughod, 2001).*

Like his colleague Ibrahim, Eqbal too ended his life engaged in the effort to rebuild – or indeed perhaps to build anew – the foundations of a decolonized,

“post-colonial” (the history is not inconsequential) educational institution, Khaldunia, in Pakistan. According to Eqbal Ahmad, in his conversations with David Barsamian, colonial education had historically served only to “produce servants of the empire”. Khaldunia, by contrast but (that’s still another story for another time and place – one that would take on, as all three men did, a longer history, global and intercultural) – at first favored and subsequently frustrated by successive Pakistani governments – sought to “show what kind of curriculum should be the curriculum of an independent, self-governing people. It would make an effort to establish some linkages between the past and the future, some congruence between inherited traditions and contemporary knowledge” (Ahmad 2000, 21). Eqbal Ahmad’s storied itinerary travels from India across the partition to Pakistan, to study in the United States, struggle with the FLN in Algeria, arrest in the U.S. anti-Vietnam war mobilization, and continued partisanship in the advocacy of considered alternatives to persistent imperial histories. Said described his friend Eqbal by paraphrasing Rudyard Kipling’s description of Kim, “a friend of the whole world” (“Cherish the Man’s Courage,” xix).

*Friends of each other, friends – and critics – of the “whole world”, Edward Said, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, and Eqbal Ahmad introduced not only one to another but the world to the critic, to paraphrase once again. According to Said, eulogizing Abu-Lughod, “[I]t was Ibrahim who introduced Arabs in America to the world of national liberation struggles and post-colonial struggles [...] He was years ahead of his time in appreciating such figures as Amilcar Cabral (Guinea Bissau) and Oliver Tambo (South Africa), in distinguishing their movements and the kind of colonialism or system they fought against, as well as finding parallels with the situation in Palestine” (“My Guru,” 2001). The AAUG volume that Abu-Lughod co-edited with Baha Abu Laban, *Settler Regimes in Africa and the Arab World* (1974), did just that and ranged from Algeria to Mozambique and South Africa – in a drastic redressing of the imperial “Cape-to-Cairo” agenda in its address to the internationally discrepant allotments of rights and wrongs. Nonetheless, nearly three decades later, mutatis mutandis, But Eqbal Ahmad admonished his readers: “The most dangerous characteristic of the current period is that a single power dominates the world militarily and dominates international institutions of peacekeeping and law without countervailing forces. That makes the current world system much more dangerous, especially for the weak and the poor, than even during the Cold War. We are in a much worse time than the Cold War” (Ahmad 93). Dark times they were. Scoundrel times they are. But the comrades remained – must remain – in arms.....*

Non-alignment, Comparative Literature, Multilateralism

“The greatest single achievement of Said,” according to Eqbal Ahmad, commenting in his conversations with David Barsamian, was to “put imperialism at the center of Western civilization” (Ahmad 39). Ahmad goes on, in almost the very same breath, to say – provocatively, to be sure: “In literary criticism and historical writing there are two times: before Orientalism and after Orientalism” (Ahmad 40). In other words, Edward Said changed drastically, dramatically, radically – but not once and for all – the ways we read, “comparatively and critically,” the ways we write, “comparatively and critically”. Indeed, Edward Said changed who “we” are, reminding us, along with Fanon and Eqbal Ahmad, of the “pitfalls of national consciousness,” and all this in anticipation of, to cite another coeval, of the meaning of a meeting at the “rendezvous of victory”.

But, before Orientalism (1978), there was Joseph Conrad: The Fiction of Autobiography (1966) and Beginnings (1975). After Orientalism, there came The Question of Palestine (1979), Covering Islam (1981), The World, the Text, and the Critic (1983), After the Last Sky (1986), Blaming the Victim ((1988), Musical Elaborations (1991), Culture and Imperialism (1993), Representations of the Intellectual (1994), The Politics of Dispossession (1994), The Pen and the Sword ((1994), Peace and Its Discontents (1996), Out of Place (1999), The End of the Peace Process (2000), Reflections on Exile (2000), Parallels and Paradoxes (2002), Freud and the Non-European (2003). The world, the text, and the critic, indeed. Edward Said’s bibliography speaks to his biography, to its historiography and to the geography of struggle that his lifework represents. In “A Window on the World,” taken from the introduction to a new edition of Orientalism on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of its original publication, Said reminded his new – and old – readers that Orientalism was – and remains – “very much a book tied to the tumultuous dynamics of contemporary history” (“A Window on the World” 2003). In 1978, that contemporary history was the Lebanese Civil War; in 2003, the occasion was – and not just for Edward Said – “surely one of the intellectual catastrophes of history,” the unilateral United States war on and subsequent occupation of Iraq, an “imperialist war confected by a small group of unelected US officials [...] waged against a devastated third world dictatorship on thoroughly ideological grounds having to do with world dominance, security control and scarce resources, but disguised for its true intent, hastened and reasoned for by orientalists who betrayed their calling as scholars” (“A Window on the World” 2003).

Remember...

In the opening paragraph of “A Window on the World,” however, that new introduction to Orientalism, Edward Said remembered: “The recent deaths of my two intellectual, political and personal mentors, the writers and activists Eqbal Ahmad and Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, has brought sadness and loss, as well as resignation and a certain will to go on” (“A Window on the World” 2004). When asked, however, by David Barsamian about his recollections of such figures that he had known or encountered, figures such as Frantz Fanon, Eqbal Ahmad replied in one case, that of Fanon: “My last thought about Fanon is, I wish he had lived” (Ahmad, 24). But then, remember, in the introduction that he wrote to Eqbal Ahmad’s interviews with Barsamian, Edward Said himself had remembered his “friend[s] of the whole world”. Memory goes both, if not many, ways, and the recollection of the past makes for the “comparative and critical ways” directed toward another future.

“Palestine,” Said wrote, again in the introduction to the Ahmad/Barsamian interviews, is a “thankless cause”. Palestine, that is, he continued, is the “cruellest, most difficult cause to uphold, not because it is unjust, but because it is just and yet dangerous to speak about [...] honestly and concretely” (“Cherish” xxviii).

But remember, now and again, “honestly and concretely,” the “comparative and critical ways” that Edward Said himself exemplified.

“Remember the solidarity here and everywhere...”

“And remember also,” Said went on, “that there is a cause to which many people have committed themselves, difficulties and terrible obstacles notwithstanding. Why? Because it is a just cause, a noble ideal, a moral quest for equality and human rights”.

Remember Edward W. Said.

QUE VIVA! comrades-in-arms, here and everywhere....

(Adapted from “Remember the Solidarity. Here and Everywhere”).

And then – from Haifa to Camden Town – and Back Again...

Ghassan Kanafani and Ruth First both died violently, at the hands of state assassins, in those erstwhile, “once-upon-a-time” days of “resistance,” non-alignment, national liberation struggle, and third world solidarity, whereas Edward Said, Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, and Eqbal Ahmad, for their part, lived another kind of violence, equally historic, just as heroic, and no less state-sponsored. Their lives, however, as much

as their deaths, must, each in turn – Ghassan, Ruth, Eqbal, Ibrahim, Edward – give us now pause, if only in a momentary memorialized anticipation of the new historical narratives that their work wrote, their lives wrought, and their legacies enable.

But...

...as Eqbal Ahmad once argued: “resistance strategies presuppose a constituency of resistance”. That said, however, he went on to ask: “how should we rehabilitate a consciousness of international solidarity among people who should have it naturally? (EA 147-8)

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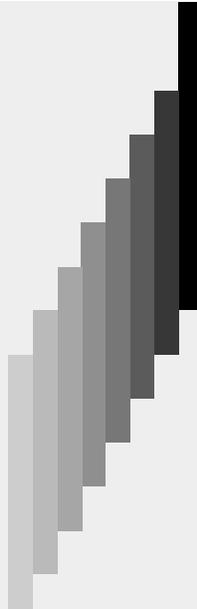
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***Karamat* Stories among Palestinians**

*Sharif Kanaana**

Introduction: Forests and Trees

This paper is presented here within the context of an international conference titled “Between the Archival forest and the Anecdotal Trees: a Multidisciplinary Approach to Palestinian History”. This is an appropriate title of the purpose of the conference and especially appropriate for allowing me to explain the idea behind choosing to talk about *karamat*. *Karamat* are narratives, and thus belong to the “trees” and not the “forest”. Fifty or a hundred – leave alone a thousand – years from now the forest will still be there and will still be intact: the individual trees will have been long gone and replaced by new trees of different species or genres.

Almost every university, institution, NGO, or political party in Israel or Palestine keeps its own archives. The same is true of many Palestinian and Jewish communities in the two diasporas and in many other communities around the world. What such archives usually collect and preserve is usually names, dates, and numbers of leaders, politicians, meetings, conferences, battles, massacres, atrocities, casualties in addition to speeches, announcements, statements, agreements and other official documents. Preserved will be a whole forest, if not a jungle. From this kind of material, a traditional history of

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famous men and famous battles will be easy to write. But imagine someone trying, a hundred years from now, to answer questions about the social problems, the psychological state, the affective mood, the cognitive world view of the Palestinians during the first decade of the 21st century, not much of this will be available in the archives. The folk narrative and the anecdotes, or the individual trees, as we said before, will be long gone and the new trees which will have replaced them many times over will not be able to give answers to these questions. Short narratives such as jokes, legends, folk metaphors and rumors respond very fast to social, psychological and political changes and, therefore, also disappear very fast unless they are captured at the proper moment. This is exactly what I am trying to do by capturing and recording what I generally call the political folklore of the Palestinian struggle, especially that of the two *Intifadas*. This kind of data from the Palestinian society up 1978 has been almost completely lost.

What Kind of Trees?

This paper is only a preliminary report from a large research project which includes several thousand narratives about *shuhada* (sing. *shahid*) during the last 16 years starting only a few days after the beginning of the first *Intifada*, late November 1987. Some of this data was collected by students who took folklore courses with me. Other data was collected by friends and student volunteers, but I collected the majority.

Some of these narratives include *karamat*, which I will explain shortly, and some do not. This paper will deal with those which involved *karamat*.

A complete analysis would involve inspecting each narrative and coding it for themes and characteristics of interest or relevance to my main research questions and hypotheses, then analyzing the coded material statistically, and finally doing a qualitative cultural and ethnographic analysis and using it to shed light on the quantitative results.

The report is based on the inspection of about a hundred stories which I have managed to code. Any conclusions or generalizations I make in this paper are, therefore, speculative and tentative.

Since *karamah* (plural – *karamat*), as we have just mentioned, is our main concern in this paper, then the question should be asked: what is a *karamah*?

This term, *karamah*, however, is an Arabic term which does not really lend itself to translation to any other language because it refers to a technical, religious concept and is strongly implicated with a whole network of religious and cultural values, beliefs and practices which do not have exact counterparts in religions and cultures other than the Arabic-Islamic tradition. In particular, it is deeply implicated and strongly associated with two other Arabic-Islamic terms namely *shahid* and *jihad*. These terms, thus, should be explained rather than translated.

But before the reader loses patience, let me translate these three terms: *karameh*, *shahid* and *jihad* loosely into “miracle”, “martyr”, and “holy war” consecutively and proceed to give the reader just a little taste of the religious and cultural, technical and connotational implications of each term, which should allow the reader to appreciate the difference between the Arabic and the English terms given above.

Genealogical Roots of Related Trees

To start with, although these terms are presently used to describe things that are happening on the Palestinian scene on a daily basis, yet the affective and cognitive structures to which they appeal and from which they derive their plausibility and believability are derived from the long religious and cultural traditions of the Arab-Islamic tradition which goes back to the early part of the 7th century AD and in some ways to much earlier pre-Islamic roots.

So far we have suggested that the three concepts, *karameh*, *shahid*, and *jihad* are genetically related and functionally connected. Let us now try to explicate that relationship.

We have translated the concept *karameh* loosely as “miracle,” but not every miracle is a *karameh*; the miracle has to be proven to be connected with or related to the death of a Muslim.

But not every miracle associated with the death of a Muslim is a *karameh*; the dead Muslim has to be deserving of a *karameh*. The main criterion for that is that the dead person has to be a holy man, a prophet, or a *shahid*. In this paper we are concerned only with a *karameh* which is associated with a *shahid*.

However, not every Muslim who is killed in fighting qualifies as a *shahid*. That has to be established or proven as judged by several criteria, most important among which is the kind of war in which the person is killed – the war must qualify as *jihad*.

But not every war fought by Muslims, not even if fought against non-Muslims or even against heathens, qualifies as *jihad*. This has to be established according to several criteria, the most important of which are the motives behind the war.

Thus, a true *karameh* is connected only with a true *shahid* who dies in a true *jihad*. The emphasis here is on true. Let us, then, see how this truth can be established in each case. Since the truth of the *jihad* is conditional to the truth of *shahadeh* (act of becoming a *shahid*) which is in turn conditional to the truth of the *karameh*, we should start with the rock bottom of this triad, *jihad*, followed by the second layer of *shahadeh*, up to the top layer of *karameh*. It should be understood, however, that our discussion here oversimplifies these issues since Muslim scholars have written thousands of volumes on the subject, not to mention non-Muslim sources written in languages other than Arabic.

Jihad: To the West, this term has become a synonym for “terrorism”. This, as we will see, is clearly a misunderstanding and misrepresentation resulting from ignorance of the true teachings of Islam on the one hand and equating what some Muslims do with the principle of the religion itself on the other. There may yet be other reasons such as intentional misrepresentation due to hostility, hatred and bad intentions.

According to qualified Muslim scholars, two main criteria determine whether a war in which Muslims are involved qualifies as *jihad* or not. The first criterion is that the war has to be, from the Muslim side, defensive; it cannot be offensive or vengeful. To be *jihad*, a war cannot be motivated by hatred or greed; it has to come only in response to war waged on Muslims by their enemies.

The second criterion for a war to be accepted as *jihad* is that it should be “*fee sabil Allah*” literally “in the way of Allah,” that is, it has to serve God’s will, which is interpreted to mean that Muslims should be fighting to defend the Muslim religion, its teachings, its rules, its beliefs, its prohibitions, and all that the religions includes and implies. Defending Islam has been elaborated and expanded by Muslim scholars to include defending and protecting Muslims and their homes, lands, property, freedom, honor, and their bodily safety, assuming that the purpose of the war is to defend and protect that which belongs to Muslims and not to destroy what belongs to the other.

Shahid: A *shahid* is a Muslim who dies in a true *jihad*, which means while fulfilling the goals and abiding by the rules of *Jihad*. Thus, a Muslim who dies while participating in true *jihad* would not qualify as a *shahid* if he/she is inspired by motives other than serving the will of God as we have just explained. These unacceptable motives include personal motives of hatred, greed, competition, glory, showing off, or proving their courage or piousness. Most Muslim authorities would even exclude those who may have wanted to die in *jihad* in order to enter Heaven. A true mujahid (participant in *jihad*) goes into battle not intending to kill or be killed but to serve the will of God. Only such a mujahid would qualify as a *shahid*.

Karamah: A *karamah*, for the purpose of this paper, is a supernatural or extraordinary phenomenon which God chooses to manifest through, or in association with, a *shahid* as a sign of God’s approval and acceptance of the authenticity of the *shahadeh* and of the sacrifice made by the *shahid*; it qualifies him beyond any doubt as a true *shahid* deserving of all the rights, benefits and privileges thereof.

However, not all supernatural or out-of-the-ordinary manifestations associated with a true *shahid* in true *jihad* are necessarily *karamat*, because such manifestations could have been concocted by magic or by the Devil to mislead people. The basic criterion for distinguishing a true *karamah* from a fake one is to judge it according to its effect. If in any way it leads or attempts to lead to evil, bad, indecent, or immoral deeds or those prohibited by religion in any other way, then it is not a true *karamah*; it is fake.

The Trees (the Narratives)

Whenever I talk about *karamat*, people often ask me, “Are all Palestinian *karamat* authentic? Do you really believe in them?” In my research I am not actually interested in the *karamat* themselves. I am interested in the narrative, in the *karamat* stories which circulate among Palestinians and which many Palestinians find plausible or believable enough to take seriously, exchange, transmit, and discuss.

I am not, therefore, going to discuss the truth-value of these narratives. Nor am I going to discuss the degree to which I personally believe or disbelieve them. I am simply going to look at them as folk narratives and apply to them the kind of analysis used by folklorists for the study of one narrative genre, namely, the genre known as “contemporary legend” or “urban legend”. I will not discuss the religious aspect of these narratives, which I am not qualified to do anyhow, but to explore some of their social, psychological, and political implications. Here are a few such narratives which I picked out randomly from my collection of *karamat* narratives.

1. The mother, wife and sister of a *shahid* called Anwar went to take a last look at him and say their last goodbyes. His body was in the freezer at the hospital. As his mother, wife and sister were hugging his body, blood got on their clothes. When they left the hospital, a strong fragrance of musk spread out from the blood and filled the air around them.
2. Jaafar Rihan, the brother of the two *shahids*, Mohammad and Assam Rihan, from the village of Tell, southwest of Nablus, went to reopen their grave in preparation for building a monument on the grave, about a hundred days after their *shahadeh*. He and the other people who were with him were surprised, when they lifted the slab of rock which covered the bodies, by the strong smell of musk coming from their bodies. The brother of the two *shahids* says that there was something even more amazing, which was that when he touched their blood, he found it still warm, and their faces were like sleeping bridegrooms, to the point that he actually thought of waking them up. Jaafar further added that he saw sweat on their foreheads and wiped it off with his hand, much to the astonishment of those who were around him. Even more amazing, and this goes to confirm that it was a *karamah*, was that the beards of the two *shahids* had grown longer than they had been. This made people praise God and thank Him for this *karamah*.
3. This was the first *shahid* of her children. It was in 1988, and he was 17 years old. His mother says that he had been religious, performing all of his religious duties. He was obedient to his parents and gentle. He went to school and treated all respectfully. One day a large number of young men were throwing rocks at the Israeli occupation soldiers. The soldiers responded by firing in their direction.

Nidal, together with the other young men ran away, but the soldiers shot him while he was trying to climb a high wall to escape, which resulted in his *shahadeh*. At the moment of his shahadah, several white doves came to him, and a child of about four years saw the doves drinking from his blood. When she saw that, she was frightened and ran to her mother to tell her what she had seen, and the parents came and saw what the child had seen. The doves remained with the *shahid* wherever he was taken, and when they buried him, the doves continued to circle around their heads. Also those who participated in the funeral later said that strong lights were shining from the street where the *shahadeh* took place.

These are three examples intended to give an idea of what a *karamah* narrative looks like. Even from this very small sample it is easy to see that it belongs to the contemporary legend genre and is closest to the sub-genre of the saint legend. Technically, there are no saint legends among Muslims, simply because there is no such thing as a saint in the Muslim religion. However, legends about prophets and holy men exist and are very similar to saint legends among Christians. Such legends among Muslims are also called *karamat*.

The narratives we are concerned with in this paper, of which we have looked at a sample of three, are all related to Palestinian resistance to occupation, especially to the uprisings known as *Intifadas*. The situation which produced these narratives is specific to the Palestinians during the last 15 years. The types of *karamat* narratives resulting from this situation are, however, neither new nor unique to present day Palestinians. The earliest known case of the term *shahid* in an idiomatic Muslim – rather than linguistic – way was by the Prophet Mohammed in the year 6132 AD when he was preparing for his first battle with the heathens of Mecca one year after the Hijra when he escaped with a few followers from his hometown Mecca to Medina. That battle was known as *Badr*. During the preparation for Badr the Prophet promised to those who joined him that should they be killed in battle they would be shuhada and would be guaranteed to enter Heaven. The very next year after Badr, during the second battle known as Uhud, the Prophet talked about *karamat* being granted by Allah to the shuhadah of that battle. Again, this was the first time ever that this term was used in a special Islamic sense. (The root of the word means literally “to witness”.) Since that day Muslims have become involved in a large number of wars that have produced a large number of shuhada, some of whom manifested *karamat*. A large number of *karamat* have been recorded and passed on from generation to generation of Muslims for the last 14 centuries both in writing and in oral tradition. The one war that produced the most *karamat* stories known to Palestinians and which seems to have captured the imagination of Palestinians and influenced their own narratives was that of the Afghan *mujahidin* in their struggle against the occupying Russian forces in the Seventies and Eighties of the last century. These were especially popularized among Palestinians through a small book of Afghani

karamat by Sheikh Abdullah Azzam, a Palestinian who taught for a while at Amman University before joining the Afghan *Mujahidin*. Palestinian *karamat* narratives have a strong resemblance to those of earlier Muslim wars including the Crusades and the early Islamic conquest, and all of them derive ultimately from battles in which the Prophet himself participated in the early days of Islam.

Kinds of Miracles

It is clear from the discussion so far that not all miracles are *karamat*, but that every *karamah* must have a miraculous aspect about it. Based on the inspection and impressionistic analysis – but not a proper statistical analysis – of about a hundred *karamat* narratives, I will give here a list of the types of miracles that occur in this and all of them derive ultimately from, and all. sample, starting from the most and continuing to the least frequent:

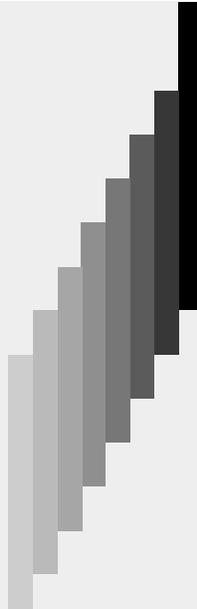
- ◆ The smell of perfume, often musk, emanating from the body of the *shahid*.
- ◆ The body does not decompose after death.
- ◆ Continuing to show signs of life after death, especially movement of fingers or hands, growth of hair, and continuing to look normal or even healthy for months or years after death.
- ◆ Responding with a smile to the presence of loved ones, especially mothers, sisters and wives.
- ◆ A bright light shining from the *shahid*'s face, body, grave or surrounding areas.
- ◆ Appearance of a word or a phrase with the *shahid*'s blood on his body, clothes or bedding.
- ◆ Knowing specific details about the circumstances of his own death ahead of time and informing someone about them before his death.
- ◆ Appearing to some loved one, especially the mother, in a dream and giving information which turns out to be true and exact in real life.
- ◆ Appearance of birds, especially white doves, above the funeral procession or in the vicinity of the grave.
- ◆ Someone, especially the mother, having an intuitive or instinctive feeling about the approaching death of the *shahid* which turns out to be exact to the smallest detail.
- ◆ A wide variety of infrequent manifestations

- ◆ Appearance of birds, especially white doves the funeral procession or in the vicinity of the grave.
- ◆ Someone, especially the mother, having an intuitive feeling about the approaching death of the *shahid* which turns out to be exact to the smallest details.
- ◆ A wide variety of infrequent manifestations.

A gain, derived from the same data and in the same manner, here are some of the most often mentioned qualities of the *shahid* in his life. In other words, this is a sort of a profile of the young man who, Palestinians seems to think, if he becomes a *shahid*, deserves to be honored by God with a *karameh*:

- ◆ Between 17 and 25 years of age.
- ◆ Wishes and expects to become a *shahid*.
- ◆ Has a strong, warm relationship with his mother.
- ◆ Has a cool, even strained relationship with his father, but is obedient to the father.
- ◆ Kindest, among the brothers, toward the sisters.
- ◆ Well liked by everyone in the community.
- ◆ Religious.
- ◆ Quiet and well mannered.
- ◆ Outstanding among his peers in every way including school.
- ◆ Seems always to be busy and in a hurry and does not bother about petty things.
- ◆ Active in politics and resistance movements.
- ◆ Comes from a poor family, most frequently from a refugee camp.
- ◆ Spent several years in Israeli prisons and a desire to take revenge for it.
- ◆ Has strong convictions and talks and behave accordingly.

Finally, this has been a comprehensive, but somewhat cursory treatment of the topic of *karamat*. The paper dealt with many aspects of the *karameh* including its significance for oral history and social sciences, its idiomatic meaning, its interconnection with the related idiomatic concepts of *shahid* and *jihad*, and its history and evolution since the early days of Islam. The paper also gave a small sample of *karameh* stories and a list of the miracles which appear most often in *karameh* stories along with a list of the characteristics of the *shahid*. I hope to return, with a more thorough treatment, to some of these topics in a future work once the analysis of my full data has been completed.



Dramas of Youth: The Intifada Generation and Its Secret Memories

*John Collins**

“I remember myself running, always running.... Always I remember running and moving [across] the roofs . . . [even now] I can’t go slowly in the streets, even when I’m not throwing stones”. Thus replied Hassan, a member of the “Intifada generation” (*jil al-intifâda*), when I asked him to describe his memories of the first Intifada.¹ During the first half of 1997, I conducted interviews with two-dozen Palestinians between the ages of 18 and 27, the vast majority in Balata Refugee Camp, as part of a project on

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¹ Throughout this paper, the term “Intifada” refers to the popular uprising that began in late 1987 and lasted into the early 1990s. In accordance with assurances given at the time of the interviews, I am using pseudonyms for all Palestinians I interviewed during my field research. With a few exceptions, these interviews were conducted in Arabic with the assistance of three extremely able interpreters (Mohammed Odeh, Abdul-Jabbar al-Khalili, and Muna Shikaki), each of whom left lasting marks on my work even as they helped compensate for the fact that my skills in colloquial Arabic, while useful for everyday conversation, did not enable me to conduct in-depth qualitative interviews on my own.

² Field research for this project was assisted by the MacArthur Program on Peace and International Cooperation at the University of Minnesota, and by a grant from the Joint Committee on the Near and Middle East of the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies with funds provided by the U.S. Information Agency.

the relationship between generation, nationalism, and memory in Palestine.² Following the important work of Ted Swedenburg (1995) on the 1936 uprising and using Walter Benjamin's dynamic understanding of history and memory, I used the concept of *popular memory* to guide my research. Within such a framework, to quote Benjamin, "a remembered event is infinite, because it is only a key to everything that happened before it and after it". (Benjamin 1968, 202) The context of the interviews then, is important: in this case, they took place at a time when the Intifada was passing firmly into the realm of memory, when the promises of the nationalist movement seemed to be receding further into the future, and when the failures of Oslo were becoming glaringly obvious—in short, a time of profound national uncertainty.

Among historians who work with issues of popular memory or more generally, with oral sources, it is most common to solicit testimony either from individuals who have passed well into adulthood or, more commonly, from those who are even older and who are consequently able to reflect back on their youth from the perspective of a full lifetime of accumulated experience. Yet, there is nothing inherent in the concept of memory that requires such a limitation; on the contrary, if we begin from Luisa Passerini's (1996, 23) simple but vital premise that "memory speaks from today," no matter who is doing the remembering, then, we must recognize that even the relatively young are capable of developing and articulating an historical perspective on the events of their youth. Hassan, who spoke about his memories of "always running," also told me that the Intifada was a "unique stage" of his life and a "suitable time" to be an activist for, in his words, "at that time I was young and full of energy". Thus, he identifies, eloquently and explicitly, what Karl Mannheim (1952) calls the "drama of [his] youth," a drama that has undoubtedly marked him for life as a member of the "Intifada generation".

In the self-representations of young Balata residents, the mutual articulation of generational and national discourses is revealed in the attempts of the narrators to *locate*, in a spatial sense, this collective drama. After I had done a number of interviews, I began to notice the frequency with which descriptions of Intifada experiences remained tied to certain key sites, including home, prison, school and the streets. Given the vast array of repressive spatial practices through which the Israeli occupation is enacted on a daily basis, the politicization of the spaces that are so prominent in young people's narratives is a product not only of Palestinian anticolonial resistance, but also of the colonial policies themselves, which assured that virtually any location could become a site of struggle between occupier and occupied. For young people involved in the Intifada, however, claiming particular spaces for political activity was about more than confronting the Israelis; it was also a way of negotiating the rapidly shifting politics of generation. After all, children and youth are generally subject to at least two major authorities—adults and the State—and the fact that these two structures of power are not coincident, and often

not complementary, can leave young people with a certain amount of leverage. Social movements such as the Intifada, or the 1976 Soweto uprising in South Africa, represent cases in which young people succeed not only in claiming a kind of political authority vis-à-vis the State, but also in chipping away at the control typically exercised by their parents, teachers, and other adult authority figures. Generational hierarchies are typically anchored in the family; in terms of space, then, it is the home that must be either redefined or transcended in some way if young people are to play an active role in such a movement. Here, however, we must take into account Passerini's reminder that "memory speaks from today," for in Balata, I found that memories related to the challenging of generational authority within the family and the home were gradually being recast, depersonalized, even filtered out altogether as individual experiences continued to mingle with a changing social and political landscape. This process, in turn, was profoundly affecting the ways in which young people conceptualized and assessed the very idea of generational hierarchy.

In this paper, I explore narratives rooted in two general locations: the home and the streets.³ In keeping with the fundamental tenets of popular memory research, I treat these narratives less as documents assumed to bear an unassailable truth-value than as creative constructions of the past told in particular circumstances for particular reasons, which are not always self-evident, even to the teller. In short, I approach these narratives as narratives and not (or not primarily) as evidence.

Home Stories: Doors, Rooftops and Secrets

Most interviewees were not inclined to point to their own home environment as a primary site of political awakening. Yet, when discussing the Intifada, many were also quick to offer stories concerning memorable, sometimes traumatic events that occurred inside the home, particularly the violation of domestic space by Israeli soldiers. Taken together, these stories speak to the encroachment of State harassment and political violence into areas previously considered comparatively safe havens.⁴ They also signify the recollection of events that were undeniably formative in a political sense for the young people who experienced or heard about them.

Home stories often called attention to what Allen Feldman (1991) calls "interfaces" dividing the house from the world outside or, alternately, enabling passage between

³ A more extended version of this discussion, including prison and school stories, can be found in my forthcoming book (Collins 2004).

⁴ Allen Feldman (1991, 41) refers to this process, which has profound implications for the development of oppositional consciousness, as the "deterritorialization of the sanctuary".

the domestic and public spheres. I think that it is useful to conceptualize these “interfaces” as sites of everyday struggle along multiple axes of power: between Israeli soldiers and Palestinians in general, between soldiers and young activists in particular, and also between these young people and their parents. For example, the rooftops of houses held the potential to serve the interests of more than one party, depending on the situation, the location of the house, and the degree to which one could occupy the roof while remaining hidden from the view of those in the street below. For young people in particular, the meaning of the rooftop depended on the degree of one’s participation in the Intifada’s most confrontational activities. Several interviewees described going up to the roof as an intermediate step between the house and the street, a way of establishing some control over the terms governing their encounters with both repression and resistance. Leila for instance, used to spy on soldiers from the rooftop while Hussein recalls how he went up to the roof during the first days of the Intifada because his father prevented him from going out into the streets.

Many narratives were also punctuated with references to doors, the primary “interfaces” controlling access to the house. The memory of soldiers beating on the door at all hours of the day and night, for example, appeared in a number of interviews. The frequency with which I heard such stories says a great deal about the encroaching power of the occupation, and also testifies to the existence of certain widely employed narrative devices through which Intifada stories are commonly constructed. In this case, the percussive image of unwanted pounding at the door acts as a kind of signal not only in the story itself, but also in the telling of the story, announcing a narrative rooted in the relative powerlessness of those whose home is invaded.

Nonetheless, doors face in two directions and in other stories, doors emerge as highly flexible signifiers marking not the absence of power, but its *production* through a variety of everyday practices, as when parents would lock the doors to prevent their children from going outside, or when camp residents would keep their doors open in case a *shab* (young man) on the run needed sanctuary. To the extent that rooftops and doors occupy important, often pivotal locations in these narratives, they do so as signifiers of situations in which young people discover the possibilities and limits of their own agency vis-à-vis Israeli soldiers. Equally important however, is the fact that the appearance of these “interfaces” in personal stories also coincides with processes of negotiation between parents and children. Given that the parents are generally the ones who decide whether to lock or unlock the doors, their place in such stories is obviously a complicated one. It is not surprising then, to find that young people tend to remember themselves as alternately being required by their parents to stay *behind* doors and being dragged out of them by soldiers, thus connecting these points of entry and exit not only with the exercise of parental authority, but also with its erosion or absence.

In my interviews, I tried to encourage reflection on the complex question of generational authority in a number of ways: by asking how parents reacted to the presence of Israeli soldiers in their homes, particularly when their children were threatened with arrest; by pursuing issues related to parent-child conflicts, as well as attempts to resolve them; and by inquiring as to how much parents knew or did not know about their children's activities in the uprising. In addition, I often asked young people to step back from their own stories to assess how generational dynamics may have changed during the Intifada and to speculate about the desirability and permanence of such changes.

In analytical terms, the resulting disjunctures that often appeared between personal memories and more abstract characterizations proved to be a fruitful terrain for understanding the intertwining of generational identities and hierarchies on the one hand, and processes of individual and collective memory-formation on the other. For example, many young people expressed a sense of ambivalence about their parents' willingness or ability to engage in effective acts of political resistance, citing cases in which fathers were exposed as powerless in the face of soldiers. Despite telling stories of parental weakness, however, most of these young people seemed to acknowledge, at least implicitly, the authority of their parents within the home and the inadvisability of challenging that authority directly. As a result, their stories contain a number of references to actions designed to circumvent parental authority, either by leaving the physical space of the house, or by deliberately keeping secrets regarding dangerous political activities. In the former case, there were ample opportunities for young people to find spaces away from their parents where the authority of age was weaker, or even nonexistent. For some, the sheer amount of time spent in these non-domestic sites completely transformed their daily life, perhaps most drastically in the case of fugitives who were unable even to sleep at home for fear of being captured or killed; consequently, being at home became the exception, and parents had to adjust to this new situation and realize that the rules of the game were changing. Nevertheless, for many younger children, the very act of leaving the house without permission, even once, was a significant and memorable event.

For young people who were constantly out of the house because of their involvement in Intifada activities, but who also had reason to worry about their parents' approval, subterfuge was often an option. Therefore, several narratives rely on themes of secrecy and covert disobedience, with moments of revelation—when secrets are exposed—figuring prominently as potential crisis points, or turning points, in the relationship between parents and children.⁵ In this case, secrecy occupies a complex location on

⁵ “In a colonized culture, secrecy is an assertion of identity and of symbolic capital,” writes Feldman (1991, 11). “Pushed to the margins, subaltern groups construct their own margins as fragile insulations from the ‘center.’ Secrecy is the creation of centers in peripheries deprived of stable anchorages”.

the protean border between national and generational identities, with young people pushing the margins of parental authority even as they moved towards the center of national political life. Qassem, a Hamas supporter, admits that before being detained, he used to keep his parents in the dark about his activities; consequently, when his initial day in court arrived, his parents were “surprised” and “angry” upon hearing the charges against him. Similarly, Leila recalls how she would secretly take part in Intifada activities and tell her mother only afterwards, knowing that her mother’s disapproval would be muted by her relief that Leila was safely home.

The issue of secrecy figures most centrally in the self-representation of Ayman, a young Fateh activist. During the first of our three interviews, Ayman’s father and one of his uncles came in for part of the conversation, and Ayman was generally cautious in his answers to my questions, making only brief reference (when older relatives were momentarily out of the room) to differences of opinion he had had with his father. In the second interview however, no adults from the family were present. Then, Ayman spoke at length about his continuing attempts both to keep his political activities secret and when necessary, to convince his parents of his need to be involved in those activities, which included organizing other students in his school and participating in street clashes with Israeli soldiers beginning in 1992, when he was in the seventh grade. He said that secrecy was often essential during the Intifada partly because of the presence of collaborators in the camp, but also because parents were so anxious to “protect” their children. When I asked him how his own attempts at secrecy might have colored his relationship with his parents, he reminded me, in effect, that the beauty of secrecy lay in the possibility of preserving a space for him to engage in resistance activities while allowing his parents to remain content in their ignorance of what he was doing. “Even now,” he said, “they don’t know about a lot of my activities”. In general, Ayman attempts to walk a fine line when speaking of his parents, admitting that even at the age of 11 or 12 he used to disobey the “orders” his father gave him, but also insisting that he has always “respected” his father “completely” regardless of the serious disagreements they may have had. To put it another way, he portrays himself as a loyal, active nationalist who has also tried his best, in his short life, to be a good son. The issue of generation thus permeates the entire narrative, opening up numerous possibilities in terms of emergent political and social identities even as it enables the narrator to smooth over any potential contradictions between patriarchal and nationalist ideologies and the expected behaviors embedded in them.

Other young people I interviewed tended to downplay any elements of generational upheaval or rebellion within their own family when discussing the Intifada. At the same time, however, when offering broad-brush assessments of the Intifada and its social dynamics, these same young people quite often asserted that the “Intifada generation”—that is, people their own age—essentially ran the show during the uprising, achieving levels of authority typically reserved for adults. This lack of

congruity between the personal and the general, I would argue, has much to do with the process of memory itself. As the Intifada passes more and more firmly into the realm of what is historical, these young people are increasingly inclined to take a more sympathetic view of their parents and more generally, to de-emphasize elements of internal social conflict. Furthermore, in their memories of this formative period, they have compartmentalized the social world in a number of ways. Most importantly for our discussion here, their narratives mark the home as a fundamentally separate space where different rules and expectations apply. Despite the fact that the same primary antagonists—Israeli soldiers—populate stories rooted both inside and outside the home, it seems that the possibility of strongly resisting soldiers in the home was mitigated by the operation of parental authority.

Streert Stories: Producing “Youthful Veterans”

In my book, I discuss street stories in conjunction with school stories. At first glance, this may seem a bit incongruous; after all, are schools not designed in part to keep young people *off* the street and out of trouble? During the Intifada however, the physical and experiential boundaries separating school from street became much more porous, to the point where either space could easily function as an extension of the other. Like the prison, schools and streets appear in young people’s narratives as spaces of political awakening and mobilization and thus, as spaces for the creation of political agency. At the same time nevertheless, school and street memories are marked by a number of significant differences with important implications for our understanding of the relationship between generation, narrative, and nationalism. In remembrances of the prisons and detention centers, for example, agency derives from the “shrinkage” of space, leaving prisoners able to act collectively and decisively on an admittedly limited range of issues. By contrast, in school and street stories, agency is produced when young people expand and transform a much more elastic and public space, thereby maximizing their ability to affect the wider political situation. With respect to the issue of generation, whereas the particular situation prisoners faced necessitated a kind of determined intergenerational cooperation in the interest of self-imposed unity and discipline, schools and streets provided an opportunity for young people to try out certain “adult” roles, even if this meant challenging teachers, school administrators, and other authority figures. As a result, these spaces essentially became testing grounds not only for new strategies of resistance, but also for new identities forged within a particularly fluid political context.

In the narratives I recorded, school and street appear not as entirely distinct spaces, but rather as overlapping elements in a larger, highly integrated political field in which young people, along with Israeli troops, were the primary actors.

Like the narrator in Ghassan Kanafani's story "The Child Goes to the Camp," a man who recalls the "drama" of his youth in the years after 1948 by repeatedly reminding the reader that "it was a time of hostilities" (Kanafani 1984), these young people speak of the Intifada as a time when school and street, in effect, were forced to invade each other. In their stories, one gets a sense of how this collapsing of boundaries helped democratize a political subculture that had been previously open primarily to dedicated activists associated with particular factions. As mass demonstrations became a regular feature of the formal educational experience—or, in the case of school closures, an alternative to it—participation in this subculture became available by definition, to almost anyone of schoolgoing age.

The historian Colin Bundy, who wrote about the turbulent 1980s in South Africa, notes that "engagement with an authoritarian state engenders a political precocity, produces youthful veterans" (Bundy 1987, 321). According to Bundy, youth activists in Cape Town—also taking advantage of schools as key organizational sites—learned and practiced a kind of "street sociology" and "pavement politics" during this period. Likewise for members of the "Intifada generation," it was the streets, more than any other location, that constituted the primary canvas on which to fashion a new culture of insurgency through a variety of practices whose seemingly quotidian nature, derived from their sheer repetition and the duration of the uprising, often belied the danger associated with them. During the course of a typical Intifada day, a young Balata resident might engage in any number of such practices, many of which became signature elements of the resistance movement. It should be noted that though none of these activities were restricted to young people, it was the young who generally possessed the requisite qualities necessary to carry them out on a mass basis: surplus time, physical stamina, and a knowledge of the streets that allowed them, for example, to disappear easily and move quickly between houses.⁶ In facing the Israeli occupation forces then, they were "defending their own territory," as psychologist Eyad Sarraj put it to me during a discussion of why so many young people were willing to risk their lives during the Intifada. Younger interviewees said much the same thing, regularly emphasizing the special relationship that refugee camp children, in particular, have with streets that function not only as thoroughfare and marketplace, but also as playground and battlefield.

⁶ In addition to facilitating the resistance movement itself, such qualities can also help foster a sense of generational consciousness. In their comparative study of youth subcultures in Britain, researchers from the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies note that young people's sense of "difference" was especially strong "when this difference was inscribed in activities and interests to which 'age,' principally, provided the passport" (Hall and Jefferson 1976, 52).

In terms of “street sociology,” the Intifada provided an opportunity for young people not only to forge stronger personal ties with one another, but also to discover the potential limitations of generational solidarity in the face of other, crosscutting social structures and identities such as class, gender, and political affiliation. The fact that not all young people participated in the Intifada in the same way—and that some refused to participate at all—is perhaps the most obvious indicator of these limitations. The process through which I came to interview Yousef, who identifies himself as having not taken part in the uprising, illustrates one way in which such tensions play themselves out within the “Intifada generation”. When I heard that one of the university students living in Birzeit village was from Balata camp, I immediately asked Ghassan, a student who had offered to help me arrange interviews in the Birzeit area, if we could set up a conversation with Yousef. He agreed to help facilitate the interview, but told me, in effect, that I would be wasting my time by talking with Yousef, suggesting that the latter was somehow less qualified to speak about the Intifada. The problem, of course, lay not with Yousef’s inability to provide a legitimate perspective on the issue—for he had much to say about his memories of his youth in Balata—but rather with his failure to conform to Ghassan’s idea of acceptable political behavior.

The issue of non-participation in the Intifada proved to be a difficult, but ultimately fruitful topic in a number of my interviews. On one level, direct questions about varying levels of participation by individuals and groups were generally met with defensive responses insisting that “everyone” (usually with the exception of collaborators) took part in the uprising; my presence, in other words, served as an opportunity to repair cracks in the social fabric, at least symbolically, through the determined repetition of a powerful “public narrative” (Somers and Gibson 1994) of heroic, unified national resistance. Nonetheless, that many interviewees believed this narrative to be “false” became clear at other points in the conversations, when questions of participation arose in a more indirect fashion in the context of discussions about particular social groups. Here, it was the issue of social class in general, and the potentially divisive intersection of class and generational consciousness in particular, that provoked the most open and emotional expressions of opinion concerning those viewed as non-participants.

“The rich have gotten richer and the poor have gotten poorer . . . And the Intifada was launched by the poor, in the old city and the central city, and what is that? That’s the poor area . . . A lot of the rich families just sent their children outside the country for a year or two. Meanwhile, there were probably 100 martyrs from the city center in Nablus [that is, the poorest area of the city], and the longest areas of curfew were in the city center, even longer than in the camp.” (Khaled)

“The people were brought much closer together [during the Intifada], but the rich people kept themselves far away while the rest of us were trying to help each other . . . There were some people from the upper classes who didn’t do anything, who sent their children away or even left themselves, left the country.” (Hussein)

In these two excerpts, what might be identified as a general class-based resentment of the wealthy emerges in a very specific context: in descriptions of how the children of the wealthy were able to live qualitatively different lives during the Intifada.⁷ None of these wealthier children, insists Khaled, had to take the same personal risks that he and others like him took; on the contrary, they were able to avoid the suffering of the prison and the dangers of the streets, and to continue their education outside the country in schools that were not subject to arbitrary closure. In a spatial sense, to use Hussein’s imagery, they were able to separate themselves from their own society at a time of political turmoil. Ironically, of course, the “advantages” these children enjoyed are also tied precisely to the fact that they did not experience the same processes of political awakening, in the same locations, as did poorer refugee youth such as Khaled and Hussein.

Other commentators have noted the ways in which complex social changes that accompanied the Intifada included significant, though temporary, shifts in gender relations.⁸ For young people, these changes included increased opportunities to interact with members of the opposite sex, either in the context of doing “political work” or in unplanned situations where such interaction could facilitate personal safety. Among the countless myths, legends and other stories that make up the folklore of the uprising, for example, is the story of the young man, fleeing from the army, who is given sanctuary by a woman who hides the fugitive by having him get into bed with her sleeping daughter, thoroughly fooling the soldiers who come to search the house but find only “a man sleeping with his wife”.⁹

In the memories of several young people in Balata, the interface between school and the streets was one area where the boundaries of “traditional” gender relations

⁷ See Kanaana (1990) for a useful discussion of the Intifada’s “intragroup humor,” much of which took the form of biting jokes aimed at the children of the wealthy.

⁸ Within this literature, one can trace dominant lines of analysis from euphoria and optimism through to disappointment and critical reassessment. Compare, for example, two accounts—one written early in the Intifada, the other shortly after it—written by the same authors (Giacaman and Johnson 1989, 1998). See also Abdulhadi (1998), who argues that political changes during the Intifada’s second year “directly altered gender dynamics, thus crushing Palestinian women’s hopes for liberation”.

⁹ For the full text of this story, collected in 1989 from a 20-year-old woman in Nablus, see Kanaana (1993). The story, the general outlines of which are common to a number of tales circulating in the West Bank, concludes with the young man returning to the house and asking to marry the daughter.

could be explored and tested. As 18-year-old Hussein pointed out, the separation of boys and girls in school was a potential obstacle to effective political organizing, an obstacle that some of his fellow students were able to overcome—though perhaps not, he hinted, for purely nationalist reasons. Some boys, he said laughingly, were “specialists” in acting as liaisons with the girls’ schools, eagerly volunteering to cross the gender divide in order to announce a suspension of classes or other protest activity in front of their female counterparts. While clearly labeling such actions as “wrong” with respect to norms governing gender relations, he went on to argue that coordination between leadership cadres among the male and female students was often essential, and admitted that in certain “urgent” situations, he had gone into one of the girls’ schools himself to read a statement from the Intifada leadership. In his testimony then, the question of how to characterize the interaction between boys and girls remains open, illustrating that the “political” actions of young people like himself cannot be viewed in isolation from the ever-changing norms of school culture, or from the unusual historical context in which those actions took place.

As we saw in the case of relations between parents and children, these emerging shifts in gender relations are also narrated, in part, in terms of Israeli attempts to harness Palestinian social dynamics to the process of counterinsurgency. According to Intissar, soldiers were well aware of the ways in which young men sometimes carried out political actions with a dual purpose: both to resist the occupation and to impress young women. In this light, soldiers’ humiliation of the young men in public—that is, in view of young women—could serve as a dual punishment:

I: I remember one time when my maternal cousin came from studying in Jordan. When he came, all of his friends came to the house to greet him because they hadn't seen him for a long time—he was gone for four years because of his studies. Then, the soldiers came into the house. They took all the men outside, lined them up against the wall, and made them take their clothes off. . . . I also remember when we used to go to school and the soldiers, in order to vex the students. . . they would see four or five young men walking together and say, for example, “You, come here! You, come here!” So two or three of the boys would come, and [the soldiers] would take their books and throw them on the ground, throw everything on the ground. Then, they would stand them up against the wall and beat them with their sticks. . . . And after that the boys would be really embarrassed, because there were girls and other people watching.

J: You think they did that on purpose because they knew that other students were watching?

I: [Laughing:] Yes, they were trying to do that!

Intissar's laughter—shared with Muna's, who was the interpreter for the interview—suggests that the soldiers' attempt to embarrass the boys was at least partially successful, and again indicates the operation of a youth subculture that is neither monolithic nor completely coincident with the operation of the Intifada's mass political activity.

If the “street sociology” of class, gender, and generation helped educate young people about the complexity of their own identities, the “pavement politics” of the Intifada gave them the chance to try out the micropractices of political action in the social space that arguably allowed them the greatest freedom to operate. As I have argued elsewhere (Collins 2004), the activities of young people in the streets led to the development of alarmist discourses among many adult observers (e.g. fears of young men “stoning anything that moves”) and, in the extreme, concerns about “the destruction of society”. Yet, for young people themselves, memories of actions taken in the streets take a form that is considerably less cataclysmic and more mundane, often almost matter-of-fact, focusing on the specificities of practices that became routinized during the uprising despite their dangerous nature.

I was living in the old city in Jenin. The city is divided into places—south, north, like this. We divided the city into parts, and each part is, let me say. . .some people there are young, or especially educated, and they agreed to do something, to make a demonstration. They get together, and they agree what time they have to start, and where, and how, you know, how to divide each other, where you have to stand, and something like that. . . . Sometimes we would say goodbye to each other—[because] maybe we will not see [each other again]—and that happened, you know. I remember a guy, we shook hands, he gave me something. . .and then I heard that this person was killed, but at least I saw him before dying. And we're sitting in the center of this place. . .and talking together and, you know, it's kind of to encourage each other and to be strong, to make the soldiers afraid, even [though] we are not equal—they have guns, weapons, gas, everything, you know, and we have nothing except stones and our determination. And we started, we got wheels [i.e. tires], big stones, rocks, and these kind of things, and the soldiers would come from lots of directions and start shooting and gas and it started, you know. (Hassan).

Well, I am with Hamas, so I used to work through their organization, not alone. We divided ourselves into groups, and on a given day one group would prepare for an escalation, another group would write graffiti, and others would do other actions. So whatever my group was doing, I would take part. Sometimes we would get ready for an escalation by gathering tires in the morning, and other times we would confront the army by throwing stones, or we would distribute leaflets or write graffiti. (Qassem)

I was ready to participate according to the situation, as it was necessary. For example, when someone was martyred, there would be a demonstration, and I would participate in the demonstration. If the soldiers showed up at the demonstration, I would join in throwing stones at them. Or if there was a need to write on the walls to announce something in particular, or to call for activities against the occupation, I would write on the walls with the shab?b. (Salim)

Here, we have three young men of similar age with three different relationships to the process of political action as it unfolded during the Intifada. Hassan comes closest to identifying himself as a leader of the uprising; in his stories of street actions, one gets the sense of a movement that absolutely took over his life, at least for a time. Qassem's emphasis is on his identity as a loyal Hamas activist, carrying out whatever actions were required of him by the faction that he continues to support. Salim, who among all the interviewees was the least reluctant to speak with me "on the record" despite the fact that I saw him regularly when eating at his restaurant, does not see himself as an activist per se and refuses to link himself with any particular group or faction. In each case, however, we see that the narrative architecture of their memories does not permit any artificial separation between one type of action and another; instead, memories of all of these practices flow freely into and out of one another, and the picture thus fashioned is one of a flexible, situational political culture in which one did what was "necessary," in Salim's words, according to the needs of a given time and place.

During the interviews, I struggled constantly with my desire to balance a respect for the integrity of this narrative architecture on the one hand, and the researcher's need to make admittedly artificial distinctions between various practices on the other. Perhaps inevitably, my ear was particularly open to any descriptions of street actions that suggested the weakening of generational hierarchies, the operation of generational consciousness or the possibility of social inversion. It was Hatem, a former political prisoner who had a short-lived career as a soldier under the Palestinian Authority, whose testimony shed important light on the generational dynamics of street activism, particularly with respect to the enforcing of commercial strikes. The two major Palestinian rebellions of the Twentieth Century—the 1936-39 Revolt and the Intifada—each began with a commercial strike (Tamari 1991), and scholarly accounts in each case suggest that some element of coercion was necessary to convince merchants to observe the strike. Yet, we know very little about the experiences of the shabâb (young men) generally credited with carrying out the instances of coercion that may have occurred. Hatem's testimony then, is instructive not only when placed in the context of his prison and school stories, but also as an unusual contribution to a sociological and historical literature in which young activists have been largely voiceless.

J: When the schools were closed, what did you do with all your time?

H: Well, most of the students were out in the streets of course. Any patrol that would pass by, they would throw stones at it. If there was a decision taken to close the shops, they would close the shops, or put up barricades....

J: So, it was the job of the young people to make sure that the shops were closed.

H: Right. They are the ones who are building the Intifada, the ones who were throwing stones, making sure the shops were closed, whatever. They were involved in everything. They made sure the strikes went according to the plan.

J: Would you say that those young people, like yourself, were the leaders?

H: About the leadership of the Intifada—the Intifada was collective, so the leadership wasn't just one person, or two, or three. . . . The decisions were made collectively. . . . So, whoever participated in those decisions—whether it was one, two, three, four, ten—if they agreed to abide by those decisions, they were leaders, OK? The generation was unified, so that even if one person made a decision, it could be considered a collective decision.

M: [Here Mohammed, who was the interpreter for this interview, intervenes:] Let me ask the same question again. . . . Would those young people be considered the effective, active leadership of the Intifada?

H: Yes, they were effectively the leaders—they took the decisions, and they carried them out. I mean, if a fifteen-year-old can close the shops, or make an escalation in Balata, or Nablus, or wherever, then he has to be considered a leader. And there are 100,000 more just like him.

J: Have you ever had to force any of those shopkeepers to close their shops?

H: Yes, that did happen sometimes.

J: They wanted to keep their shops open?

H: Well, at times some of them asked for an extension for a certain amount of time because of work they had to do. Sometimes, you would try to understand their situation and to give them the extra time, but sometimes you had to force them all to close. This excluded pharmacies and bakeries, of course.

J: Was that difficult? A lot of those shopowners were obviously older people—was it ever, I don't know, awkward or embarrassing for a young person to have to do that?

H: Sure, and one or two times I just left. But at the same time, these are collective decisions. . . . He didn't want the embarrassment—and it really was embarrassing. . . . [I told him] “I don't want to close everyone except for you,” and so he had to make himself understand the situation.

J: Did the soldiers ever come into the camp and try to force the shopkeepers to open the shops?

H: Sure, that happened a lot. But when it happened, the shopkeepers would respond to us, not to the soldiers.

It is worth noting that at other points during our conversations, Hatem characterized his relationships with the mukhâbarât (secret police) in prison and with the headmaster at school in terms of negotiation. Here, he remembers his days of enforcing truncated commercial hours as a time of empowerment, but also as a time marked by the need to respect the ever-changing rules governing these social interactions. On the one hand, his insistence that fifteen-year-olds had the power to shut down the commercial district of a large city suggests a powerful, symbolic inversion of generational authority. On the other hand, he is careful to stress that he and other young activists did not exercise their newfound authority as strike-enforcers arbitrarily (as he says headmasters did before the Intifada), but rather with discretion and a willingness to bend the rules when necessary.

Given the dubious, occasionally vicious reputation sometimes attached to these activists by many older observers during the Intifada—the term *shabâb* could be quite double-edged, suggesting menace as well as heroism—Hatem's description of the enforcement of commercial strikes can be read as a determined balancing act mounted in response to an existing “public narrative”. While not denying the possibility of intimidation (“sometimes you had to force them all to close”), he attempts to prove that if he and others like him acted “beyond their years” during the Intifada, they did so not as irresponsible youth, but rather, through determined efforts and collective decision-making, as the mature conscience of the nation. Khaled, a longtime Fateh supporter, makes a similarly nuanced point concerning the increasing involvement of young people in dispute resolution, a social function traditionally reserved for older men. During the Intifada, he said, the elders often ended up asking young activists for help, sometimes asking for them to use force. “Like we say, when there is no law, the only law is the law of the *shabâb*...and that's a problem,” he admits, perhaps referring to the sometimes violent score-settling that took place at various points during the uprising (Hunter 1993, Robinson 1997). Yet, the bulk of his remarks portray young people as equaling, even exceeding, the capabilities of their elders in mediating deep social conflicts. Again, we see how the rearrangement of generational authority is embedded in popular memory: the valorization of the young contains within it an implicit critique of the old.

Conclusion: The Generation Of Social Memory

The consideration of the stories of political awakening and social inversion discussed here opens oneself to both the spatialization and the generation of popular memory. To be sure, these self-representations are stories about particular places that loom large in the narrators' individual and collective memories. At the same time, they are stories told by people who see themselves as not only marked, as a generation, by their location in historical time, but also as having transcended the boundaries and social implications of age even as they tried, with some success, to break the hold of foreign occupation. In other words, they are stories that attempt to explain how it is possible to claim, as one Balata resident did, that a ten-year-old boy could be a shab (young man), or even an adult, during the Intifada; and they accomplish this explanation by insisting, through vivid illustration, that certain places and circumstances made such a transformation possible.

In bringing together the many stories examined here, as well as the social analysis embedded within them—for the young people quoted here are indeed critics as well as narrators—it is useful to imagine a sort of spatial continuum on which to plot the various sites that reappear in the narratives. On one end, we have the home, on the other, prison and the streets, with the school occupying an intermediary position. In terms of generation in the narrow, biological sense, the home for Palestinians is traditionally a place where age matters; not surprisingly, it is clear that young people recall the home as the place where they enjoyed the least amount of freedom and authority. The presence of parental control, combined with the disruptions of domestic space by Israeli soldiers, yielded memories that are often strikingly passive, narrated as if by someone physically unable to respond (Qassem: "I didn't wake up until the soldiers were right over my head. . .they told me I was under arrest"). As we move toward the other end of the spectrum, we find spaces that are both more dangerous and more productive of agency, spaces in which the loosening or transformation of generational structures is closely related to the articulation of memories highlighting negotiation, activism, and, at the extreme, the "law of the shab?b".

The generally passive character of home stories, like the insistence of so many narrators that they learned their political lessons outside the home, can be explained in terms of the continuing fusion of age (a biological category) and generation (a social category) within that space. By contrast, stories rooted in the streets suggest a decoupling of age from generation that age itself became increasingly irrelevant as an indicator of one's ability to act, to be trusted with political responsibility, and to exert authority in a variety of social situations. If these young people possess a kind of generational consciousness, they do so because they have linked their collective identity less to their age, and more to the historical experiences and memories of political action that they share. This process of separating age from generation is

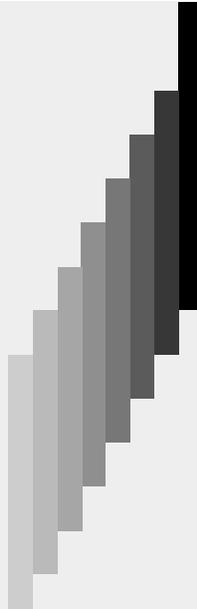
crucial for, in these self-representations, a young person could claim social and political authority to the extent that such a separation took place: a student could legitimately stop and search his headmaster's car precisely insofar as the former's age could be "forgotten" (or its significance minimized) and his "adult" status confirmed.

Then, these stories illustrate the malleability of generational identities, particularly in times of political turmoil and consequent social upheaval. Ironically, as artefacts of memory, they also testify to the fleeting nature of generational identities in another, more historical sense, for as remembered events recede into the past, the drama of one's youth, however positively and energetically it is recalled and narrated, emerges as a temporary stage (recall here Hassan's statement that "at that time I was young and full of energy"). Such a realization has far-reaching implications for the whole range of emotions and experiences associated with this drama in the first place. If the operative assumption of popular memory research is that "memory speaks from today," then we should not be surprised to find that among young Palestinians, evaluations of the Intifada are changing in response to present circumstances, with the result that the range of possible evaluations is widening. Needless to say, this includes asking critical questions about the very project for which, in their eyes, they and other members of their generation have sacrificed so much.

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The Palestinian City Reborn: the Middle Class as Historical Agent

*Lisa Taraki**

I would like to frame my presentation¹ on Palestinian urbanity around some of the issues noted in the call for papers for this conference. The first has to do with the “evidence” or “data” of the social historian, the other relates to periodization as a tool for understanding the uniqueness of different epochs in the history of the Palestinians, and another concerns the problematization of what the organizers call the “hegemonic Grand Narrative” treating Palestinians as a homogenous “nation-class”.

To begin with the last two issues first, you may have noted that the conference has been conceived around critical moments in Palestinian history, namely the 1936-1939 revolt, the Nakba, the occupation, and the two *Intifadas*. I think that this periodization in itself reflects very much the spirit of that Grand Narrative. Its focus on wars and moments of resistance eclipses other, less dramatic events, especially those where resistance or catastrophe are not the defining quality of the period. I believe that such a periodization does not give due weight to a critical historical watershed of the past decade that has had far-reaching consequences for the present. Specifically, I think that the waning of

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the first intifada, the momentum of the “peace process” in the early 1990s, and the actual installation of the Palestinian Authority by 1995 ushered in a new era in the recent history of Palestine. I am not speaking here of momentous political transformations, although these have been considerable and do form the backdrop for the developments I am interested in. Rather, I focus on the social and cultural dimensions of the process of what I call “societal normalization,” a process whereby Palestinian society is becoming “like any other” in the Arab region, a process with a seemingly inexorable logic despite setbacks occasioned by conditions of war, near-war, and siege in the current period.

Briefly, I would argue that the early years of the past decade witnessed an acceleration of embryonic trends waiting, as it were, to unfold under the right circumstances. Among these trends was the development of a bold new ethos that came in sharp conflict with the reigning and hegemonic culture of resistance of the previous two decades. The latter was a culture that valorized struggle and sacrifice, promoted a puritanical and austere social code (especially during the first intifada), downplayed social disparities, and saw in Palestinian peasant culture the main source of national identity.² The social groups key in fashioning and embracing the new counter-hegemonic ethos are the new middle strata, formed over the past three decades from diverse sources and through different avenues which I unfortunately do not have time to discuss here. I may note parenthetically here the paradoxical fact that many women and men of these new middle strata were nurtured in the culture of resistance in the seventies and eighties; today, they are among the most enthusiastic collaborators in the elaboration of its negation.

I am arguing that the emergence of this new middle class ethos is very much tied up with the unraveling of the hegemonic discourse of the national movement of the 1970s and 1980s under the weight of the Oslo process and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. It involves the deligitimization of peasant culture and peasant ways (albeit valorized in another, “modern” version or ritualistically resuscitated in moments of crisis); the normalization of rank, hierarchy, and social disparities; and the emergence of a de-radicalized “normal” politics. The new ethos also entails the enthusiastic embrace of middle class values of individual self-enhancement and involves changed individual and familial agendas and projects.

This new ethos is an urban ethos par excellence, since it is in an urban environment that it can find its fullest expression. Ramallah, not surprisingly, is the best incubator for this ethos, endowed as it is with the right kind of cultural and political capital both historically and now under the rule of the Palestinian Authority. For reasons that unfortunately I do not have time to dwell upon except very briefly, Ramallah has become in the past decade the most hospitable terrain for the elaboration of the new middle class ethos, and a focal point for the ingathering of the new middle class itself. While elements of this class are to be found in other towns and cities across the West Bank and Gaza Strip, it is in Ramallah that the new middle class is constructing itself as a social category conscious of itself in

relation to other social groups and is discovering the most accommodating terrain for the realization of its social agenda and strategic vision. Thus, a considerable wave of immigration of this class (or would-be class) has been taking place in recent years.

To summarize thus far, I would argue that Palestine is witnessing, after more than half a century, the rebirth of the modern city, not in Jerusalem or Nablus or Hebron, the larger and older Palestinian cities, but in a peripheral town which until the beginning of the twentieth century was indistinguishable from the many villages in its environs. In many ways, Ramallah is reproducing, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, some of the same features of the modernity of the coastal cities and Jerusalem at the beginning of the twentieth century before they were aborted by war and occupation.³

I also argue that what is happening in Palestine is a local instance of transformations underway in the major cities of the Arab world, from Beirut to Cairo, from Tunis to Amman. The most salient of these is the articulation of a new, globalized and modernist urban middle class ethos that is shaped in the metropolitan centers of the Arab world and then radiated to the farthest reaches of the region. While other classes and groups also define the Arab city today (particularly the masses of the poor, those whose abject poverty is conflated with contemporary urbanization in the discourse of “development” theory and practice), the middle class, in my opinion, is a key agent in the construction of the other face of the Arab city, the face that wants to become the showcase of Arab modernity as conceived by governments, city planners, and intellectuals.

The new urban middle class in the Arab world is caught up in the currents emanating from the unraveling, if not demise, of the post-colonial nationalist project. The decline in the quality of public education and guaranteed employment, and the withdrawal of state support for public services, have rendered precarious the lives of millions of citizens. While the poor eke out a living on the margins of the formal and informal economies and cannot imagine better lives, the aspiring middle classes have discovered that in today’s world social mobility cannot be realized without the acquisition of the proper tools (foreign languages, marketable skills in the global economy, and the right kind of tastes and dispositions). Thus, their grand strategy is necessarily a privatized one, a relentless search for social distinction and the determined pursuit of new avenues for social mobility. This ethos, a hybrid construct crafted by the new urban middle classes in the age of globalization and the demise of the post-independence nationalist project, encompasses a new consciousness of self, family life, and family futures. The largely privatized life projects also entail a reconceptualization of private and public space and the relationships embedded in it. In this sense, the practices and sensibilities of the middle classes are one of the key factors in defining the public face of the modern city in the Arab world.

Finally, I would argue that it is a mark of the power of the trans-Arab middle class ethos that it has penetrated into the farthest reaches of the Arab world, and in a turbulent landscape shattered by wars, displacement, and dispossession. But the

coalescence of the momentous political events at the local level (the Oslo process and what we may call the process of societal normalization) with the general collapse of the nationalist project of the Arab nation-state and the relentless currents of globalization sweeping the Arab world constitutes the fertile ground in which the emerging urban middle class is beginning to construct itself as a social category and incubating its new life agendas and the sensibilities and practices that give it expression. City life is becoming a possibility in Palestine, more than half a century after it was aborted by war and rendered impossible by occupation.

To return to the issue of periodization and the Grand Narrative, then, it would appear that our conventional periodization, grounded as it is in the Grand Narrative, sidelines the less momentous “inter-intifada years,” a period that I think we should regard nevertheless as a significant moment in Palestinian history. It may be relevant to note at this juncture that my investigation into the process of “normalization” and the ethos of the new middle class has not always been met with enthusiasm or approval from colleagues or those with whom I have had conversations regarding my research. This in itself demonstrates, I think, a reluctance to let go of the Grand Narrative, since investigations of the sort I am initiating may be going against the grain of this narrative, and may be construed as an indictment of the national commitment or seriousness of purpose of the social groups under study. The fact that many of my interlocutors belong to this class may be another factor in the uneasiness or lack of enthusiasm with which I am sometimes confronted.

I will now turn to the first issue I raised earlier, that which concerns the materials of the social historian, the “data” on which we base our interpretations and analyses. In particular, one may ask what kinds of evidence one could bring to bear upon studying the evolution of a town and one of its social groups. I think the historiography of Palestine has come a long way in recent years with the use of an eclectic mix of sources. Our own “new historians” are not only using previously unexcavated archives, but are also making use of other kinds of documents, particularly photographs, the architectural record.⁴

memoirs, literary works, life stories, and other kinds of “oral” materials. I think that, despite the dangers inherent in using individual narratives in historical reconstruction, memoirs and other narratives are still very important in elaborating the ethos of particular social groups, especially in terms of their self-consciousness and their conception of their mission and place in history. I think that the work being done by the Institute of Jerusalem Studies (by Salim Tamari, Issam Nassar, and others) has contributed a great deal to our appreciation of the ethos of the middle and upper middle classes in Palestine’s urban modernity of the late Ottoman and mandate periods.

I think that for those interested in more recent history (or the present as history), more use could be made of ethnographic methods and textual analysis. In my study of the middle class ethos in Ramallah, I have focused particularly on what

one could call the micropractices of daily life, which is where, I think, that the ethos expresses itself best. By this I mean the cultural practices of members of this class, ranging from restaurant-going to jogging, and from music practice to internet chatting. The texts of daily life constitute another rich source of material for understanding this ethos, whether they are restaurant menus or graduation ceremony programs, car license-plate colors or newspaper advertisements. In short, we have to use a creative mix of sources, including, of course, more “hard” data of the kind provided by population or migration statistics (which incidentally I have used to great profit in trying to establish some of the hard facts about Ramallah such as its heterogenous population composition and other attributes).

I do not have time here in this short presentation to trace the history of Ramallah over the span of a century from a sleepy village to a prospective city and the “capital” of the Palestinian Authority. Even though the written history of Ramallah does not match the richness of the histories available for Jerusalem, Nablus, or Jaffa, there is enough of a written record from which to reconstruct the town’s history and the key turning points in its development during the course of the past century. Concerning the more recent history of Ramallah after 1948, we find that the more revealing sources are those written from the vantage point of the visitor or migrant taken in by the charm, openness, and tolerance of this town giving refuge to the political activist, the peasant boy-turned-student, or the budding intellectual. Murid Barghuthi, the author of *I Saw Ramallah* is obviously one of these (Barghuthi 2002), but there are many more whose memories and impressions can be used by the historian to reconstruct different periods of the town’s history.⁵

The slow crystallization of a middle class during the mandate was important in the history of Ramallah’s gradual transformation into an important regional center. Emigration, mainly to the United States, was one important source for this development, as investments by émigrés in construction, institution-building, and commercial activities began to change the face of daily life in the growing town. But the real turning point in Ramallah’s trajectory of transformation into a town with a middle class came in 1948. It may be noted that Ramallah and Gaza City (and Jerusalem to some extent) are the two Palestinian towns most affected by the war and dispossession of 1948. While Nablus and Hebron, the two largest cities in the West Bank, did receive some refugees (Nablus many more than Hebron), Ramallah in the West Bank became a city of refugees and internal migrants after 1948. But what distinguished Ramallah (and to some extent Bethlehem and Jerusalem) from other towns receiving refugees was the fact that many of these new exiles were middle class Christian refugees from the coastal towns of Jaffa, Al-Lid, and Ramla. Mostly engaged in commerce, this group of urban refugees augmented the dwindling original Christian population of Ramallah and formed the nucleus of its new middle class of petty traders, shopkeepers, government employees, teachers, and later, professionals.

By the 1950s, Ramallah had become a hybrid town of natives and refugees, people with city ways and new arrivals from villages. Even though it had lost its former Christian majority (despite the influx of Christian refugees from the coastal cities and their environs), it kept its unique Christian cast; its Christian schools, especially the Quaker-run Friends Schools, continued to attract students from other Palestinian cities and even from surrounding Arab countries. Despite some reservations by conservative Nabulsi and others concerning the open atmosphere at these schools, enough of them seem to have admired these Christian institutions for the kind of education and values being offered to send their children (even their daughters) there. The diversity and reputation for openness and tolerance of Ramallah became a factor for further heterogeneity, and the town became a magnet for those wishing to escape the oppression of villages and other towns. Small numbers of intellectuals, professionals, and political activists from other areas settled in Ramallah.⁶

One of the keys to understanding the transformation of Ramallah from a sleepy village to a vibrant small town and later a city on its way to becoming the primary urban center in the West Bank has to do with its Christian identity. It is important to note that it has been decades since Ramallah lost its Christian majority.⁷ But the original Christian identity continues to figure in representation of the city, both in terms of its self-image and its place in the national imagination. I would argue that over the years, different social groups – professionals and other white collar migrants from other towns, students coming to study at nearby Birzeit University, political activists, Christian refugees, and the dwindling population of natives – had a common interest in furthering the notion of Ramallah as a Christian town, and by association and extension, as a town tolerant of difference and diversity. Today, under the rule of the Palestinian Authority, whose major seat Ramallah has become, the Christian identity of Ramallah endures and is embodied in its relatively lax and free social atmosphere enabling the mixing of men and women, leisure activities, and a restaurant and café culture where men and women can feel comfortable in public, and where alcohol can be served.⁸

Ramallah is unique among Palestinian cities in that it does not have a hegemonic social group with historic roots in the city. This, I believe, is one of the keys to understanding its urban modernity, in sharp contrast with the more conservative cast of Nablus and the entrenched conservatism of Hebron. A good part of Ramallah's "original" families emigrated to North and South America throughout the twentieth century, making Ramallah a town that belonged to no one and thus to everyone. Since there was no hegemonic, entrenched group of town "elders" or notables in place, "strangers" and "outsiders" came to assume positions of influence in the town, especially after the 1970s and with the growing power of the hegemonic national movement. A good number of political activists of rural origins or from other towns took up residence in Ramallah, and began to wield effective political power through the growing network of national institutions such as universities, political parties, mass organizations, women's

associations, and student federations. The arrival of the Palestinian Authority in 1994 further intensified this trend. Marginalizing the town's mayor (who according to custom had to be a Christian "native" of the town), the President's Office, the Governorate, and the various security services took over the leadership of the town. This situation must be contrasted with Nablus and Hebron, where, due to the relative stability of the population and the negligible migrations into the cities, the local power structures were almost entirely local and more stable over time.

By the 1960s, Ramallah had become a town of some significance in its region, primarily as a market and administrative center, and the site of a number of educational institutions. In the period stretching from the Israeli occupation in 1967 to the arrival of the Palestinian Authority in 1995, Ramallah's status as a district center was further cemented by the presence of the West Bank military administration, courts, main hospital, public libraries, banks, and other public services. Birzeit College in the nearby village of Birzeit, which was until then a two-year institution, became a university in 1976 and expanded in the 1980s to encompass an increasingly diverse student population and faculty drawn from all parts of the West Bank and Gaza. By the 1980s, Ramallah had become more diverse, a major market center during the day for villagers from the area, a site of investment for village entrepreneurs, but also more importantly, a place drawing youth from outlying villages to demonstrations, political rallies, book fairs, voluntary work camps, and the ubiquitous annual "Palestine Week" held in local colleges and at Birzeit University.⁹ In short, and despite the fact that many of the visitors to the city and investors were from villages and thus did lend a ruralized cast to the town (Tamari 1995), the town had accumulated enough cultural capital as a site of modernity and diversity

The coming of the Palestinian Authority enhanced Ramallah's status as a central Palestinian city. The optimistic political atmosphere surrounding the Oslo agreements and the establishment of the PNA had given confidence to local and expatriate entrepreneurs to launch businesses and embark on an ambitious program of construction, most notably of modern, multi-story apartment buildings and private villa-style residences. The years after 1994 saw the initiation of several relatively large-scale private-sector investment projects in hotels, a shopping mall, a medical center and hospital, and several private radio and television stations. The proliferation of apartments for sale in multi-story housing estates went hand in hand with the emergence, for the first time, of upscale suburban areas removed and distinct from the older, more mixed, residential neighborhoods. Spatial segregation by social class and status was installed rather quickly in a town that had not hitherto witnessed strict separation of neighborhoods by class.

A further factor in the assumption of prominence by Ramallah was the intensification of Israeli policies of siege and encirclement. By the late 1990s, movement within the West Bank and between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip became increasingly difficult. Many Palestinian Authority institutions, including the President's office,

diplomatic missions, and Palestinian NGOs relocated their headquarters to Ramallah. By the year 2000, most if not all the major Jerusalem-based NGOs had established permanent offices in Ramallah. Further restrictions on movement during the second intifada since late 2000 have resulted in an influx of employees of Palestinian Authority, NGO and private sector institutions who used to live outside Ramallah. The demographic heterogeneity of Ramallah continued to expand.

The most unique feature of Ramallah after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, and the most relevant for our purposes here, is the way in which Ramallah is partaking of—primarily through its new middle class—in the evolving and dynamic hybrid trans-Arab urban middle class ethos, epitomized in the major cities of the Arab world such as Cairo, Beirut, and more proximately, Amman. This globalized and modernist urban middle class ethos has captured the imagination of the city's new middle class, and is reflected in the sensibilities, dispositions, life projects, and practices of wide sections of the urban middle strata.

I will now turn to a very brief examination of this ethos. I think it should be noted here that consumption is the principal field for the articulation of the new middle class ethos in Ramallah. Modern education, modern houses and homes, and modern tastes and skills are only some of the precious commodities sought after by the new middle class and around which a multiplicity of practices and discourses have developed. Education is possibly the most critical of these, as it is through a “modern” and globalized education that new middle class subjects hope to realize their individual and familial projects for social mobility and distinction. Consumption is also the medium through which new concepts pertaining to personhood, domestic life, parenting, and the ideal home find expression. Since there is no time to elaborate on this realm of practice and discourse in any detail here, I will focus on the place of education in the grand strategy of the new middle class.

I am conceiving of education here in the broadest possible terms. In Ramallah, there is an implicit hierarchy of schools and other sites where education for distinction can be acquired. Even private schools, which by definition exclude the poor and working class, are ranked not only in terms of their academic excellence but also by the kinds of cultural capital they have to offer. Contrary to impressions among the public, a good proportion of the children in private schools are the children of middle-ranking employees and professionals, not the children of the upper levels of the middle class.

Bourdieu (1984) has captured the psyche and disposition of the upwardly-mobile middle class in his book *Distinction* where he shows how members of this class seek to accumulate cultural capital through scholastic investments in children's education and the acquisition of signs and markers of “legitimate culture” for themselves and for their children. It is important to note that Bourdieu's rising European petit bourgeois and our aspiring new middle class individual inhabit vastly different social and cultural universes. In our case, “legitimate culture” is the hybridized culture of the trans-Arab upper middle class, a culture honed and perfected with considerable effort, diligence,

and sacrifice, and in a process fraught with tensions and contradictions. The hallmarks of this culture are the symbolic (linguistic and behavioral) and material markers of distinction, and are acquired in a multiplicity of sites such as private schools, music academies, fitness centers, resorts, and through international travel.

I would like to end with a brief discussion of the circumstances in which the new middle class finds itself today, three years into the intifada. The Palestinian critic Zakariyya Muhammad (2002), reflecting on Palestine's rebellions over the past century, warns that just as in past revolts when the countryside imposed its conservative values on the modernity of the city, the present intifada is likewise threatening the modern spirit. I believe that this fear is misplaced, at least in the context of the modernity being crafted by the middle classes of Ramallah. Ramallah in the second *Intifada* is resolutely not the Ramallah of the first. Its intellectuals, many of them the veterans of the first intifada, are fashioning a new cultural hegemony in which the old-style austerity and puritanism have no place. European and Hollywood films, plays, concerts, swimming expeditions, art exhibits, conferences and workshops crowd the weekly calendar in Ramallah, even in the most vulnerable of times. Not only that, middle class intellectuals are crafting a counter-hegemonic narrative justifying art and the pursuit of leisure as resistance and steadfastness, as sustenance to the soul in times of crisis. It would appear that we have been launched on an irrevocable trajectory, at least for the foreseeable future and barring any major catastrophes.

Understanding the nuances of the middle class ethos requires us to assemble the whole arsenal of tools available to the social scientist and the historian, from textual analysis to ethnographic inquiry and life stories. I have tried to use these diverse sources in my own investigations, which may in some way be considered an inquiry into the fragmentation of the Palestinian Grand Narrative. But of course I have not had but the briefest opportunity to convey the richness of the "data" awaiting our ears and our hearts.

Endnotes

¹ This paper is based on the author's research, begun in 2001, into the middle class ethos in the city of Ramallah. The research was partially funded by a grant from the MEAwards Program in Population and the Social Sciences, The Population Council, WANA Regional Office in Cairo. A longer version will appear in Ibrahim Elnur and Martina Rieker, eds., *Reconstruction as an Alternative Modernity: Essays on the Challenges of Rebuilding War-Torn Communities in the Middle East and North Africa*.

² One cultural critic has called this the "adoration of culture," (Muhammad 2002). In Arabic

³ There has been a heightened interest in the past few years in the sites of "high modernity" in pre-1948 Palestine, in the cities of Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Haifa. The Institute of Jerusalem Studies has been particularly instrumental in bringing to life the lost cosmopolitanism of late Ottoman and Mandate Jerusalem, through its ambitious program of publishing and scholarship. Interest has also been heightened by scholarly works, memoirs, and autobiographies published or brought to light in recent years chronicling life in pre-1948 Palestine, all pointing to the existence of a vibrant and modern urbanity among the middle and upper middle classes in these cities.

⁴ Here, one must mention Riwaq, the Center for Architectural Conservation in Ramallah.

⁵ Qura (2002) is one example.

⁶ Histories of Ramallah and other literary documents bear this out (e.g. Abu Rayya n.d.; Qaddura 1999; Shaheen 1982; Shaheen 1992; Dajani 1993; Barghuthi 1998; Qura 2002).

⁷ Figures from the 1997 census indicate that 32 percent of the city's population is Christian. The proportions for Nablus and Hebron are 0.8 and .1 percent respectively (calculated from the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics dataset from the 1997 census).

⁸ Jerusalem, Ramallah and Bethlehem are the only cities in the West Bank where alcohol is served in restaurants and sold in shops. Even in Ramallah's twin City al-Bira, a stone's throw away from Ramallah, municipal regulations prohibit the sale of alcohol.

⁹ Hammoudeh 1991 provides interesting statistics about the flow of people, capital and commodities in and out of Ramallah from the villages in the vicinity in the early 1990s.

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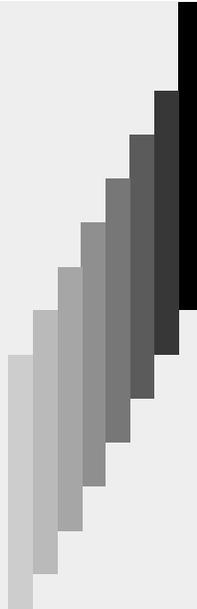
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Worshipping in Times of Crisis: Remembering the Past and Constructing the Present

*Sossie Andezian**

Does worshipping in times of social, political and moral crisis take on special significance? I will discuss this issue in light of two research projects. The first project, “The local expressions of Sufism in Algeria” (Andezian 2001) was carried out between 1980 and 1990. The other, which I started in 1999 and with which I am still engaged, is titled “The role of Christian collective rituals in memory building in Palestine since the second Intifada”. I will focus my analysis on one aspect, namely the significance of the repression of local religious rituals within the context of struggle for symbolic domination over space. My approach is anthropological, but I use historical material as well, such as archives and written material, in order to lend a historical perspective to my ethnographic data. I suggest that far from being a secondary concern in times of crisis, freedom of worship is very important, whatever the religion and the religious forms practised. The performance of religious rituals brings about stability and continuity in space and time disrupted by political and military repression. Apart from sacred texts, which remain the ultimate references for worshippers, it is the rites (i.e. a set of material operations, attitudes, gestures and prayers) that are unified over space and time by rituals and by the clergy and, having proven their efficiency, are transmitted

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through generations that make up the symbolic landmarks of their memory. Hence, the rites do not only reproduce the past, but help build the present as well.

The Settings

The Algerian setting is the city of Tlemcen, the capital of the wilâya of Tlemcen in West Algeria, in October 1990. The context is the beginning of a political crisis; the ruling party since the Independence in 1962, the FLN (National Liberation Front), has collapsed, and a religious party, the FIS (Islamic Salvation Front), a Salafi trend, is rising to power. The FIS won the local elections in Tlemcen and in most of the other parts of the country as well. The religious event/being celebrated is the *Mawlid al-Nabawi* (the Birth of the Prophet). The place in question is the shrine of Sidi Boumediene, the local patron-saint. This shrine is disputed by the worshippers that are mainly women, the local inhabitants who claim it to be a historical heritage, and members of the FIS who condemn both the practice of worshipping the dead and the fact that tourists are visiting the site.

In Palestine, the setting is the city of Bethlehem in December 2002. The context is the fact that the Israeli army is reoccupying the Autonomous Palestinian areas in order to repress the second Intifada that started in September 2000. The religious event celebrated is the Latin Christmas. The place in question is the Basilica of the Nativity, where the Patriarch makes his dakhle (entry in procession) at noon on December 24th, and officiates at the midnight mass in the presence of the President of the Palestinian Authority.

I suggest that in addition to their spiritual significance, sacred places constitute spaces for negotiating territorial identity, be it religious, cultural or political. There seems to be greater attachment to holy sites in times of crisis, when they are claimed as places for national remembrance. This was the case for the Basilica of the Nativity after the Israeli army siege of April-May 2002. Originally a goal for Christian pilgrims, an increasing number of Muslims are visiting the Basilica. More to the point, it has become a goal for Palestinians in general, regardless of religious creed, as a place for commemoration of the Palestinian resistance.

I will proceed to analyse the issues at stake in each setting for comparative purposes. I will refer mainly to the theories on memory by the French sociologist and historian Maurice Halbwachs (1950, 1952, 1971).

Sidi Boumediene: From Universal Sufi Saint to Local Patron-Saint

Abu Madyan Shu'ayb b. al-Husayn is one of the most prominent of the Sufi figures. He is the *Ghawth* and the *Qutb*, which means that he is at the top of the hierarchy of Sufi saints. His spiritual path serves as an illustration of the itinerary of Sufis

who traveled from west to east to be initiated by Sufi masters. He did not create a new *tariqa* of his own, but his teachings, a synthesis of Andalusian, North-African and Oriental Sufism, were diffused by his disciples across North Africa and eastwards. Indirectly, Ibn 'Arabi is one of his disciples since his teachers were initiated by him. Thus, within Sufism, Abu Madyan is both a universal and a regional figure (Bargès 1894; Brunschvig 1947; Dermenghem 1954).

Although Abu Madyan never lived in Tlemcen, he is still the local patron-saint. He died at the entrance of the city on his way from the Algerian town of Bejaia to Marrakech in Morocco. As he fell ill and felt his end approaching, he asked to be buried in the village of al-Eubbad on the outskirts of Tlemcen. His will was respected, and the population of Tlemcen adopted him as the new saint protector of the town in place of Sidi Dawdi. Thus, Abu Madyan became a major figure of local Sufism. A *qubba* was built over his tomb shortly after his death. A mosque, a basin for ablutions, a *hammam* and a *madrassa* were later added to the site. Leo Africanus and Ibn Battuta visited the place. Ibn Khaldun retired there and taught in the *madrassa* in 1369. Official Islam, legal Islam, Sufism and local religiosity merged at the tomb of Abu Madyan, and this reflects the reality of Islam in the western part of Algeria (Marçais 1950). His figure is representational for saint veneration and its evolution throughout the centuries in an Algeria influenced by new religious systems and ideologies. It is an example of a complex phenomenon which is not merely popular. The memory of Abu Madyan is honoured both by observant and non observant people, *fūqaha* and Sufis, literate and illiterate, men and women, young and old.

After the Independence, the entire structure was listed as a historical monument. It was in the care of both local authorities and associations for preserving historical heritage. Tourists visited it since it was one of the city's most interesting architectural monuments. The *madrassa* and the *hammam* do not work as such any more. The mosque is one of the most prestigious in the city. On week days, only people from the neighbourhood come to pray. Worshippers from the surrounding areas usually come on Fridays and feel that it is a duty to pray there at least once a year. The ruling party used it for religious gatherings. In 1982, the Women's Association of the FLN, the UNFA, organised a vigil of prayers for women in order to celebrate *Laylat al-Qadar* (The Night of Destiny), the 27th night of Ramadan, when the Qur'an is said to have descended.

The significance of the shrine of Sidi Boumediene was particularly obvious in the late 1980s – a time of political, social and moral crisis – as it became one of the important questions in the struggle for symbolic domination. Everyone projected their own interpretations on the saint. The incident that took place late September 1990, a few days before the celebration of the *Mawlid al-Nabawi*, was indicative of such a struggle; a struggle that eventually resulted in civil war. The Islamists

accused the caretaker of the shrine (*muqaddim*) of encouraging worship of the dead and of keeping the offerings from the visitor to himself. He was handled roughly and hit, and access to the shrine was prohibited. Most Tlemcenians condemned this act, and considered it an attempt to erase the town's historical heritage and one of its architectural masterpieces. The women were angered, for the shrine of Sidi Boumediene symbolised an important aspect of local female religiosity. Since the burial of the saint, his tomb has been visited by women who, apart from praying, confided all their secrets, joys and sorrows, hopes and fears, wishes and desires in him. A visit to Sidi Boumediene's shrine gave them an opportunity to go out for some fresh air. Sometimes, the women would undertake several visits, going from one shrine to another. The older women would recall outings to the saints' tombs with their children as an opportunity to go for a walk and relax. They would recount the children's joy running in the forest, and their own pleasure in escaping their daily burdens. They would stress that the place was so safe they could sleep there all night. This was the case before the War of Independence, but, according to them, no longer possible since the Independence, when the city's population changed and the number of workers from surrounding villages and other cities increased.¹ In spite of the threat they felt, the women continued visiting the shrine in the afternoon with friends or relatives, after having finished their domestic tasks.

When the FIS closed the shrine a week before the *Mawlid* in 1990, the women were convinced that this was done in order to prevent them from spending the eve of the *Mawlid* there, as had been the custom since the Middle Ages.

In general, men do not like the idea that the women of their families, i.e. wives, daughters, mothers or sisters, are visiting the shrines. Since times immemorial, women's visits to the shrines have been associated with bad behaviour. The women are suspected of undertaking these visits in order to meet men outside of the family. A *muhtasib* from the 15th century, Muhammad al-'Uqbani, wrote a book (1966) in which he denounced the improper behaviour of the Tlemcenian women and also highlighted the ambiguous nature of their gatherings. In his view, all women's gatherings, such as visits to cemeteries and saints shrines, funerary rituals and even weaving circles, had only one aim – of seeking contact with men for the purpose of illicit amusement. The descriptions of *ziyârât* and pilgrimages written by 19th and 20th centuries Western authors (e.g. Trumelet 1892, Dermenghem op. cit.) are full of

¹ The forest, where sumptuous houses have been built, was believed to shelter both alcoholics and criminals. Tlemcenians were afraid to go there for walks for fear of aggressions. In other words, the area of the shrines has been monopolised by the *brâwiya* (the outsiders), either „nouveau bourgeoisie“ or criminals.

accounts of such “bad behaviour”; alcohol consumption, dancing, sexual relationships etc. When the reformists launched their attacks on the practice of the *ziyârât* in the first decades of the 20th century, they began by denouncing the gatherings of women in the cemeteries and at the shrines. In the early 1950s, the Communist press strongly condemned these kinds of practices, arguing that for some of the participants they were a pretext for drinking alcohol and meeting prostitutes. As for the colonial administration, it recognised the necessity of freedom of worship for Algerians, but it was also critical of the abovementioned “misbehaviour”.

This representation of the *ziyârât* remained active in the Algerian society after the Independence. It was the women’s outings that were disapproved of, more than the practices themselves. The men consider the outings a transgression of the principle of sexual segregation of space, a principle on which the social organisation is still based. In independent Algeria, many women were educated and some of them held high positions. Even so, their access to public space, predominantly occupied by men, was also controlled by the latter. Sexual segregation increased as Islam continued to pervade the public sphere. However, far from having created the phenomenon, the Islamists merely reinforced an existing attitude and legitimised it by invoking divine law.

The discussions within women’s circles revealed that the FIS was not only censoring religious ritual; it was censoring the customs too. Thus the party acted as a *muhtasib* who censors all behaviour, both private and public, including clothing and celebrations and even spoken language, for instance the way in which husband and wife address each other. The women complained about this and had their own way of ascertaining *halâl* and *harâm*, based on their individual or social interests. They admitted that they should change some of the incorrect oral expressions, such as the use of the term *ukhti* and *khûya* when addressing one’s wife or husband. “Spouses are not sister and brother; we should say *zawjti* and *zawji*”. But they vehemently rejected the FIS’ attempts to abolish customary marriage celebrations that, besides the actual wedding, provided families, friends and neighbours with an opportunity for social and symbolic exchange. The closure of Sidi Boumediene’s shrine was intolerable to them. Sidi Boumediene’s shrine is not only the physical embodiment of the religious memory of Tlemcen, it is a symbol of rejoicing and feasting, and for the women, a symbol of freedom; a place where the love for God and the saints is expressed in words, chanting, and dance, a place of commensality. It was a place where women were allowed to express themselves without restriction. The closure of the *qubba* on a festival as important as that of the Birth of the Prophet came off as very repressive, both physically and morally. “They are forbidding even the visits to saints now, the only men worthy of confidence and of respect in this country! What are they going to allow us to do?” cried a young girl.

As soon as the *qubba* reopened, the women rushed to the shrine on Friday to visit their cherished saint. While they were waiting for the *muqaddim* to open the door, two members of the FIS came out of the mosque and shouted at them: “What are you doing there? Are you coming to see a man who died centuries ago? Stop your ignorant practices and go home!” The women tried to resist, but to no avail. They gave up and walked home slowly, cursing the men whom they called “fake Muslims”, and humming an old song praising the saint, rearranged by a Tlemcenian singer, Nouri Koufi. Here are a few verses of the song:

Sidi Boumediene, I come to you with a purpose, come in my dreams to cure me... Sometimes I cry for my country, sometimes I cry for exile, sometimes I cry for the mosques, where no *taleb* and no *imam* reads... O *Ghawthi*,² don't forget me... O Boumediene, I want to see you in my dreams with my own eyes... Tlemcen is praying so you remove all disease and affliction from the people....

For the adepts, veneration of saints evokes notions such as authenticity and liberty as opposed to the hypocrisy and alienation that, according to them, characterises radical Islam. They claim that the tradition saint worshipping goes back to the origins of Islam. “It has been there for thirteen centuries” is the current answer people give concerning any shrine. The adepts describe it as an internalised movement, expressing a historical continuity felt through the senses animating the body and transporting the spirit beyond the social limits. If it has passed the test of time, it is because it has been practiced out of sight, secretly, in sanctuaries, houses and remote areas. Veneration of saints has merged with local culture and achieved a supremely popular expression. Legitimacy has been conferred with reference to the followers’ and their ancestors’ experiences more than with reference to religious law. Women’s attachment to this religious form was undoubtedly brought about by the fact that they were excluded from public religious space, and their religious life confined to private space, outside the arena of political power. Given the fact that the politicians, who have proven incapable of subduing the violence, could not be confided in with respect to women’s fates, the followers of the saints chose to turn towards these supernatural men, in an attempt to make some sense of the chaos that pervaded the country.

The worshippers do not only commemorate the founding of their religion or that of the shrine of Sidi Boumediene. They commemorate also the constitution of their town, Tlemcen, which was a glorious Islamic city in the Middle Ages, welcoming prestigious religious scholars and Sufi masters. They observe the *Mawlid al-Nabawi* in order to commemorate a festival that has been celebrated since the Middle Ages.

² Ghawthi: “My Great Help” – one of the names given to the saint in Tlemcen

The celebration of the *Mawlid al-Nabawi* in the Muslim world was first institutionalised in Arbela (east of Mosul) in 1207 on the 12th Rabi' Awwal.³ From there it spread all over the world. Sufi rites, such as the *sama'*, sacrifices, meals and processions with candles, were performed. In Morocco, the celebration was developed with the impetus of the Sharifian dynasties (those who claimed to be of prophetic descent) as well as that of the Sufi organisations. In Algeria, the feast gained its magnificence under the rule of Abû Hammû Mûsâ II (1359-1389), the restorer of the Abd al-Wâdîd dynasty in Tlemcen. Yahyâ b. Khaldûn (1913) gave a detailed description of the celebrations which were also taken up by Western authors in their monographs of Tlemcen (Bel 1922, Doutté 1900, Marçais 1902). Presided by the Sovereign, the ceremony usually took place in the yard of the *Mishwâr*, the sumptuously decorated royal palace, during the night of the Birth of the Prophet. The whole town population was invited to participate. There were recitations of *madh* and pious exhortations, and the feast would end at dawn with a banquet.

Later, Western authors (op cit) gave colourful descriptions of the festival the way it was celebrated by families at the beginning of the 20th century. Little girls were dressed as brides (of the Prophet) and taken to the photographer and then to relatives and friends, which is also the custom the first time they fast during Ramadan. Boys let off firecrackers. Both receive sweets and gifts. Women redden their palms and the soles of their feet with *henna*, which is also a wedding custom. The family dine in the light from candelabras. Food and alms are distributed to the poor, candles are offered to friends and to the teachers. People visit the shrines and take part in the processions of the Sufi organisations. Shinar (op cit) relates the historical importance of the *Mawlid* to the exceptional prestige of the Prophet and his descendants' (the *Shurafa*) and the Sufi brotherhoods' veneration. The liturgical part of the ceremony includes recitation of Quranic verses, a sermon, narration of the *Sîra*, and recital of poems combining the praising of both the Prophet and the Sovereign. In the Sufi circles, the figure of the Sovereign is replaced with that of the *Shaykh* of the brotherhood. The celebration takes place in mosques, *zâwiyyât*, saints' tombs, the governor's court, in private homes, and in the markets and the streets as well.

It was the '*Ulamâ*' of the *Islâhi* movement that launched the reform of the *Mawlid* celebrations. They purged them of all Sufi practices (the use of candles and illumination and other so called pagan rites), which, according to them, were putting brakes on not only the development of consciousness and faith, but on the sense of national belonging as well. In the reformist celebrations, schoolchildren, both boys and girls, participate in the formal rituals, in the dramatisation and the modernisation

³ See Shinar 1977

of the *Sîra* – asserting its role in the history of mankind, and in discussions of social, ethical and cultural themes. The Sufi celebrations themselves were also changed. The *madh* and the *dhikr* were replaced by sermons, lessons, ethical and religious speeches related to the personality of the Prophet, his life, and his achievements. The popular elements, such as music, dance and processions were subdued. According to Shinar, the Sufi celebrations lost of their spontaneity and cheerfulness; they became serious, austere and quiet events. The reformist *Mawlid* was adopted by the State in the aftermath of Independence.

The traditional celebrations of the *Mawlid* were resumed in the early eighties, not only in Tlemcen, but in the rest of Algeria as well. After having been on the wane for twenty years, the political authorities decided to revitalise local cultural expressions, in order to construct a national identity that would transcend local identities. Sufi brotherhoods again performed their rituals in the open. In the late eighties, however, the Salafi trend opposed these celebrations and tried to fight against their adepts, the same way that the *Islâhi* trend had done on the eve of the Independence. This time, though, both the government as well as the intellectuals were on the Sufi side. The incident at Sidi Boumediene's shrine illustrates this struggle for control over the writing of Algerian history; every party, with their conflicting ideologies or individual or collective experiences seeks to impose their own memory. The Salafis launched a campaign of purification of religious practices and social behaviour, and exhorted people to go back to the very sources of Islam and to refer to the practices of the Salaf. The Sufi trend defended the maintenance of local practices and behaviour, although it might mean that they would have to introduce changes to them. As for the political authorities, their strategy was to manipulate local symbols in order to transform them into national ones. This opposition is of course oversimplified. The reality is more complex. For instance, Sufi adepts adopted Salafi ideology and fought against some of the practices within their own organisations. On the other hand, members of the Salafi trend who had grown up in Sufi families continued to attend Sufi ceremonies. The political authorities had no uniform strategy. They were not supporting all the Sufi organisations, only those who had played a role in transmitting religious knowledge as well as spiritual heritage.

In 1990, most of the municipalities were headed by the FIS. This was indeed the case in Tlemcen. That is why they managed to close the shrine of Sidi Boumediene and to prevent women from spending the night there. No celebration was organised in the town, however, in the localities headed by the FLN, women managed to gather for the *zâwiyât*.

The media broadcasted different reports of the celebrations. "Al-Moujahid", the daily of the FLN, wrote (2.10.90) that the celebrations took place like they had done every year, adhering strictly to the tradition with civil and religious, public and private

ceremonies, endowed with both cheerfulness and piety at the same time. There were prayers and commentaries of the Prophet's life in the mosques, the mosques and the *zâwiyât* were full of worshippers and prizes were being distributed to reciters of the Qur'ân. Teachers were explaining their pupils the sense and extent of this great historical and spiritual event, which has left an indelible mark on the future of the worldwide Islamic Nation. Families gathered in the evening around decorated and lighted candles and children were joyfully setting off firecrackers and playing percussions. The daily "Al-Aqida" of the Salafi trend devoted several pages to this "historical fact" (3.10.90), and published articles written by religious thinkers of the past, such as Ibn Bâdîs, Mâlik Bennabi, and Sayyid al-Qutb in order to justify the celebration of the *Mawlid*. The French written weekly "Algérie-Actualité", related (25-31.10.90) the ceremony of the *Sbû'* in the Southern area of the Gourara, which was presented as an exotic event. In effect, there were a great variety of celebrations reproducing the rituals and symbols of the past, referring to either the Arab-Islamic heritage or to the national and local heritage. The Prophet appears either as the messenger of a universal religion, as a national hero, or as an extraordinary ancestor that is venerated. The celebrations take place in a context dominated by a return of the debate of the thirties between reformist and Sufi leaders concerning the *bida'*. By closing the shrine of Sidi Boumediene, the FIS seems to say that Sidi Boumediene should not be identified with the Prophet. Still, they recognise him as a great Islamic figure. For the Sufi adepts, Sidi Boumediene symbolises the continuity of the town and its culture, but they do accept to change some of their beliefs and practices. As for the defenders of the city's architectural heritage, their aim is to preserve the universal character of an architectural masterpiece that belongs not only to the local cultural patrimony, but to the world cultural patrimony as well. In all cases, Tlemcenians, be they Sufi or not, condemn the abrogation of all kinds of cheerful celebration, something which signifies that life is being taken away from them.

The Basilica of the Nativity: A Place between Religious and National Remembrance

In the case of Palestine, people are submitted to restrictions in their freedom of movement. The performance of religious rituals such as pilgrimages and processions, which imply walking about in defined spaces, is often disrupted by the Israeli government and the Israeli army for security reasons. The celebrations of rituals in Christian holy places, such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Church of the Tomb of Mary in Gethsemane and the Basilica of the Nativity should not be subject to measures of interdictions and closures. These places are ruled by the Status-Quo imposed by the Ottomans in 1852 in an attempt to organise the use of the Holy sites

belonging to three main Christian denominations; the Greek Orthodox, the Latin and the Armenian. In reality, even if the clergy can perform the rituals, the faithful can not obtain permits to participate, this in spite of official texts guaranteeing free access to places of worship. Even though the Israeli government does take special measures to ease movement for Palestinian worshippers during holidays, there are numerous obstacles that prevent them from achieving this right. Such obstacles can be closures of the Palestinian territories, siege of towns and villages, curfews, roadblocks, and new checkpoints being erected. Even the clergy, which enjoys diplomatic immunity, is sometimes prevented from reaching the places of worship. This happened to high dignitaries such as the Latin Patriarch. In any case, it is the soldiers at the checkpoints that arbitrarily decide whether to let people through or not.

Worshippers complain of being mocked by the soldiers when they tell them that they are going to pray. I experienced this myself while I was driving to Gethsemane during the Armenian Assumption in August 2002. All the roads were closed because a special event was taking place in the al-Aqsa Mosque, and the only access was by way of the Wailing Wall. I was stopped by some border policemen. "You cannot cross, the Jews are praying, you disturb them", a policewoman said. "I am going to pray too, let us pray all together", I answered. She reported what I had said to her colleagues and they were making fun of me. She lit a cigarette, even though smoking is forbidden in that place of worship.

Bethlehem: A Christian Sacred Town Turned into a Battlefield

In December 1995, Bethlehem was declared "Palestinian Autonomous town". It became an important point of focus in 1999 during the millennium celebrations when the Palestinian Authority launched project Bethlehem 2000 aiming at developing the economy, tourism and environmental aspects of the city. Since the beginning of the second Intifada, it has been at the focus of Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For the Israelis, it is a strategic point because of the settlements which surround the city. In 2001 and 2002, it dominated the headlines of the media. In October 2001 it was reoccupied by the Israeli Army; on December 24th, the President of the Palestinian Authority who was being locked up in his headquarters in Ramallah, could not attend the midnight mass as he has used to do since December 1996. In April and May 2002, Palestinians were taking shelter in the Basilica and the church, the rest of the city and the surrounding area came under a 39 days siege. In December 2002 the city was occupied by the Israeli army and, especially Manger Square, was declared "military area", and even journalists and diplomats were forbidden to enter. This lent doubt to whether or not the Christmas ceremony would be performed until the last minute.

The Christian churches used to believe that they were protected both by the Status-Quo and the agreements with the Israeli government, but these events revealed that the Christian holy places were not inviolable and their rights not inalienable. At the same time, it revealed that those places, which are imbued with a spiritual significance for local Christians and for Christians all over the world, are important foci in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Latin Christmas, 2002

For the third consecutive year, the Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem were disturbed. The city was reoccupied by the Israeli army and declared “military area”, and tanks were barring the access to the Basilica. The President of the Palestinian Authority had asked that the festivities be cancelled, by way of protesting against the occupation. Some people suggested that the Patriarch should not make his *dakhle* into the Basilica of the Nativity if the Israeli tanks were still in Manger Square. The Latin custodian of the Holy Land announced that the ceremonies would take place, but he made his *dakhle* on the first day of Advent without the procession, because of the presence of the Israeli tanks. “He made his *dakhle* secretly”, said a witness. Two days before the festival, it seemed likely that the Patriarch and the clergy were the only ones to participate in the procession from the old city of Jerusalem, where the Patriarch resides, to the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem. The scouts would not welcome them with their fanfares. This would be the saddest Christmas since the beginning of the second Intifada. After the ostentatious millennium Christmas celebrations on December 24th-25th 1999, the Christmas celebrations of 2000 and 2001 were austere. There were no pilgrims, the economy of the town had declined, the town was destroyed by bombardments, and there were many dead among the residents.

In 2000, the President of the Palestinian Authority cancelled all the festive aspects of the celebrations as a sign of mourning for the young martyrs who had fallen to the bullets. There were no decorations, no scout bands, and no cultural events. The walls of the Manger Square were covered with pictures of the young martyrs. Pieces of papers with the names of the martyrs written on them were hanging from the branches of the trees, replacing the customary coloured lamps. The parishes of Jerusalem brought some of their parishioners along. At the checkpoint, the youngsters scoffed at the soldiers, because they were passing without *tasrih*. The Patriarchate had obtained a collective entry permit for the people accompanying the procession. The President of the Palestinian Authority attended the midnight mass. Pilgrims usually fill the church and leave no room for the local residents, but since there were none, young Bethlehemites were allowed enter the church to get

a glimpse of the President. Whereas the Patriarch's entry into the Cathedral symbolises the Latin re-appropriation of a sacred territory, the entry of the President symbolises the all Palestinians' re-appropriation of a sacred territory, located in an autonomous and no less sacred national territory.

The celebrations of Christmas 2001 were disrupted, since the President of the Palestinian Authority, who was being locked up in the Muqata'a, was not allowed to go to Bethlehem for the midnight mass. Unlike the former year, however, the President requested that the holiday take place as usual. Groups of scouts, Christian and Muslim, welcomed the Patriarch with their bands. The local inhabitants crowded the narrow streets to see the Patriarch, but they seemed mainly interested in the fate of the President. "Did you bring Arafat along?" they asked. "You should have disguised him as Santa Claus, so he could have crossed the checkpoint". On the morning, the Patriarch was in Ramallah to greet the President. The Chancellor of the Patriarchate had declared on Radio Bethlehem: "The Patriarch taking Arafat to Bethlehem secretly is out of the question. If the President comes, he should come with all his dignity, if not, it is better that he stays in Ramallah". In reality, the soldiers had checked the cars of the procession upon entering Bethlehem to find out whether or not Arafat was hidden in one of them.

Decorated with the traditional Christmas tree, the place of the Nativity was resonating with Christmas carols in different languages. While some people followed the Patriarch and the clergy into Saint Catherine's Church to sing the Vespers, others rushed to the restaurants or to the snack-bars. The Christmas celebration is an opportunity for Palestinians from Jerusalem to meet with family members or friends in Bethlehem over a meal. During the afternoon, people strolled about in the places where they could have hot drinks and sweets. A Santa Claus was distributing gifts to everybody. There were both Christians and Muslims present. At 7 pm, one could hear the sound of a helicopter. "It is Abu Ammar; the King of Jordan has lent him a helicopter", a waiter cried out from a restaurant. The rumour spread in the city, but it was not confirmed. At 8.45 pm, a Palestinian choir was asked to call off its performance on the stage of Manger Square. Some officials got out of a car, and everybody rushed at it to see if the President was among them. The mayor made a declaration that disappointed everybody: "The President will not come, but we will listen to his message broadcasted by 'Sawt al-Falastin' (the Voice of Palestine, the official broadcasting system). The public listened to the in silence and then acclaimed the name of the President among whistles and applause. It was a brief moment of national mobilisation, an ephemeral sense of national unity. Afterwards, the place was quickly deserted. Some people entered the Church, but most of them went back home. The mayor refused to attend the mass as a sign of protest. Young people tried to get into the Church to see the *keffieh* (scarf) covering Arafat's seat. In his homily, the Patriarch emphasised the military situation on the ground as well as the difficulties of daily life. He reminded the attendants of the mission of the

Christians of the Holy Land, which is “to be the witnesses of Jesus, i.e. to be the witnesses of the violence, the destruction and the death”. He called for the unity of the Palestinian people claiming justice for their cause, and invoked peace between Israelis and Palestinians as he urged for achievement of inter-confessional coexistence.

Christmas, 2002

Since the siege of the Basilica in April 2002, Bethlehem has almost lost its autonomy and become a permanently occupied city. After the siege was lifted, the city was destroyed, offering a spectacle of demolished houses, broken up roads and cars burned out or smashed by tanks. Three years after the millennium which marked the beginning of urban and political reconstruction, the town was in a state of urban deconstruction and political disorganisation. The Peace Center, one of the symbols of the 1999 rebirth, was completely devastated. The impoverishing of the population was more visible.

Once an international Christian city, Bethlehem had become a small local town isolated from the other Palestinian territories, and more importantly, isolated from the world. More and more, the only foreigners the people would see, apart from the clergy, were diplomats, NGO employees, journalists and peace activists.

A few days before Christmas, Bethlehem had almost rediscovered its ordinary aspect. But the Israeli tanks were still there, blocking the access to the Nativity Square. Eventually the international pressure resulted in the withdrawal of the Israeli army to the city limits. The curfew was lifted in the morning of December 24th and the *dakhle* of the Patriarch could take place as normal at 1 pm. However, the celebration had taken on a political character. The impact of the siege of April 2000 was obvious. At the checkpoints, international as well as Israeli-Palestinian activists welcomed the procession of the Patriarch. They joined organisations from Bethlehem and demonstrated as the procession went along, holding placards with slogans such as: “End the occupation”, “Curfew = destruction camps”, “Let the children go to school”, and “Silent night, holy night”. The Patriarch’s *dakhle* into the Basilica was headed by two young boys from a refugee camp carrying a picture of Arafat. The local population, which normally does not participate in the procession en masse, now tried to get into the Basilica and caused jostle. Later, while the Patriarch was celebrating Vespers, the peace activists held a meeting in front of the Peace Center and delivered political speeches, both in Hebrew and Arabic.

During the midnight mass, a *keffiyeh* was put on Arafat’s seat like the year before. But the President’s absence seemed move the people less than before. (It should be stressed that in May, when the siege of the Basilica was lifted, the President visited the city and was greeted by a less than warm welcome, since the people had felt abandoned during the siege). Unlike the previous, the mayor attended the midnight mass.

In his homily, the Patriarch exhorted the Palestinians to love even the Israeli soldiers who were imposing the siege, the curfews and the humiliations. He condemned the violence as well as the occupation causing it.

The next day, when the Patriarch was greeted by the local authorities, the mufti of Bethlehem rose up against the Western idea of an alleged clash of civilisation between Christianity and Islam. He recalled the tradition of peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims in Bethlehem.

In the afternoon, the Franciscan Friars made their traditional procession with torches from the Shepherd's Fields in Beit Sahour to Bethlehem. Since the beginning of the Intifada, this ritual has been politicised every year as peace activists have participated. In 2001, the peace activists joined the procession from the Shepherd's Fields to the Tantar checkpoint, where clashes broke out between the soldiers and demonstrators. In 2002, the peace activists protested against the separation fence that is being erected between Israel and the Palestinian territories. This politicisation was obvious throughout the Christmas celebrations, and it seemed as if the absence of the Palestinian political Authority was reintroducing politics in the celebrations, to the extent that politics were taking over the religious event and was covering it.

The Politicisation of a Religious Remembrance Place

The connection between religion and politics is historically determined in the holy city of Bethlehem, although the nature of this link has changed according to the context. During the Crusader era, religious ideology pushed Westerners to conquer the sacred city, but the later various occupiers have to a great extent been guided by political or military objectives. Today, the logic of territorial expansion led the Israeli army to regain control of the Basilica, one of the most important Christian Holy Places and to reoccupy the city that was given back to the Palestinian Authority in December 1995. The case of the city of Bethlehem demonstrates that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is less an inter-religious one than a struggle for control of space, a conflict where religion is used as an instrument for achieving political and military goals.

What is at Stake in this Struggle?

Bethlehem is a border town, situated 10 km south of Jerusalem. This border is today marked by the Greek Orthodox convent of Mar Elias, a few meters down from the military checkpoint. The Bethlehem district includes the three towns of Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour, 71 small villages and three refugee camps (Aida, Dheisheh and Beit-Jebrin). Some twenty Israeli settlements are interlinked

and connected to the rest of the Israeli territories through a complex network of bypass roads that surrounds the city. The population of the district constitutes 5,7% of the total population of the Occupied Territories. In Bethlehem, 38% are Christians and 62% Muslims. Beit Sahour and Beit Jala have a majority of Christians, 83 and 86% respectively (Shomali and Shomali 1998).

Religion is, however, not the reason why the city is important to the Israelis. According to Michel Warschawski, in an interview made by Péan (1999), the Israeli policy of territorial extension is what has led to the town being surrounded. In order to secure a territorial continuity between Israel and the settlements imposed on the Palestinian territories, and to guarantee “Jewish ethnic purity”, Israel has penalised Bethlehem. The city has thus become a victim of the “Greater Jerusalem” project. The fate of Bethlehem has always been related to that of Jerusalem. Both cities have been occupied by the same rulers. In 1948, the international community proposed a “corpus separatum” status for the two sacred cities. Their fates were not differentiated until 1995; Bethlehem becoming autonomous Palestinian territory and Jerusalem remaining under Israeli occupation. Paradoxically, Bethlehem has never been so isolated from Jerusalem and from the other Palestinian territories than it has been since it was declared autonomous. Entrance to the city is controlled by the Israeli army and the Bethlehemites need a *tasrîh* to go to Jerusalem. People need to be able to move between the two towns, to study, to work, to pray, to get medical care, to get married and to attend funerals. Even if somebody manages to get through, it is with great difficulty. With the rise of the second Intifada and the Israeli government’s failure to provide security for its citizens, it has been decided to erect a separation fence that will isolate Bethlehem more than ever.

For the Palestinian Authority, the sacred town of Bethlehem has taken on new significance. Even though it is a Christian Holy Place, a holy place for a few thousands of its nationals only, it still has become a sacred national town. In 1996, the Authority launched project Bethlehem 2000 in order to prepare for the celebrations of the millennium commemorating the advent of Christianity. A religious event, it has been overwhelmed with political significance. The aim of Bethlehem 2000 was to achieve urban renovation, development of the tourism and preparation of religious, cultural and artistic events that was planned to last for 17 months. The implementation of the project started in early 1998. A 160 millions dollar budget was reserved for road repairs and renovation of the electricity and the sewerage system. In the old city, the streets leading to the Church have been paved, the front of the shops painted and the streets illuminated. The old houses were restored thanks to UNESCO support. Strategic roads such as the one leading to Beit Sahour, the Shepherd’s Fields and the Solomon Pools were enlarged. Significant amounts of money came from outside. A United Nations’ resolution (1998) gave priority to Bethlehem for UNDP funding. Other important international

organisations, such as the World Bank and the European Commission, as well as foreign governments and religious institutions contributed to the financing. The Nativity Square was restructured with the construction of a Peace Center. This space was supposed to be a focus point for dialogue between the peoples. The President of the Palestinian Authority accepted to move the Police Headquarter from the square. He declared that the project was consistent with the vocation of Bethlehem, which is to deliver an eternal message of peace to the world.

Apart from religious commemoration, the project aimed at transforming the town into an international tourist center, seeking to preserve its historical and archaeological heritage. At the same time, the Israeli government undertook an extension of the Jerusalem city limits and increased the Israeli presence to the north of Bethlehem, in the Tomb of Rachel area.

Conclusion

The issues at stake in both research cases are occupation of space and appropriation of sacred territory, structured and shaped through religious beliefs and practices. The events celebrated are the commemoration of the origins of new religions, new civilisations and new societies. The faithful perform rituals, repetitions of the gestures executed by the first worshippers, in order to recall the glorious past of their ancestors who first set out worshipping the holy places. Their remembrance is closely linked to ceremonies, processions and feasts.

As a space is being subject to ever stricter control and prohibitions, imaginary space is freed and filled up with representations of elsewhere, past or future. Worship of the holy places was set up by first groups of faithful. When present day worshippers claim collective identity with the forbearers, it is not an identity of refuge, but rather one of evocation of and identification with those forbearers.

In Tlemcen, the celebrations of the *Mawlid al-Nabawi* commemorated both the Birth of the Prophet and the founding of the shrine of Sidi Boumediene, whose origin traces back to the Prophet, which is indeed the case of every Sufi Saint. They commemorate the history of the prestigious city of Tlemcen. In Bethlehem, the millennium celebrations commemorate not only the founding of Christianity, but also events related to Christianity in the Holy Land for a period of over two thousands years, particularly the shaping of the sacred territory of the Grotto, the very place of the birth of the founder, Jesus. In spite of latter modifications that have affected both places (in the case of Tlemcen, the construction of a mosque and a madrasa opposite the shrine of Sidi Boumediene and the transformation of the landscape of the town; in the case of Bethlehem, the construction of the Basilica

and later Saint Catherine's Church and the transformation of the town of Bethlehem, the boundaries of which are continually reshaped by the Israeli occupation), they remained unchanged. Their boundaries have been defined historically. Their appropriation by the faithful, who interpret them as landmarks and obvious signs of identity, is achieved by means of symbolic powers such as those of language, legends, tales, accounts of the past ceremonies and blessed times. According to Halbwachs (op cit), the faithful search for a state of mind in consecrated places; a state of mind that they have experienced before. Together with other believers they constitute a visible community, common thoughts and common remembrances that have been formed and kept alive since previous times in the same places. The rituals do not merely reproduce the past; they build the present as well, and contribute to ensure social continuity.

Beyond the boundaries of that territory lie the land of neighbouring groups, foreign lands of potential enemies, be they from within the national society, as is the case of Algeria, or from the outside, as in Palestine. The ritual management of the territory is achieved by walking in circle around the borders (procession). By treading the territory, following its borders stretch for stretch, the faithful commemorate the special individuality of that space. The annual walking of the borders by the group of faithful is at the same time a return to the time of the first definition of that space; it is a reminder of history. Therefore, it is necessary that territory be continually rebuilt and renewed by religious events.

During times of crisis it seems more necessary than ever to the faithful to assert the sacred territorial boundaries and to commemorate those who first established them. As sacred territories do not move, they constitute stable landmarks for people whose daily territorial boundaries change continuously.

Lexicon

Bida', sing bid'a: An innovation in the religious and social conduct according to Islamic law

Brâwiya: Outsiders, foreigners

Dakhle: Entry in procession

Dhikr: The core of the Sufi prayer, reciting the name of God. It consists of litanies, recited repeatedly with the aim of reaching a state of trance

Fuqahâ', sing Faqîh: A man of law

Ghawth: Great Help

Halâl: Licit

Hammâm: Turkish bath

Harâm: Illicit

Henna: A vegetal fabric used in the Muslim world to redden hair, palms and soles during feasts

Imâm: A leader of Islamic prayers

Islâhi: The Algerian Salafi movement founded in 1931

Khûya: My brother

Keffieh: A scarf used by men to cover their head in some Arab countries. In Palestine, where Yasser Arafat wears it all the time, it has become a symbol of the Palestinian Resistance

Laylat al-Qadar: The Night of Destiny, the 27th night of Ramadan

Madh: Panegyrics of the Prophet Muhammad

Madrasa: Coranic school

Mawlid al-Nabawi: The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad

Muhtasib: Censor of customs

Muqaddim: A leader of a group of brotherhood devotees or a group of a saint's followers

Qubba: A shrine which contains the coffin or the catafalque of a holy man or woman, which is covered by a cupola or a tiled roof

Qutb: The Pole of the Sufi Saints

Sama': Lit.: concert. A Sufi ceremony with music and sometimes dance

Shurafâ', sing Sharîf: A member of the family of the Prophet. This - in most cases fictitious - kinship serves to legitimise the exercise of political and/or religious power

Sîra: The Life of the Prophet

Tâleb: A man of religion in North Africa

Tarîqa: Literally the "path". A spiritual method developed by Sufi masters for the quest of the divine. It is composed of prayers, exercises, principles and behaviours

that every individual who wants to be initiated to Sufism must perform in the presence of a spiritual master known as the shaykh.

Tasrîh: Permit needed by Palestinians to cross the Israeli checkpoints

Ukhti: My sister

Wilâya: Department

Zâwiyât: Lodges built on the tombs of saints, where usually the leader of a brotherhood (shaykh) resides. The spiritual assemblies also take place there

Zawji: My husband

Zawjti: My wife

Ziyârât, sing Ziyâra: Literally “visit”. This is the visit to the saints tombs in order to ask for favors

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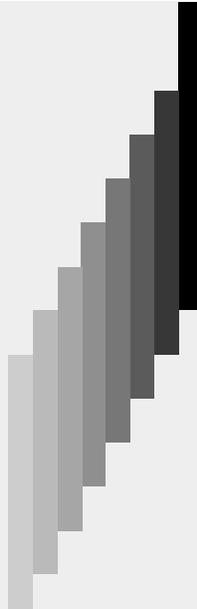
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Nazi Agrarian Colonisation of the Zamojszczyzna (South-eastern Poland): Documents, Memories and Silences

*Édouard Conte**

Zamojszczyzna

The Zamojszczyzna constitutes the southernmost district of the voivodship of Lublin, today a province of south-eastern Poland. To the east, along the River Bug, the ‘land of Zamość’ borders on the Ukraine. For centuries, shifting boundaries, both cultural and political, have crossed or delimited the Zamojszczyzna. The Renaissance town of Zamość was founded by royal hetman Jan Zamoyski (1541-1605), a magnate intent on promoting agriculture in his fief. Zamość was long a citadel buttressing Polish domination over the Ukrainian marches. After the first partition of Poland, in 1772, the Zamoyski domain, reduced to a hinterland, went to the Austrian Kingdom of Galicia, but was subsequently annexed by the Russian Empire in 1815, a part of which it remained until the Polish state was restored in 1918 (see Hoensch 1990). During the interwar period, under the Second Republic (1918-1939), the Zamojszczyzna, then a part of central Poland, was plagued by growing interethnic

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tension. Indeed, the settlement border separating the dominant, mainly Polish and Roman Catholic population to the west from the predominantly Greek Catholic (or 'Uniate') Ukrainians to the east ran between Zamość and the Bug (see Torzecki 1989). Under Nazi occupation (1939-1944), the district was designated by Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler to become the first 'bastion of Germandom' on the new eastern frontier of the 'Greater German Reich' (Madajczyk 1988). Hemmed into the 'triangle of death' formed by the concentration camps of Bełżec, Majdanek and Sobibór, the district lost its entire Jewish population, only then to become the scene of armed conflict opposing Poles and Ukrainians. After 1944, the effects of Nazi 'racial purification' and civil war were compounded by a campaign of 'ethnic purification' jointly pursued by the Polish communist authorities and the Soviet Union. As a result, the Zamojszczyzna became, for the first time in its history, a virtually monoethnic region in a virtually monoethnic state, a profound change which coincided with the 'transition to socialism' (Conte 1995a & b).

Wounds

Between 1939 and 1947, the Zamojszczyzna was the scene of three historically intertwined, violent undertakings:

- a) Operation Reinhard, as in other areas of the Nazi 'Government General for the Occupied Polish Territories', was the code name given by the SS to the extermination programme of the local Jewish population. On 19 July 1942, in Lublin, Himmler ordered 'that the transferral of the entire Jewish population of the Government General be completed and terminated by 31 December 1942 ... These measures are necessary in view of the ethnic division of races and peoples required by the new European order as well as in the interest of the security and purity of the German Reich.'¹ In the Zamojszczyzna, the genocide was, according to plan, virtually completed by the end of November 1942.
- b) Operation Zamość, conducted from 1942 to 1944, aimed to achieve the colonisation of the Zamojszczyzna through the widespread confiscation of land from Poles and its redistribution to local and foreign 'ethnic Germans'. It was based on the systematic 'racial selection' of local residents as well as the extensive internment and deportation of 'undesirables', making of the Zamojszczyzna an 'SS laboratory' of both ethnic cleansing and agrarian colonisation (Madajczyk 1977).

¹ Berlin Document Center, Letter from Himmler to Krüger, 19 July 1942.

- c) Operation Vistula, jointly undertaken by Polish and Soviet military and security forces after the German defeat, eradicated the Ukrainian and Polish anti-communist underground forces in south-eastern Poland while imposing an 'exchange of population' that entailed deporting Polish citizens of Ukrainian extraction 'back' to the 'Soviet motherland' or to the newly acquired western and northern territories of Poland, formerly administered by Germany (Silesia, Poznań, Pomerania and the southern half of East Prussia) (Drodza 1997). While not directly entailed by Nazi policy, this vast operation compounded the consequences of the two former actions, rendering any return to a situation of cultural pluralism almost inconceivable.

Notwithstanding the infinitely different scope and nature of the crimes they implied, Operations Reinhard and Zamość were closely linked in the eyes of the SS-planners of Himmler's 'Reich Commissary for the Reinforcement of Germandom'. For these men, the Nazi slogan 'Blood and Soil' was to be taken literally (Darré 1929). 'Racial purification', dubbed 'negative racial policy', foremost implied the elimination of the Zamojszczyzna's 50,000 to 60,000 Jews. Yet, this massacre was viewed only as a preliminary step that would enable the subsequent implementation of 'positive racial policy'. The German 'ethno-racial border' (*Volkstumsgrenze*) was to be pushed eastward by the establishment of a 'settlement wall' or *Ostwall* running from the Baltic Sea in the north to the Carpathian Mountains in the south (Müller 1991). Vast colonies of 'warrior-farmers' were to be established on the lands of deported or subjugated Slavs. These 'ethnic fortresses' would secure perpendicular 'lines of penetration', pushing ever deeper into Polish, Russian or Ukrainian lands. In the interstices of the grid, Slavs were to be confined to reserves where they would survive at subsistence level while furnishing all required labour force to German colonists. The Zamojszczyzna was but the first on a list of pilot regions ultimately destined to extend from western Poland as far as Leningrad, the Ural and the Caucasus in accordance with the Generalplan Ost or 'Master plan East' (Madajczyk *et al.* 1990; Rössler *et al.* 1993). Colonisation was to be accomplished through the procedures of *Umrassung* and *Umvolkung*, Nazi neologisms roughly translatable by 'racial' and 'ethnic mutation' (see *Mühlmann* 1944). Each 'nationality' affected was earmarked with a 'appropriate' rate of elimination established according to 'raciological' criteria: Jews: 100%; Poles: 85%; Ukrainian Galicians: 'only' 65% in view of the 'valuable' if residual 'Nordic racial component' they were credited with.² Before considering the implementation of this policy in Poland, I will briefly recall the ideological and juridical foundations of Nazi racism.

² Nuremberg Document NG-2325: Comments of 27 April 1942 by Dr. E. Wetzel concerning the *Generalplan Ost* of the Reichsführer-SS. Reprinted in Heiber 1958 and Madajczyk 1990: 82-110.

Nazi Racial Doctrine and its Implications for Germanisation Policies

After the German defeat of 1918, the intellectual precursors of Nazism vehemently rejected the egalitarian ideals of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution (see Grant 1919; Rosenberg 1934). They postulated a natural hierarchy of races, defined as qualitatively distinct descent groups or *Abstammungsgemeinschaften* endowed with specific physical as well as moral or intellectual attributes. In this essentialist perspective, all people result from the specific hybridisation of 'original', once geographically circumscribed racial substrata (e.g. Nordic, Alpine or Dinaric) no longer represented in 'pure form' since pre-historical times (see Günther 1928). The long-term objective of Nazi 'racial hygiene' and 'breeding' was to reinforce the Nordic element in the otherwise 'mixed', indeed 'bastardised' German people, notably through the assimilation of other Europeans (e.g. Scandinavians or 'ethnic Germans') deemed to share this heritage. Inversely, 'intolerable' African or Asiatic elements such as found in Blacks or Jews were to be eliminated through marriage prohibitions and physical removal.

In Eastern Europe, the Nazis imagined two 'racial threats'. Firstly, as in Germany, they designated the 'Jewish bacillus' as an absolute danger (Dinter 1921; Hitler 1933): in virtue of this biological metaphor, they proclaimed that sexual relations could with Jews 'infect Nordic blood' over generations and must thus be prevented at any cost. Consequently, the 'Nuremberg Laws' of 1935 were applied in the annexed Polish territories (see Essner 2002). Secondly, they considered that Slavic peoples possessing a lesser share of 'Nordic blood' than most Germans and some traces of 'Asiatic genes' constituted a relative danger that could be countered by massive racial selection. 'Inferior' Slavs were to be treated no less harshly than Jews, whereas Slavs of 'better racial stock' could be tolerated or indeed assimilated. Four categories of persons were thus defined in occupied Poland and other occupied lands to facilitate the process of selection and Germanisation:

- ◆ Category I included 'ethnic Germans' who could be granted Reich citizenship.
- ◆ Category II grouped 'ethnic Germans' who had been subjected to Slavic influences but could be rapidly 're-germanised'.
- ◆ Category III was comprised of persons of more distant German extraction, 'racially valuable aliens' or 'slavicised' Germans, all of whom could be subjected to 're-acculturation' and thus largely reintegrated into the fold of the German people.
- ◆ Category IV was constituted of both 'racially intolerable aliens' or politically renegade (ethnic) Germans.

The solutions foreseen to deal with these categories of persons covered a wide range measures: immediate Germanisation, re-acculturation in Germany proper, adoption into a German family, forced labour in Germany, confinement to special villages in Poland, forced labour in the occupied territories or, as a last recourse, internment in a concentration camp (see Majer 1981; Conte and Essner 1999).

Testimonies

In this context, the colonisation plan of the Zamojszczyzna may be considered paradigmatic in several ways. Firstly, it illustrates how the Nazis themselves intended to articulate so-called negative and positive racial policy in order to create ultimately, through the 'consolidation of Germandom', a monoethnic, racially homogenous Reich. Further, it demonstrates how the manipulation of long-standing interethnic and confessional rivalries in Central and Eastern Europe (see Buell 1939) was used with catastrophic effect to support German policies of conquest and agrarian colonisation. Finally, it exemplifies how, in the immediate post-war phase, the Soviet and fledgling Polish socialist regime took advantage of the bedlam unleashed by Hitler's forces to consolidate their own grip on power through renewed programmes of ethnic cleansing.

The long-term consequences of these events are, in many regards, still felt today (Conte 2001). Indeed, the Zamojszczyzna has not yet recovered its pre-1939 population of 517,000 (MRS 1939); illegal expropriations left durable animosities; Polish-Ukrainian relations, today on the road improvement, remain tense. Unfortunately, our understanding of the period extending from 1939 to 1948 will always be impaired by the asymmetrical character of the sources at our disposal. German archives document in detail both the specific action undertaken in the Zamojszczyzna and its wider implications for Nazi racial and colonisation policies (Madajczyk 1977; 1988). These records are complemented by the rich testimony of actors and witnesses given at the post-war trials conducted in Poland and Germany (see Madajczyk *et al.* 1990). A third set of sources is offered by enquiries conducted with the help of Polish inhabitants of the Zamojszczyzna who experienced the occupation.³ Finally, post-1989 studies by Polish historians draw upon hitherto confidential or neglected documents (e.g. police archives) (Jarosz 1998, Torzecki 1993). Notwithstanding their plurality, these sources do not give equal voice to all

³ See Mańkowski 1978; Wnuk 1975. During two stays in south-eastern Poland in autumn 1989 and spring 1991, I met former victims of Nazi agrarian colonisation and racial selection in order better to understand how, between 1939 and 1948, occupation, genocide, civil war and ethnic cleansing had transmuted the Zamojszczyzna's identity (Conte 1995a, b & 2002).

parties. Germans and Poles are by far best represented. The destiny of Jews is, by definition, only documented by the word of those who witnessed their extermination. The voice of Ukrainians, pushed off their lands by Poles and Soviets alike, is hardly to be heard since neither the Polish socialist nor the Soviet authorities of the late 1940s had any interest in recording or making known their testimony. Finally, it must be stressed that official readings of available sources have varied with successive changes of regime and political systems. In the pages that follow, these difficulties will be illustrated by reference to sources of different status:

- 1- Dr. Zygmunt Klukowski's wartime diary records the process of and Polish reactions to the decimation of the Zamojszczyzna's Jews.
- 2- SS-man Josef Scharrenberg's war trial statement will be quoted to illustrate how Nazi colonisers 'cleared' Polish lands.
- 3- The words of Polish prisoners Piotr Densiów and Kazimierz Wdzięczny show how their experience of horror could alter perceptions of events.
- 4- My conversations with Tadeusz K., a Polish farmer, relate the process of Germanisation imposed on 'racially valuable' children.
- 5- Finally, a secret service report of the Stalinist period shows the symbolic intensity of the otherwise fully silenced Polish-Ukrainian conflict the Nazis that developed in 1943.

These references are admittedly disparate and in no way pretend to offer an adequate or comprehensive account of the complexities of the racial and ethnic cleansing our region of study was subjected to. Yet, I argue that their confrontation might allow us better to appreciate just how fuzzy the boundaries between 'oral' and 'written' sources become as the process of recording and the passage of time surreptitiously transform the former into the latter. Last but not least, it shall become clear that official histories and taboos linked to the successive avatars of national identities may impede the comparative reading of sources for decades, eventually making it impossible, as witnesses disappear, to recur to oral testimony in order to interpret and contextualise archival sources.

'Racial Purification' and 'Ethnic Cleansing'

The extermination of the Jews in Lublin province has been analysed with poignant precision by Christopher Browning in his 1992 study *Ordinary Men. Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. This work, which notably relates the massacre of the Jews of Jozefów, a town south-west of Zamość, insists upon the role of 'average' Germans, seldom staunch Nazis, in the mass executions

organised by paramilitary forces outside the bounds of the death camps. In turn, it is important to recall what many 'ordinary Poles', faced with the extermination of the Zamojszczyzna's Jewish population, their neighbours, knew and did.

A unique source, the wartime diary of Dr. Zygmunt Klukowski (1958), director of the Szczebrzeszyn hospital, 15 kilometres west of Zamość, and later a witness and expert at the Nuremberg war trials, offers a shuddering account of the events of March to November 1942. By early April, Klukowski and his informants realised 'beyond doubt' that daily 'Jew trains' from Lwów, Lublin and beyond were bound for a small locality south of Zamość known as Bełżec:

'There, the Jews alight, penetrate into a barbed-wire enclosure and are massacred with electric current or poisoned by gases; after that, their bodies are incinerated. On the way ... people observe atrocious scenes, for the Jews already know well where and why they are being transported' (Klukowski 1958: 251).

Although mistaken with regard to death by electrocution, the doctor's assessment is otherwise fully correct. Contrary to numerous disclaimers of witnesses protesting 'I wasn't aware of anything', anyone with eyes and ears in the Zamojszczyzna knew by the spring of 1942 that a massacre of unprecedented scope and nature was underway. The Nazis, for their part, were convinced that this knowledge would have a 'beneficial' effect on the Poles and induce them to collaborate more gracefully with subsequent Nazi demands.⁴

By late October 1942, most local Jews had been murdered in the ever more vicious pogroms organised by the Nazis, often assisted by the Polish police and militiamen. Recognising his own inability to fathom what he witnessed or heard, Klukowski could only note:

'In general, the Polish population [of Szczebrzeszyn] has not behaved correctly. Some have participated actively in the tracking down and searching for Jews. They have revealed where Jews were hidden; young boys have even hunted little Jewish children that the police then shot down in sight of all ... Farmers, fearing reprisals, apprehended [fleeing] Jews in the villages and took them to town where, on a number of occasions, they executed them straightaway ... A psychosis has taken hold of people who often, after the example of the Germans, do not see the Jew as a human being ... rather as a sort of harmful animal that must be exterminated by all means, like mad dogs, rats...' (Klukowski 1958: 290; 299).

'Racial purification' having been achieved, the road toward 'ethnic cleansing' (*Umwolkung*) was now open.

⁴ *Völkischer Beobachter*, 15 December 1942.

The last entry in Klukowski's diary concerning the murder of local Jews is dated 26 November 1942. A December communiqué of the Polish underground records:

'Zamojszczyzna. Population transfer began on 27 November. At 3 in the morning, SS and German police units surrounded and occupied the villages of the commune of Skierbieszów. They ordered the population to abandon their farms within an hour ... all live-stock and implements had to be left on the spot. Those who sought to hide were shot down like rabbits... By 17 December, more than forty villages were evacuated in this manner, that is about 12,000 farms and 50,000 people' (quoted in Mańkowski 1978: 264).

The abandoned farmsteads, their fireplaces often still alight, were immediately resettled by ethnic German settlers from Bessarabia, Hungary, Romania, and Yugoslavia.

Of the captured and interned villagers, more than 7,000 were submitted to racial assessments: 4.4% were deemed 'worthy of Germanisation', 73.0% acceptable only as bonded labourers or 'helots', and 22.6%, branded 'racially intolerable', were remanded to Auschwitz-Birkenau.⁵ Many of those expelled, however, eluded internment and found refuge in outlying hamlets where they often joined the underground. On 11 December, three occupied farms in Nawóz were set on fire. The neighbouring village of Kitów was immediately designated for reprisals. Its inhabitants were murdered in their homes (Kasperek 1988: 344). SS-man Joseph Scharrenberg recalled, at the time of his post-war trial:

'I was part of an execution squad numbering thirty men. The village was surrounded by soldiers, but most of us were sent in for a house-to-house search to find and kill people ... Two soldiers were ordered into each house. "All inhabitants must be shot on the spot" [we were told]. We felt sick when we entered the first house. We found a family of five persons. They spoke German. They were Poles evacuated from Posen [near the German border]. We hesitated to carry out the order and called the group leader ... We only executed the order on his strict injunction. We ordered the people to lie down on the floor and [then] fired on them. I killed a young girl of 18 or 19 and a boy of 12. I was sorry' (quoted in Mańkowski 1978: 267).

In all, the Nazis murdered 170 persons in Kitów. Commenting the drama in the clandestine *Głos Warszawy* on 18 December, a journalist of the Polish Workers'

⁵ "Bericht über die Arbeit der Umwandererzentralstelle, Zweigstelle Zamość von Beginn der Aktion Zamość vom 27.11 bis 31.12.1942", report submitted by SS-Obersturmbannführer H. Krume, reproduced in Madajczyk 1977, I: 256-259.

Party wrote: 'The fate of the Jews is very fresh in our memories.' He then quoted a recent declaration published in the Nazi party daily, the *Völkischer Beobachter*: 'Thus is accomplished the sentence the Poles imposed upon themselves. The Polish people, a pack of unworthy Aryans sometimes defiled by yellow blood, has forfeited any right to be treated as a member of the European family.' 'Only an armed uprising of the entire people', concluded the journalist, 'can master the Hitlerian beast' (quoted in Madajczyk, 1977, I: 224-225). And, in the Zamojszczyzna, this is precisely what was about to happen.

In the hope of better controlling a rapidly expanding and efficient Polish resistance movement, the Nazis played on the Polish-Ukrainian rivalry that had been voluntarily sharpened by the Warsaw government during the 1930s (Buell 1939: 253-287). Indeed, the linguistic border between the two peoples ran between Zamość and the river Bug, to the east. In the Tomaszów Lubelski district, near Bełżec, 15 Polish villages were emptied of their inhabitants and handed over to Ukrainian farmers, used as a buffer population between German colonists and the 'residual Poles'. In early 1943, the Germans set their sights on the Hrubieszów district which, in 1939 was 12% Jewish and 38% Ukrainian. 52 Polish villages were emptied by February and farmsteads divided between colonists and Ukrainians. By March 1943, another 50,000 Poles had been expelled from 116 localities. Only half of those expropriated, however, fell into German hands. Many joined the Resistance. Polish camp survivor Piotr Denisów relates:

'Children and women were sent to Majdanek [concentration camp] because the latter's husbands had fled to the forests to fight with the partisans, their families being taken as hostages ... I remember the children going to the gas chamber.'

This, tragically, is a fact. Yet, at this point, Denisów's recollection slips into the realm of phantasm:

'There was an event. A Bavarian was on duty at the gas chamber and shut in the children. Some of them - there were some older girls, 10 or 11 - knelt down and began to pray. When the Bavarian saw this - there was a loophole in the door -, he was touched and unbolted the door. The children, half asphyxiated, were handed to the Polish Red Cross who put many in hospital in Lublin, whereas those in good health were placed in Polish families'.⁶

Could compassion thus emerge from the guts of the Beast? Could Piotr Denisów, as a 'bystander' (and prisoner), have observed this purported 'event' at the side of

⁶ Akta Procesu Bühlera, vol. IV, quoted in Wnuk 1975: 120-121.

the ‘compassionate executioner’, looking with him together through the loophole of an iron door? By specifying that the guard was Bavarian, did he imply that the man was a Catholic and hence sensitive to the Polish girls’ prayers rather than a ‘godless Prussian’ or pagan Nazi? Or did the intensity of the horror experienced at Majdanek simply lead an otherwise lucid man sincerely to imagine a miracle and to preserve it in his memory as an event? In practice, some children of prisoners were then handed over to the Red Cross. Many died of exhaustion once in hospital, only to be buried in cloth sacks by the inhabitants of nearby Lublin. But not all received even this minimal consideration, as is shown by the testimony of Kazimierz Wdzyencyz:

‘On 25 July 1943 ... it was decided that the children from the pacified zones of Hrubieszów and Zamość [districts] would be gassed and their mothers sent as forced labourers to Germany. Prior to that, unfounded rumours had circulated according to which the children had been placed under the protection of the Polish Red Cross ... But the truth became public. When the vehicles arrived to remove the children, the mothers, sensing what was in store, did not allow their children to be torn away from them. The men and women of the SS, speaking through interpreters, reassured them and [sought to] persuade them to relinquish the children. These exhortations not having had the desired effect, they began to take them by force, throwing and loading the children onto the vehicle. Cries and lamentations resounded on the square. Mad with despair, the mothers fled with their children. The SS and camp guards caught them one by one. I saw how [one] Hofmann, in SS uniform, struggled with a prisoner who forcefully clung to her baby. She was a young woman of strong constitution. I saw how, at a certain point, Hofmann tore the baby away from her and threw its little bleeding body, certainly already lifeless, onto the lorry. I observed this at some distance and it appeared to me that the head of the child had remained between the hands of its mother. Maybe I am mistaken. Maybe I was the victim of a hallucination. I know that Hofmann would stand by the doors of the crematorium and attract children who approached with sugar and dolls. Then he killed them and burnt them...’⁷

Was this witness still under the effect of shock and delusion when he testified at the war trials? Does he tell of events that only he survived? Did an amalgam occur in his mind of experiences so numerous, intense and unfathomable that temporal references and spatial boundaries between occurrences fade, whereas incongruous details acquire a key position in his synthetic narrative for lack of any rationally satisfactory or emotionally tolerable explanation? As in the case of Piotr Denisów,

⁷ Archiwum Państwowego Muzeum na Majdanku, quoted in Wnuk 1975: 119.