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The Palestinian Nakba and its Continuous Repercussions

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# The Palestinian Nakba and its Continuous Repercussions

## INTRODUCTION

A NUMBER OF BOOKS WERE PUBLISHED IN ARABIC ABOUT THE MEANING of the Arab colossal defeat (*Nakba*) in 1948 and its implications during the first decade following this eventful catastrophe. In the summer of 1948, Constantine Zurayk was the first to try and analyze the reasons behind the Nakba, followed by Musa al-'Alami during the following year.<sup>1</sup> However, in the years that ensued, very little was published about the meanings of the Nakba and its repercussions, either by Palestinians or by other Arab intellectuals. Then, 'Aref al-'Aref published his six-volume seminal work entitled *Al-Nakba, Nakba of Bayt al-Maqdis or Paradise Lost*.<sup>2</sup> These books and other Arab publications during the first decade after the catastrophe were important contributions to the Arab understanding of this traumatic event and of the necessary conditions to overcome its results. However, the stream of intellectual works on this topic seemed to dry up from the late 1950's writers turning instead to other issues such as the political changes then taking place in the Arab regimes and other current events.

The next intellectual attempt to grasp the full-fledged meaning of the Nakba took place in the aftermath of the June 1967 Arab *Naksa* (setback). But even this attempt was again short-lived and overpowered by the obsession with military and political events in the region. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that very little was written in this period about the meaning of the Palestinian catastrophe and its long run implications.<sup>3</sup>

The scope of this article does not allow a detailed discussion of all the Nakba's meanings and implications on the Palestinian people. What it attempts to do is to outline some of the different aspects of the Nakba, focusing on the collective dimensions. The Palestinian catastrophe and its implications intensified over time and gathered new meanings, stemming from the tragic experiences of the Palestinians in their exile. The passing of

more than sixty years has done very little to erase the Nakba's deep direct and indirect repercussions on subsequent Palestinian generations. The experience of statelessness and the injustice which befell the refugees has only intensified. Therefore, the history of the Palestinian people is deeply marked by a dividing line between the pre-1948 and post-Nakba periods. I briefly examine the thirty years that preceded the Nakba, and then review the years which followed, focusing on new readings of the 1948 event.

The Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in June 1967, the colonization of these newly occupied Palestinian territories and the repressive measures of the occupiers, particularly after the eruption of the first Intifada in December 1987, added new chapters to the tragic saga of Palestinian suffering. Contrary to what many think, particularly in Israel, the Nakba was not a one-time event connected to the war in Palestine and its immediate catastrophic repercussions on the Palestinians. Rather, and more correctly, it refers to the accumulated Palestinian experience since the 1948 war up to the present. After the Oslo agreements in 1993, there were hopes that the stateless Palestinian people would soon earn freedom and independence. However, the failure of the peace process to end the Israeli occupation and allow the birth of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel pushed the Palestinians back to square one. Furthermore, the eruption of a new cycle of violence which began in September 2000 added new dimensions to the disintegration of Palestinian society. For many Palestinians, these more recent events are adding new chapters and new meanings to the long-lived catastrophe since 1948. By outlining the major effects of the Nakba on the Palestinians during six decades, this paper is intended to enhance understanding and empathy for the continuous and multiple dimensions of the Palestinian catastrophe from the late 1940's to today.

## EARLY INTERPRETATIONS OF THE NAKBA AND ITS CAUSES

As early as August 1948, Constantine Zurayk (1909–2000) had grasped the full meaning of the Arab defeat in Palestine and coined the notion of the Nakba (catastrophe) in his book “The Meaning of the Catastrophe.”<sup>4</sup> Seven Arab countries had tried to prevent the partition of Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish state and failed, he wrote. Israel stood up to the invading Arab armies, defeated them, and enlarged its borders at the expense of the territory allocated for the Arab state by the UN. Furthermore, the stream of Arab refugees had increased during the previous

months (as of August 1948) and about 400,000 Palestinians were already displaced from their localities at that time. They lost homes, lands, and other property and wandered in the neighboring Arab countries in despair and helplessness. This outline of “the meaning of the catastrophe” was the first to be published in the Arab world in the midst of the war.

Zurayk, a professor of history and vice president of the American University of Beirut, was the first Arab intellectual to fully grasp the meaning of the Nakba and publish his views in public. He wanted his students as well as other readers to play a role in minimizing the long-term repercussions of the defeat by addressing the factors comprising the Arab predicament. Zurayk was a pioneer among Arab intellectuals, politicians and other leaders who delved into analyzing the meaning of the Nakba. Furthermore, he pointed out what steps needed to be taken, both in the short and long term, to enable the Arabs to overcome their weakness. A failure to address the Arab predicament, Zurayk warned, could result in further disasters befalling the Arab world. Zurayk, the intellectual, expressed confidence in the potential ability of the Arab world to address the reasons behind the defeat. However, he could not hide his scholarly skepticism concerning the prospects for a fundamental change of the Arab reality in the near future.<sup>5</sup>

Musa al-‘Alami (1897–1984) was a scion of an old Jerusalemite notable family who took part in leading the national struggle of the Palestinians to keep the country complete in the hands of its indigenous people. His book *‘Ibrat Filastin* (The Lesson of Palestine) is instructive and representative of his generation’s understanding of the Palestinian debacle in 1948.<sup>6</sup> The author’s aim is to explain what went wrong and who was to blame for the defeat in the war of Palestine. His book represents self-criticism, a diagnosis of the failure, and a prescription for the recovery from the setback.

He begins his diagnosis by outlining the external reasons of the Nakba. He puts the blame, first and foremost, on the British and their policies. He also blames the Americans, the Russians and the international community, all of whom contributed to the disaster. The author also explores the internal causes and blames the Palestinians, who fought the war of 1948 without adequate preparations. As for the Arab states and their armies, al-‘Alami says that they were not in any better shape. They suffered from the same symptoms of weakness, lack of seriousness, and ill understanding of the challenges they faced. He highlights three basic reasons for the Arab failure in 1948: The absence of unity, inadequate military preparations, and the general weakness of the Arab societies. This diagnosis leads the author to suggest that unity, freedom, and the development of the Arab peoples are prerequisites for future success and recovery.

Zurayk and al-'Alami focused their studies and analyses on diagnosing the causes of the Arab defeat in the war of 1948. The lot of the Palestinians who became stateless, fragmented, and marginalized was a secondary topic. The point of departure of the authors was pan-Arab rather than a local Palestinian approach. The political and military defeats of the Arabs were fresh and painful. The implications of the Nakba for the Arab countries who were involved in the war for Palestine were clear and immediate. A wave of political instability shook the Arab regimes that were perceived as partners to the failure.

The first country to suffer from a series of coups d'état was Syria. Then the Lebanese prime minister was assassinated in Amman in July 1951 and his host, King Abdullah was assassinated in Jerusalem a few days afterwards. The turn of Egypt came a year later, when the monarchy was toppled by the "Free Officers" in July 1952. This event had a profound influence on the Arab world and generated deeper political transformations in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East.<sup>7</sup> The effects of the catastrophe continued to impact the Arab countries during the 1950's, and influenced the reality of the Palestinians in varied ways.

## THE ROOTS OF THE PALESTINIAN CATASTROPHE

It is impossible to understand the contemporary history of the Palestinians without comprehending fully how the war of 1948 changed their world. Until WW I, the Palestinians were part and parcel of the Arab region controlled by successive Islamic Empires. During the late 19th century, Arab national sentiments began to spread among the educated strata in the large cities of Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine as the nationalists sought to liberate the Arab lands from the Ottoman control. At the same time, Jews in Europe established an organized Zionist movement aiming to transform Palestine into a Jewish homeland. Furthermore, thousands of Zionist Jews started to immigrate into Palestine and settle it, beginning in the 1880's.

However, only at the end of World War I did the Palestinians start to fully grasp the serious challenge of the Zionist project, which by then had earned the official support of Great Britain with the Balfour Declaration, issued in November 1917. The British, who succeeded the Ottomans in controlling Palestine and other neighboring Arab countries, posed a special threat to the national aspirations of the Palestinians. In the next two decades, the Arabs in general and the Palestinians in particular did their

best to persuade the British to end their support for the Zionist project, but failed to achieve this aim by peaceful means in the 1920's.<sup>8</sup>

The Palestinians who watched the construction of the infrastructure for a Jewish state turned to violence as a last resort to defend their country against British rule and the Zionist newcomers. However, the Jewish state-in-the-making gathered more and more strength and support, particularly after World War II and the disclosure of the horrors of the Holocaust. The climax of international support for establishing a Jewish state in Palestine materialized fully in the UN partition plan, approved on 29 November 1947. Notwithstanding these new realities, the Palestinians were absolutely confident in their cause and believed that justice would prevail.

At the end of 1947 the Arabs of Palestine were more than two thirds (about 1,350,000) of the country's two million people. Furthermore, they possessed about 90% of Palestine's privately-owned land. Hence, as an indigenous stable majority, they believed in their right to take control of a free and complete Palestine. As the indigenous majority they were ready to share the country with the Jewish minority, not by dividing it but rather by living together. The Arabs were well aware of the divergent Zionist plans. However, in their worst dreams, they could not imagine the magnitude of the disaster which would befall them soon after their rejection of the UN partition plan.

The tragedy of the Palestinians started to take shape already in the late 1930's, but more so during the late months of 1947. The Palestinian leaders misled themselves and their people into believing that "justice" and pan-Arab support would prevent the catastrophe of losing their entire country or a major part of it. The fact that the idea of establishing a Jewish state in at least part of Palestine had gathered almost full support among the international community was not fully grasped and internalized. The Holocaust and the new realities of post-World War II world were not fully understood or taken into account by the Arabs. Moreover, the Palestinians and particularly their leaders misled themselves into believing that the Arab countries would be able to overcome the Zionist military superiority.

They failed also to consider the effects of factionalized Arab world and the clear interest of King Abdullah of Jordan in preventing the establishment of a Palestinian state, even if it meant colluding with Britain and the Jewish Yishuv. The Palestinian cause had too many enemies, but the majority of the Palestinian people were unable to grasp this reality and to behave accordingly. The numerous mistakes and miscalculations of the Palestinian leadership stemmed from the belief that their just case would prevail and this, in turn, prevented them from behaving pragmatically.

After 1948, the Palestinian literature dealing with the Nakba and its implications focused on “Paradise Lost”, the suffering of the 750,000 refugees and the destruction of their homes, villages and towns.<sup>9</sup> The solution for this predicament from the Palestinian perspective was liberation of the homeland and implementing the right of return. Those dimensions of the Palestinian Nakba are relatively well known and have been dealt with in the literature. But other aspects of that catastrophe and its long-term implications are scarcely discussed.

One of the dimensions absent from the discussion is the Palestinian failure to establish an independent state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the aftermath of the 1948 war. The Palestinians focused their discussion on the external reasons for this failure and have said very little about the weak and factionalized Palestinian society. It is important to recognize that the loss of the homeland, the disintegration of the national community, and the marginalization of all the Palestinian communities became the most important elements of the 1948 catastrophe. The other long-term dimensions of the Palestinian tragedy during the past half-century stem from the transformation of the Palestinians into a stateless people. The effect of this new reality became more obvious with time. Unlike other tragic events, the passing of time does not diminish the national absence of freedom and dignity and the loss of statehood in a world based on nation states.

### THE SOCIO-POLITICAL REALITIES OF THE PALESTINIANS AFTER 1948

The repercussions of the war in 1948 on the Palestinians are analogous to an earthquake which changed the geography, the demography, and the identity of Palestine and its inhabitants. At the end of the 1948 war and the signing of the ceasefire agreements in 1949, the direct implications of the Palestinian catastrophe were clear. The homeland was lost and shattered. The name of Palestine disappeared from the atlas of the globe and the maps of the nation states of the Middle East. The largest portion of it was occupied by Israel, which annexed approximately half of the proposed Arab state which was to be established according to the UN partition plan of 1947. Israel was established on about 78% of historic Palestine and the borders of the ceasefire agreements were recognized *de facto* by the international community.

The second largest portion of Palestine was occupied and annexed by the Hashemite regime of Jordan. After 1949 this central hilly part of the country came to be known as the West Bank. The Gaza Strip, a tiny

portion of the country bordering Egypt, fell under Egyptian administration in 1948 and remained so until 1967. Gaza was transformed into a densely populated area. The original 80,000 people of the Gaza Strip absorbed more than double their number of refugees, who were settled in numerous camps in the suburbs of the few townships. Too many refugees living in a tiny underdeveloped territory transformed the Gaza Strip into a troubled area with deep socio-economic distress.<sup>10</sup>

The Palestinian experience in the Arab world in the aftermath of the Nakba was not pleasant. The lip-service support for the Palestinian cause was accompanied by contempt and humiliation for Palestinian refugees within Arab societies. Most of the refugees came to live in camps adjacent to Arab towns. They competed with the poor and unemployed segments of the host countries for charity and the few employment opportunities available, and turned into a political and economic burden for the Arab regimes and societies. International organizations such as UNRWA and the Red Cross supplied basic humanitarian assistance, which had the effect of enhancing the segregation of the Palestinian refugees in their camps. Thus, the refugees were able to survive in the camps, while the Arab regimes and societies liberated themselves from any responsibility for integrating their guests into their socio-economic fabric. The refugee camps enabled the Palestinians to rebuild their communities along the lines of their original localities and thus spared them daily humiliating encounters with the host states and societies.

Notwithstanding the gaps and differences between the Palestinian communities, the loss of the homeland and the feeling of injustice, betrayal and victimization provided a feeling of commonality. The suffering of the Palestinians in daily life was first and foremost the lot of the residents of the refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and the Gaza strip. The vast majority of these Palestinian refugees were peasants who had made their living in the past from cultivating the land which they had now lost. Furthermore, most of these refugees were uneducated and faced policies of exclusion, humiliation and forced unemployment. They became dependent on UNRWA and other local and international aid organizations. Without its provision of such basic needs as housing, food, health and education services for their children, the catastrophe of the Palestinians in the refugee camps would have been much worse.

Many Palestinian refugees did not give up the hope of going back to their homes and properties after the end of the war, and tried to return to their original localities. They crossed the new borders erected in the aftermath of 1948 in an attempt to go back to their homes and lands. About



20,000 succeeded in their mission, particularly in the Galilee, and thus spared their families the humiliation of exile in the refugee camps. However, many more failed to make it and a few thousand Palestinians paid dearly with their lives in their attempts to return to their homes.<sup>11</sup> The Israeli policy was extremely harsh with respect to Palestinians who “infiltrated” the borders of the newly established Jewish state, which had a clear interest in preventing the enlargement of its Arab minority. The partial expulsion of the Palestinians from their homeland was complemented by the Israeli policy of transfer *ex post facto*. Hundreds of Arab villages in Israel were destroyed and on many of them new Jewish settlements were established. As a result of these measures, the stream of Palestinian returnees dried up from the mid-1950’s on. Since then, second and third Palestinian generation of refugees have been born in the camps of exile

Palestinian society disintegrated into marginalized and shattered communities inside and outside the historical homeland after 1948. About half of the Palestinians survived in their localities in the West Bank, Gaza and Israel. However, approximately 750,000 were displaced and embarked on a new life in the neighboring Arab countries.<sup>12</sup> Inside Israel an estimated 156,000 people survived the war and became an Arab minority in the Jewish state. The Palestinian people lost its unity and became homeless in a modern world based on the nation state system. Furthermore, most of the Palestinians were transformed into either stateless residents or second class citizens wherever they lived. Jordan and Israel, which together occupied and divided the territory allocated to the Palestinian Arab state allocated by the UN, offered the Palestinians formal citizenship. However, in practice, the policies of both countries delegitimized Palestinian identity and their policies emphasized control and cooptation rather than partnership and equality.

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan competed with the Palestinian leadership led by Hajj Amin al-Husayni in representing the interests of the Arabs of Palestine both before and after 1948. In the aftermath of the Nakba the leadership of Hajj Amin was weakened. Nonetheless, he continued to claim to be the only legitimate leader of the Palestinian people until his death in 1974.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, a new party, the PLO, emerged in the 1960’s and gradually won the support of all sides concerned as the sole representative of the Palestinians. The members of the new strata of activists were very different from the urban elite of “notables” who had led the Palestinian national movement during the British Mandate. This new generation of PLO leaders who grew up in exile replaced the old established elite in leading the Palestinians. This transformation was in keeping with the

revolutionary upheavals that roiled the Arab world during the 1950's and 1960's. Part of the old established notable strata in the West Bank succeeded in keeping their status and interests for a while by collaborating with the Jordanian regime. However, the Six-Day War changed their lot dramatically and eventually the PLO activists won the leadership and representation of the Palestinian people.

The Palestinian refugees nurtured the idea of returning to their homeland and rejected integration into the neighboring societies. Segregation suited both sides, particularly in countries like Lebanon, based as it is on social and political communal segregation. Jordan was an exceptional case, where Palestinians were offered full citizenship, fair opportunities for integration, and Jordanian identity. The prospects that this endeavor would succeed appeared fairly good in the early 1960's. However, the Arab cold war, the reawakening of the Palestinian national movement and the occupation of the West Bank by Israel put an end to the Jordanian efforts to suppress the Palestinian identity. Two decades into the Palestinian Diaspora, the refugees stepped up to the political stage to play an important role in affirming their national identity and took the lead in the struggle for liberation and representation. The sons of the peasants who became refugees in 1948 and after were transformed into freedom fighters in the late 1960's.<sup>14</sup> The defeat of the Arab regimes and their armies in June 1967 enhanced the reawakening Palestinian movement led by the PLO.

### NEW MEANINGS OF THE NAKBA AFTER JUNE 1967

The Arab defeat in June 1967 reawakened memories of the Nakba among some Palestinians. However, it is possible to point out some positive socio-political implications of this war. The Gaza Strip and the West Bank were united under Israeli control. The Jordanian regime that competed with the Palestinian leadership was weakened after the loss of the West Bank. The Palestinians in Israel who suffered from segregation and disconnection with the Arab world in general and the Palestinians in particular, were able to meet them again. The status of the Arabs in Israel was upgraded as citizens in comparison to the newly occupied Palestinian brethren. Furthermore, after the signing of the 1979 peace agreement between Israel and Egypt, the biggest Arab country opened its gates for tourists from the Jewish state, including its Arab citizens. A similar process occurred with Jordan in the mid-1990's and enhanced the status of the Arab citizens, not only in Israel but rather in the whole region. The Israeli citizenship conferred upon the

Palestinians within Israel in 1948 became much more meaningful after 1967. Thus, the feeling of relative deprivation of the Palestinians who survived in Israel and lived under military control until 1966 changed gradually into relative relief and comfort.

As for the Palestinians in the Arab countries, some were easily integrated in the neighboring host societies while others still suffer from segregation and discrimination. The largest Palestinian community lives in Jordan and many of its members live quite well as equal citizens. For the city dwellers from Haifa, Acre, Tiberias and Safed, life in Beirut, Tripoli or Damascus was not a sharp departure from what they were used to in their original home towns. Hence, they were able to integrate socially and culturally. Most of them did not live in the Palestinian refugee camps but rather in the cities' neighborhoods. Many were able to make a living in those cities because they had the skills needed to survive economically in the urban market of the host societies. Furthermore, Palestinians who had economic or intellectual property joined the development boom of the Arab oil countries of the Gulf and turned into successful businessmen. But even those lucky Palestinians were not spared the effects of political and military upheavals. Thus, the Palestinians in Kuwait suffered terribly from the repercussions of the first Gulf war in 1991, and others from the turmoil in Iraq after 2003.<sup>15</sup>

Unlike much of the urban population, the peasants from Palestinian villages, the biggest group of refugees from Palestine, could not integrate into either the rural areas or the cities. Nowhere in the Arab world was there a need for peasants to cultivate the land. Thus, the Palestinians ended up segregated in their refugee camps on the outskirts of the cities, with few of the assets and talents needed to integrate socially and economically into the urban fabric. The Arabs did not perceive the issue of the refugees as a socio-economic problem but rather a political one. Neither the host countries nor the Palestinians themselves had an interest in full integration because it negated the basic belief and struggle for a return to Palestine. During the first two decades of refuge, most Palestinians and Arabs believed that the return to Palestine would happen soon. In addition to politics, economic and socio-cultural factors supported anti-integrationist attitudes and, with the passage of time, the refugees started to nurture an identity as victims who had been subjected to brutal injustice. Some Palestinians hold on to the idea of return to historical Palestine as the only just solution for the national problem.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to make detailed review of complicated relations which developed between the Palestinians and the

neighboring host countries. It suffices for our purposes to mention some of the upheavals which resulted in death and destruction among the Palestinians. After the success of the PLO in gaining political and military support, certain Arab regimes viewed this development as an immediate danger. Such perceptions to conflicts, including the open civil wars of Black September (1970) in Jordan and the long civil war in Lebanon from 1975 until 1989. The indecisive nature of the civil war in Lebanon attracted the involvement of Syria, and led to the Israeli invasion in 1982. The official goal of Israel was to destroy the PLO and its bases in Lebanon. This aim was achieved to some extent and the Palestinians suffered again from massacres and destruction in the refugee camps. However, the ultimate goal of Israel to destroy the Palestinian national movement was not achieved. The PLO activists moved their struggle from Lebanon to the West Bank and Gaza, focusing more on political popular resistance of the Israeli occupation.

In the aftermath of June 1967, millions of Palestinians were reunited in their homeland under Israeli occupation and control. Putting an end to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza became the main goal of the PLO from the mid-1980s. The Palestinian leadership gradually grasped the new reality and accepted the political solution of establishing a state in the occupied territories to live in peace alongside Israel.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, the Israeli occupation and colonization of the Palestinian territories continued, notwithstanding the peace with Egypt, Jordan, and the Oslo agreements. Today, most Israelis and Palestinians support a political compromise which allows, theoretically, an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel. However, most also realize that the prospects for such a compromise to materialize are very slim. Almost half a century after the Israeli occupation of all the Palestinian territories, millions of them are still stateless, living under military control.

The tragedy of Palestinian suffering is reaching new heights. The Palestinians were transformed into “the Jews of the Middle East”. They are stateless, marginalized and undesired everywhere in Israel and Arab countries. It is not difficult to list the main elements of a reasonable solution for the continuous Palestinian tragedy. Four decades after the Nakba, the Palestinian leadership had the wisdom to accept a historic compromise and has declared that it seeks to establish a state in the West Bank and Gaza strip alongside Israel. Most Israelis have reached the conclusion that the Israeli occupation and colonization is more of a burden than a benefit. However, the historic compromise continues to be deferred. The repercussions of the Palestinian catastrophe accumulate with the time and keep shattering the fabric of the Palestinian society more than six decades after

the establishment of Israel on the ruins of Palestine. Meanwhile, the Israeli side attempts to impose unfair solutions which reflect the asymmetric balance of power rather than a deep belief in peace, justice and historical compromise. Thus, it is difficult to conclude this paper with an optimistic or even realistic hope that the main elements of the Palestinian catastrophe will be resolved soon.

## CONCLUSION

The first decade of Palestinian statelessness was the most difficult and humiliating. Many of the Palestinians, in particular, and Arabs in general, convinced themselves that their tragedy was a temporary predicament. The name of the game during the 1950's was survival until their lot would change. However, in time the Palestinians lost faith in the Arab regimes and even in their own leadership, which lacked control and unity. The disintegration of Palestine and the Palestinian society became an integral and continuous factor in the modern history of the Middle East. During the 1960s and particularly after June 1967, the PLO succeeded in putting the Palestinian case back on the Middle Eastern stage and the international agenda. The new Israeli occupation enabled the PLO to reunite many of the Palestinians in their quest for justice, liberation and freedom. During the 1980's the PLO leadership moderated its political views and became ready for a compromise of establishing a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. The Palestinian national movement modified its aims after 1988 from the vague struggle of liberation to a specific goal of ending the Israeli control of the more recently occupied territories (in June 1967) and establishing a state.

The failure of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and eruption of the second Intifada in September 2000 changed for the worse the prospects for a historical compromise. The institutions of the Palestinian Authority were destroyed or dramatically weakened during the cycle of violence, which lasted until 2005. The unilateral Israeli pullout from Gaza in that year accelerated the strengthening of Hamas and other Islamic militant groups.

Israel continues to build the apartheid wall in the West Bank and to turn the Palestinian localities into shattered enclaves. The besieged Gaza Strip under Hamas rule and the new cycle of Palestinian polarization spreads defeatism and hopelessness among all sides concerned. For many Palestinians the current realities resemble the days of the Nakba in 1948, when the Zionists succeeded in establishing a Jewish state at their. More

than six decades later, Israel has many achievements to celebrate. However, the Zionist movement failed to build a normal state as a result of forty years of occupation and colonization of Gaza and the West Bank. Paradoxically, the Jews in Israel are less safe than are many Jewish communities in the Diaspora.

As for the Palestinians, the list of atrocities that befell them since 1948 is getting longer. Many of them commemorate the catastrophe not only as a historical event but rather as a contemporary reality. The disastrous results of the war in 1948 continue to impact the shattered Palestinian communities by different ways. In 1988, the PLO leadership expressed its readiness for a historical compromise to allow the establishment of a mini Palestinian state alongside Israel. The failure to achieve that compromise is adding new complications and shedding more blood on both sides of the divide. The PLO leadership is still ready for reconciliation and peace which will bring an end to the Israeli occupation. Today, Israel rejects the Palestinian offer of dividing Palestine into two independent states and risks its future existence. The ball is in the Israeli court. It is a serious question whether the division of Palestine into two independent states is still a realistic option. The alternatives are either sharing the country in one bi-national state or an official Israeli apartheid system.

## NOTES

See dialogue discussion <http://www.israelstudies.umd.edu/sharednarratives.html>

1. Musa al-'Alami, *The Lesson of Palestine* (Beirut, 1949) [Arabic].
2. The first volume of this book was published in 1956 and the last one in 1961. Earlier Muhammad Nimr al-Khatib from Haifa published his account about the 1948 disaster in Damascus, 1951 under the title *Min Athar al-Nakba*. Other books about the Palestinian catastrophe were published in the 1950's, one by advocate Muhammad Nimr al-Hawwari in Arabic about the secret of the Nakba printed in Nazareth, 1955.
3. Very few autobiographies and other kinds of personal accounts were published by Palestinians during the 1950's and 1960's.
4. "*Ma'na al-Nakba*" in Arabic. The first edition was published in August 1948 in Beirut and the second, two months later.
5. See Fritz Steppat, "Re-reading the Meaning of Disaster in 1985" in Hisham Nashshabe (ed.) *Studia Palestina: Studies in Honour of Constantine K. Zurayk* (Beirut, 1988), 12–19.

6. Published in Beirut, 1949. A shorter version in English was published in the *Middle East Journal* 3 (1949): 373–405.

7. Malcolm Kerr, *The Arab Cold War, Gamal Abd ul-Nasir and his Rivals 1958–1970* (London, 1971).

8. Muhammad Muslih, *The Origins of Palestinian Nationalism* (New York, 1988) 191–210.

9. Aref al-Aref coined this concept for the loss of Palestine in his book about the Nakba in the mid 1950's. Since then the concept has been used in literature, paintings, music and other genres of Palestinian art.

10. The Gaza Strip continues to be one of the most troubled areas in the Middle East. Its control by Hamas since 2007 has led to two wars by Israel and many hundreds of Palestinian deaths.

11. Benny Morris wrote thoroughly about this topic in his book *Israel's Border Wars, 1949–1956: Arab Infiltration, Israeli Retaliation, and the Countdown to the Suez War* (New York, 1997).

12. Recently, both Palestinian and Israeli scholars seem to agree on this estimate of 700,000–750,000 refugees. See for example, Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage* (Boston, 2006) and Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge, 2004).

13. Hajj Amin was the most obvious representative of the Jerusalemite notable leadership of the Palestinians, which lost that leadership to the new generation of the PLO activists in the 1960's.

14. Rosemary Sayegh, *Palestinians from Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London, 1979).

15. In the aftermath of liberating Kuwait from the Iraqi occupation in 1991, 250,000 or more Palestinians who lived and worked in that country for decades were expelled. The vast majority of them came to live in Jordan, while others went to Iraq, Syria and elsewhere.

16. In November 1988, about a year after the eruption of the first Intifada, Yasser Arafat declared the establishment of a Palestinian independent state in Gaza and the West Bank. Furthermore, he declared that the Palestinians opt to live in peace alongside Israel.