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Variant Identities: The Palestinian Before and After 1948

Following the American Psychological Association's Guidelines

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Abstract:

The word “Palestinian” has had variant meanings since the British Mandate to the present day. The memory of Jerusalem and the inter-religious and cultural dynamism of pre-1948 is one deeply ingrained into the psyche of the Palestinian people and this has been evidenced by photographs and memoirs written by Palestinians prior to and during the al-Nakba (catastrophe of 1948). I will be referencing works by Issa J. Boullata, Elias Chacour, Edward Said, and others as well and my own personal familial accounts to signify the impact of memory in reconstructing identities after 1948—identities often confused, torn, and traumatized by the displacement and dispossession of lands and occupancy and the impact this has had on future generations of Palestinians both in and outside of the Middle East.

Keywords: Nakba, Zionism, Palestinian, national identity

“Our natural tendency to assume that what exists today has always been, may afford us psychic peace but only at the terrible cost of denying reality. And once historical reality has been denied, our capacity to understand and react meaningfully to the present is similarly destroyed”

-Janet Abu-Lughod, “The Demographic Transformation of Palestine”¹

What led me to do this research was my own upbringing as a Palestinian American in a small suburb of Cleveland. My sisters, brother, and I grew up with a heightened awareness in Midwest America, to be American with Arab roots involved a sort of diaphanous walk between old country traditions and the smell and taste of perpetual freedom. Every Sunday morning our kitchen smelled of fava beans and garlic—with a garnish of chilled crisp white onions and me complaining to my mother, “why can’t I just have pancakes like everyone else?” It took me my adult years to realize the importance of my mother’s cooking and the reality that life could and would not feel complete without smelling of garlic and onions. It is a smell I cherish to this day. It is what makes me truly a complex American in every sense of the word.

The purpose of this paper is twofold: to illustrate the various factors contributing to Palestinian identity and how this identity has changed since the Nakba (catastrophe) of 1948 mainly through the prism of memory. This paper in no way seeks to delegitimize homeland aspirations for the Jewish people through Zionism. Rather the paper serves to illustrate how Palestinian aspirations for national identity have been distorted and manipulated through media, the barrier wall, checkpoints, and other systematic attempts to delegitimize Palestine’s historic memory, which is

¹ Said, Edward et al.(1988). “Profile of the Palestinian People”. *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestine Question*. Eds. Edward W. Said and Christopher Hitchens. Verso, London. Pp. 237-8.

rooted in Ottoman society and later the British Mandate. However, it was the Nakba of 1948 which shaped Palestinian identity and politicized it like no other time period in history.² History and memory almost vanished overnight, causing a rift in people's psyches—leading them to develop anger, resentment, rejection, and self-malaise—psychological imprints which to this day are felt by all who experience exile, war, torture, and humiliation and I would argue, all who identify as Palestinian. The same condition Jews faced in the Holocaust, the Armenians in their genocide, and the Kurds, are the same conditions felt by Palestinians.³ However, self-determination and national identity were never fully realized for the Palestinians even though moments of promise seemed to emerge under the British Mandate. Promises made by the British, as we well know today, had been broken and can be felt even to the present day through the politicization of Palestinian identity.

This paper begins by defining national identity and then goes on to explain the unique importance of Palestinian identity and its pluralistic contributions to the region. It begins its development under Ottoman rule during the reign of Abdulhamid II and then becomes more defined and politicized during the British Mandate. By 1948, we learn that Palestinians no longer carry a legitimacy to their homelands and are mostly confined to villages in the West Bank and Gaza. To be Palestinian by 1948, is to be exiled, dispossessed, an 'absentee', and now a

² According to the BADIL Survey of Palestinian Youth on Identity and Social Ties Working Paper no. 14, "Palestinian national identity shaped, and was shaped by, the conflict with the Zionist movement in a reciprocal, two-way, relationship. In other words, Palestinian identity has evolved for many decades within evolving social, political and economic contexts" (p.10). "One People United: A Deterritorialized Palestinian Identity-BADIL Survey of Palestinian Youth Identity and Social Ties-2012". BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights.

³ Khalidi, Rashid (1997). *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*. Columbia University Press, New York. p.11. Here Khalidi explains how all three of these groups—mainly the Kurds, Armenians, and Palestinians, had reason to expect self-determination promised by Woodrow Wilson's 14 points in the aftermath of World War I and of the breakup of the Ottoman empire. Khalidi writes, "The Armenians finally have an independent republic, albeit one engaged in border conflicts with neighboring Azerbaijan, and located in only part of their ancestral homeland. The Kurds, although denied statehood, currently enjoy an ambiguous international protection in northern Iraq, while a decade-long conflict with the authorities in Turkish Kurdistan continues" p. 11.

fragmented and disappearing collective identity in the Holy Land due to the diaspora. The result is violent and nonviolent resistance to Israeli colonization and discreditation of Palestinian right to the land. Post-1948 also re-identifies the Palestinian (and not by choice) as one which is no longer fluid, but now solely Muslim and minutely Christian (as the Christians have begun leaving the region due to the occupation). This paper focuses on the evolution of Palestinian identity in three major phases from pre-1948, post-1967, and today addressing questions as ‘What does it mean to be Palestinian?’ and ‘What are the current ways Palestinian identity is expressed by peoples in the region?’ Lastly it will help prove the importance of protecting and preserving Palestinian identity in the region in order for peace to be a comparable possibility to another possibility: never-ending conflict.

What is National Identity?

National identity comprises the shared language, history, culture, and aspirations of a people who yearn for a homeland—a nation to call their own. It was a construct realized in Europe in the 19th century alongside politically liberal aspirations, and later their colonies in the 20th century. A large part of understanding Palestinian identity is to a large extent, to disregard modern European concepts of national identity. To be “Palestinian” does not connote belonging to a state or nation called ‘Palestine’ which has yet to be acknowledged, as most all national identities do. Does this mean that the Palestinian does not exist? Absolutely not. Conceptualizing Palestinian identity involves more creativity as it is something intangible, more ambiguous, and perhaps, because of the lack of a nation-state, less palpable. People who identify as Palestinian are Jews, Muslims, and Christians who speak various languages and recall memories of home in the land from which they were dispossessed. They are Armenians, Greeks, Turks, Arabs, Jews, who share stories and interactions. They are peasants, farmers, villagers, artisans, highly educated, secular, urbane,

cosmopolitan, and religious. The 19th century liberalization of nationhood attempted to classify identity in accordance with the peoples' aspirations and was to be defined and experienced by the people from the inside. Palestinians longed to call Palestine their home and made vocal and political attempts to do so as early as the late nineteenth century as Zionist colonies began to form. Zionists felt deeply associated with the holy land as a freedom land—a promised land for Jews in the midst of anti-Semitic pogroms and ghettos in Europe. In this sense, Zionism was and is a form of nationalism but its patriotism lies in Judaic culture and Judeo-secular circles. To be Israeli is to be Jewish and to be non-Jewish is to be non-Israeli. What made Zionists different from Palestinians, was their exclusion of the other—the non-Jew; whereas the Palestinian identity was fluid—inclusive, perhaps not in every case, but certainly more so than its Zionist counterpart.⁴

As people begin to assert their identity collectively and nationally, the outside—passersby—will attempt to define that peoples' national identity⁵ from their own perspective, legitimizing it or delegitimizing it when it serves their purpose—as was done with the Palestinians under British and French colonization and is certainly the case today under Israeli occupation.⁶ This type of outward to inward identity is still cast upon Palestinian Arabs and Palestinian Americans in the West due mainly to the West's misunderstanding of the history and politics of the region.

Edward Said explains this phenomenon in his book *After the Last Sky* (1986). He writes,

⁴ There are exceptions to this rule. Men like Gad Frumkin, the sole Jewish judge in the Supreme Court during the British Mandate of Palestine and Ishaq al-Shami, were two Zionists who closely interacted and identified with their Arab neighbors and counterparts. Frumkin, an Ashkenazi Jew from Jerusalem and al-Shami, a Sephardic Jew from Hebron, describe their ties and contributions to the multi-cultural and pluralistic identity of Ottoman and British controlled Palestine. For more information on Gad Frumkin, read Wallach, Yair (2011). "Shared Space in the pre-1948 Jerusalem? Integration, Segregation, and Urban Space through the Eyes of Justice Gad Frumkin". *Conflict in Cities and the Contested State. Electronic Working Papers Series*. Working paper no. 21.

⁵ I use the term 'national' loosely since Palestine has yet to be recognized as a viable state alongside Israel.

⁶ Here I am referencing the secretive Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, when the British had promised the Arabs rule over their own countries as evidenced by the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence.

...Palestinians remain virtually unknown. Especially in the West, particularly in the United States, Palestinians are not so much a people as a pretext for a call to arms. It is certainly correct to say that we are less known than our co-claimants to Palestine, the Jews. Since 1948, our existence has been a lesser one. We have experienced a great deal that has not been recorded. Many of us have been killed, many permanently scarred or silenced, without a trace. And the images used to represent us only diminish it further. To most people, Palestinians are visible principally as fighters, terrorists, and lawless pariahs. Say the word 'terror' and a man wearing a kaffiyah and mas and carrying a kalachnikov immediately leaps before one's eyes. To a degree, the image of a helpless, miserable-looking refugee has been replaced by this menacing one as the veritable icon of 'Palestinian. (p. 4).⁷

Edward Said here, argues that a 'great deal has not been recorded', which poses a problem to current understandings of Palestinian identity from the historical sense. What Said is partially referring to here, is the lack of acknowledgement of Palestinian identity—one that history books tend to promote. I myself recall learning about Palestinians only as children with slingshots aimed at soldiers and labeled as young 'terrorists'. The misnomer that Palestinian identity is traced directly out of the 1948 Nakba and can only be identified by a handful of repetitive violent images on Western media is all too real. The reality is that Palestinian identity has always been expressed and recorded through various newspapers, memoirs, photographs, and journals by Palestinians themselves dating as far back as late 19th century in mostly non-violent terms. Through these sources, we learn that Palestinian identity has various shapes, colors, and threads and cannot be confined completely in one type of person, one primary language or one sole

⁷ Said, Edward (1986). *After the Last Sky, Palestinian Lives*. Pantheon Books, New York.

religion. They are people as diverse as the villages and cities they came from and were later cast out of. They are urban, they are educated, they are peasants, they are shepherds, they are lawyers, they are rabbis, they are priests and bishops, and also sheiks and muftis. The Arabic language is their common thread, but they can speak Hebrew, Greek, Russian, Armenian, German, French, or English. They are a people who refuse to be cast in white and black shades, but rather feel comfortable living in shades of grey where simplicity, intercultural, and inter-religious interactions are the norm.

Origins of Palestinian Identity

When did Palestinian national identity begin? Can they claim an identity without a nation to call their own? How did this diverse group of individuals begin to call themselves Palestinian? What did it mean to be a Palestinian?⁸ Some historians claim their identity was not defined until World War I, during the time Balfour made his Zionist declaration for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Other historians date Palestinian identity far before the introduction of Zionism into the region, dating as far back as biblical times and up through the present day. The Arabs living in Palestine began to assert their identity against the backdrop of Turkification and European colonialism in the late 19th century under Ottoman rule, what I term the first phase of emerging Palestinian national identity. This phase of creating identity developed out of the modernization effective

⁸ Edward Said eloquently describes what a Palestinian is in an interview with Brian Lamb at CSPAN. He states, "Palestine is a historical area which is I guess what today Israel would be, including the West Bank and Gaza and it has a long history but it's not a history exclusively associated only with Jews...It has a history with 10,000 years, it's been associated with all of the monotheistic religions...literally dozens if not hundreds of civilizations have come and gone so Palestine includes all of those histories Arabs, Ottomans, Byzantines, Greeks, Romans, Parthians, Philistines, Moabites, Jebusites I mean people you've never heard of, have had a stake in Palestine. So for us [Palestinians], Palestine is that long history—including that of the Jews—but that's just part of it. And 20th century Palestine is basically Arab land where the preponderance of the inhabitants were, in fact, Palestinian Arabs, until 1948, when 2/3 of them were driven out."

under Ottoman rule in the latter half of the 19th century and well into the 20th century under the British Mandate. Palestinians were given high positions in Ottoman government in 1876, for example, serving in the military, civil service, diplomatic corps, judiciary, and as young ministers to the Ottoman cabinet. But as time went on, the *osmanlilik* or Ottomanization and Islamization of Palestine began to gnaw at the inhabitants who clearly wished to identify distinct from Turkish or solely Islamic conceptions.⁹ It also was defined in contrast to the growing Zionist presence in the region by the time of the second *'aliya*, which I will discuss later. During the *Tanzimat* system, massive changes toward modernization were brought about—most notably the secularization of education when Western missionary schools and private schools introduced modern methods and foreign languages alongside their religious curriculum. An Arab Renaissance emerged as newly graduated notables from these Western-influenced schools had high positions in the newly modernized Ottoman government. Although Arabic remained predominant as the language of daily life, French, German, and English also took hold among the educated classes. Western intellectual traditions began to shape the Arab mind—when various European novels were translated from the European to Arabic language. Classical Islamic texts and European translations in literature were placed in family owned and run libraries such as the al-Khalidi library in Jerusalem.¹⁰

Modern education and reforms under Ottoman rule helped the Arabs to reconstruct time and place from a purely Islamic context to a secular one. The 19th century was a time of strong literacy among Palestinian notables and a growing middle class. In the process, however, schools of various backgrounds—religious, foreign, or private, seemed to battle for the hearts and minds

⁹ Osmanlilik can be defined as the program of Turkification and Islamization of the Ottoman world including Palestine under the rule of Sultan Abdulhamid II who ruled from 1878 to 1908.

¹⁰ Khalidi, Rashid (1997). *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*. Columbia University Press, New York. p. 44.

of their students. The great game of European interests prior and after World War I was felt among students in the Middle East. French national influence, for example, was felt at the French Jesuit-run College des Frères founded in Jerusalem in 1875. Issa J. Boullata recalls his days at the Collège des Frères when he writes,

There could be no mistaking, either, that the school was a French institution. It raised the French flag on a flagpole on top of the building...French was the language of instruction for most courses, even under the British Mandate, whereas English and Arabic were taught only as languages. I learned to add, subtract, multiply, and divide in French, and I still use French unconsciously for all my silent calculations to this day. (pp. 54-55).¹¹

Historian James Gelvin in his book, “The Modern Middle East: A History” (2011) details the diary of Wasif Jawhariyyeh who began recording his life in 1904 in Jerusalem. His father was a prominent member of the Eastern Orthodox community and spoke Greek, Turkish, and Arabic. He received a very dynamic education—memorizing the Qur’an to learn the pure Arabic language, attending a Lutheran school at age nine, and then off to the Khalil al-Sakakini’s *al-Madrasa al-Dusturiyyeh* (the Constitutional School) where he learned grammar, math, French, Turkish, physical education, and Qur’anic studies for Christians. Sakakini’s school intended to provide students with an education in the sciences, mathematics, and foreign languages, as well as teaching them a love of the Arabic language and Arab history.¹² Sakakini’s school unified Palestinians irrespective of their religious and social backgrounds—creating a shared nationalist identity among its pupils and faculty. Issa J. Boullata, a Jerusalem-born scholar, writer and translator of Arabic literature writes in his memoirs “The Bells of Memory” recalling his

¹¹ Boullata, Issa J. (2014). *The Bells of Memory, A Palestinian Boyhood in Jerusalem*. Linda Leith Publishing, Quebec.

¹² Khalidi, Rashid (1997). *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*. Columbia University Press, New York. p. 50.

boyhood days of having admired Mr. Sakakini and making strong impression on him as a young boy. Boullata writes,

I admired Khalil Sakakini and wanted to be like him when I grew up, a good teacher and educator with an excellent knowledge of Arabic language and literature. I later learned much more about him. He was the author of more than a dozen books, and he had been an indomitable figure whose participation in Palestinian politics in Ottoman and British times often led to his imprisonment. He always cherished freedom and dignity and truth and justice as essential human values worth struggling for. He had a good sense of humour, was interested in music and singing, played the violin, and liked good food and a hearty life enhanced by physical exercise and sports. (p.18).¹³

The press too, also helped to foment a shared national consciousness among Palestinians in the years following 1908—the year that the Ottoman Constitution was re-established. With this renewed constitution came more press freedoms and Palestine became a playground for ideas on politics, society, and identity. Egyptian newspapers were most prevalent in educating Arabs on the newest Islamic and European ideas of the day. Furthermore, words like *Filastin* and *bilad al-Filistiniyya* became common words in daily conversations and newspapers like *Filastin* in Jaffa and *al-Karmil* in Haifa which began reporting against Zionist colonization prior to World War I.¹⁴

What makes Palestinian identity so different from Syrian, Iraqi, Lebanese, or Egyptian identity is that it not only resisted European/ British imperialism after World War I, but also growing Zionism. It is important to mention that Palestinian national identity began reacting heavily

¹³ Boullata, Issa J. (2014). *The Bells of Memory, A Palestinian Boyhood in Jerusalem*. Linda Leith Publishing, Quebec.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 57.

against Zionism in the period known as the second *'aliya* of Jewish immigration, around 1908. These Jewish immigrants were more politicized than the previous immigrants to the region expressing their aspirations in two slogans: “conquest of land” and “conquest of labor”.¹⁵ Palestinians in the latter half of the 19th century and into the early 20th century identified largely by village and through the coexistence of families and neighbors. Peasants marked the majority of Palestinians--they cultivated the land and worked and lived off of the land--later to be pushed off largely by absentee landlords who sold peasant lands to Zionists or Turkish officials--who in turn, sold them to Zionists. The first phase identity was one of free movement between cities and a strong urban intellectual presence notably in Jerusalem--where schools sponsored by the French, Russians, and British were established. The highly educated Palestinians became very politically conscious in the late 19th century, demanding a Palestinian national homeland to emerge out of Ottoman rule and later the British Mandate (which was never realized). These Palestinians were familiar with Zionist land claims and were deeply affected by these claims during the second *'aliya* (from 1904-1914) of Zionist colonization. This *'aliya* was much more politicized in creating a distinct Jewish homeland than the first *'aliya* and is evidenced in the quote by Dr. Arthur Ruppin, land expert of the Jewish Agency,

Land is the most necessary thing for our establishing roots in Palestine. Since there are hardly any more arable unsettled lands in Palestine, we are bound in each case of the purchase of land and its settlement to remove the peasants who cultivated the land so far, both owners of the land and tenants. (p. 216).¹⁶

¹⁵ Gelvin, James L. (2011). *The Modern Middle East, A History*. 3rd ed., Oxford University Press, New York, p. 220.

¹⁶ Khalidi, Rashid (1988). “Palestinian Peasant Resistance to Zionism Before World War I”. *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestine Question*. Eds. Edward W. Said and Christopher Hitchens. Verso, London.

Major cities like Jaffa and Haifa in the north and along the eastern coast of historical Palestine were cosmopolitan cities, with a large merchant class. These cities made it easy for Jews, Muslims, and Christians to interact daily. My grandfather Farid was born in the coastal town of Jaffa, a cosmopolitan city next to Tel-Aviv known for its thick-skinned oranges and cosmopolitan feel. He used to tell me stories about how Jews would come to the Palestinian side of town to buy ice cream, while Muslims and Christians would go to the Jewish side of town to buy bread. His reminiscence of life in Jaffa continued to the day of his death as exemplified when I would walk him around his home in Amman, Jordan during his later years and he would ask me when the bus was coming to take him home to Jaffa. His home was expropriated by Israeli settlers in 1948 and he was forced with his family to seek refuge in Ramallah, at that time a predominantly Christian village some 6 miles north of Jerusalem. Farid spoke Hebrew, Greek, and Arabic fluently and this was typical in the cosmopolitan cities.

Father Elias Chacour, author of *Blood Brothers*, tells the story of his life growing up in the Christian village of Biram, in northern Israel today. This village was one of coexistence and peace before 1948, the year that the Israeli military took hold of the village and dispossessed its inhabitants. Chacour recollects his days in Biram before 1948 in his book, much like my grandfather did in Jaffa. Chacour recounts a memory of pan-village dynamics between Christians and Jews when he searched the village center for his father. Chacour is stopped by the village mukhtar (chief elder) when a dialogue emerges between them:

What do you want here, Elias?

I...uh...have you seen my father? I have to find him—it's important.

I spoke with him earlier, another man interrupted. He went trading today—I don't know where. Maybe over in the Jewish village. (p. 24). ¹⁷

Small villages like that of Ramallah, however, remained almost undisturbed of Zionist expropriation until the late 1940s when refugees from neighboring regions began pouring into the village. Naimeh Abboud, my grandmother, only spoke Arabic and English, and she explained how she grew up in Ramallah. When I asked her what life was like prior to 1948, she responded by saying that it was beautiful. She stated,

Palestinians were a very simple people, neighbors were kind to each other, I loved my school, it had lots of American teachers. I studied English, most of the school was done in English. We also studied Arabic. There were no Jews in Ramallah, only Arabs, largely peasants. People were so simple and they made great food. We had a huge house, lots of land, big trees of grapes, olives, figs. We would go to Jerusalem and shop—it was only 15 minutes from Ramallah. We always felt safe. ¹⁸

My grandmother was clear to mention that the people living in Ramallah and all over the British Mandate at the time identified as Palestinians. When I asked her what that meant, she couldn't really answer other than it meant that they were born in Palestine. When I asked her about the

¹⁷ Chacour, Elias (2003). *Blood Brothers*. Chosen Books, Grand Rapids, MI. Chacour recollects a happy and peaceful time when Jews and Arabs traded with one another from village to village. Later in the chapter, Chacour goes onto describe his father's story to his children about the Holocaust in Germany and how the village would be met by Jewish soldiers who would be traveling through Biram called Zionists. He writes, "In a few days, children," he [Chacour's father] said, watching our faces, "Jewish soldiers will be traveling through Biram. They are called Zionists. A few will stay in each home, and some will stay right here with us for a few days—maybe a week. Then they will move on. They have machine guns, but they don't kill. You have no reason to be afraid. We must be especially kind and make them feel at home." p. 28. The village of Biram, it should be noted, was captured by the Haganah forces in Oct. of 1948 and was expropriated the following month whereby most of the villagers were expelled, their homes and possessions taken, and not allowed to return.

¹⁸ Naimeh Abboud, personal communication, December 18, 2015. Naimeh attended and graduated from the American Friends School of Ramallah founded in 1869 by the Quakers. She spoke very fondly of her school days.

difference between the Palestinians before 1948 and those after, she responded, “They don’t know if they will stay in their country or be casted away”.¹⁹

Post-1948 Identity Issues

The second phase of Palestinian identity emerged during the British Peel Commission and later with the full dispossession and occupation of land in 1948 by the Irgun, Haganah, and Stern gang forces. This identity was largely defined in the form of resistance--more so than the first phase. This was mostly felt by urban notables who felt their aspirations were nullified and by dispossessed peasants who became more mobilized politically against Zionism as a result of their new refugee status.

One of the first systematic attempts to erase Palestinian identity was by seizing Palestinian homes and looting them. Starting in 1948 and lasting through 1949, there was an operation of what the Israelis termed ‘a book salvaging operation’ in the form of looting and plundering citizens’ vacant homes for appropriating books under the supervision of the Israeli military. This was primarily evident in cities (Jaffa, Haifa, and Jerusalem for example) where the population was highly educated and where homes contained family libraries. These books would be housed in the Jewish National and University Library.²⁰ Approximately 30,000 books collected in West Jerusalem during the first nine months of Israeli statehood were in Arabic, while many others were English, French, German, and Italian. Many of these books were also taken from churches

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Amit, Gish (2010/2011). “Salvage or Plunder? Israel’s ‘Collection’ of Private Palestinian Libraries in West Jerusalem”. *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Institute for Palestine Studies. V. 40, No. 4.. Gish references Social Darwinism on part of the Zionists in their book collecting motivation and endeavor. He writes, “The collection of Palestinian libraries illustrates the dialectical complexity of the far-reaching changes of the period: the operation was simultaneously an act of exclusion of Palestinians from the national collective, defined as solely Jewish, and a realization of Zionism’s self-conception as cultural agent whose moral mission was to bring enlightenment to this outpost of Europe at the margins of the Middle East” p. 9.

and educational institutions and covered various disciplines from Islamic law to translations of European literature, science, history, and philosophy.²¹

It should be noted that this time was one where Israeli forces made enormous strides in uprooting Arab villages and almost completely erasing the memory of Palestinians in these villages. The result has led to deep emotional scars which will never heal without a sincere acknowledgement of the former Arab presence in these villages. Elias Chacour's story in Biram is a perfect example. Chacour recalls the day in the 1948 that the Israeli soldiers announced to the people of Biram that they needed to leave their keys with them and evacuate their village immediately because they were in 'serious danger'. This is what he recollects from his book *Blood Brothers* (2003),

“When father told us about the order, he reported that most of the village men were disturbed. They remembered the turmoil of the 1930s with the occupying British forces. And there had been word of new bombings in Jerusalem, or trouble between the British and the Zionists. If there was to be any confrontation between these forces, the men of Biram decided it would be best to keep their families safely out of the way. The commander urged them on, saying “Travel light. Take nothing with you. You must leave today—as soon as possible. (p. 50).²²

They stayed in a nearby olive grove where they held a vigil alongside other villagers. After nearly two weeks of 'camping' he describes the village elders as tired and worn down after

²¹ Ibid. p. 8.

²² Chacour, Elias (2003). *Blood Brothers*. Chosen Books, Grand Rapids, MI.

having slept on the stony ground and so they decided to return to Biram. But upon their return they were told that the land no longer was theirs.²³

Another example of exile is my father's story having been refugee-d twice in his lifetime when West Jerusalem was taken over by the Israelis and again in 1950—when my father's family returned to the West Bank—Ramallah from Egypt. His cousin Fadwa Samara [Frangieh] also recollects her family's story having been exiled from their home in 1948. In an email dated Dec. 19, 2015, she writes,

In my younger years my family moved to Ramallah in 1948 and I was 2 years old. I do not remember much then but later I remember how my parents and grandparents always talked about their good life in Palestine and how Palestinians were pushed out of their homes by the British who told them to leave and in three days you will come back after the war is over and we are still waiting to come back, unfortunately. Life was not easy at all for us when we were young especially the cold weather in winter time where we did not have any heating but later we had a portable kerosene heater and moved it from one room to the other to heat the room before we were tucked in our beds. Food was not in abundance either and most families were in the same situation as a child we suffered but never talked about food or about politics (politics were whispered in closed doors) as the Palestinians had a lid over our heads; very abusive situation. My parents managed with the little we had and educated us at the Catholic school in Ramallah with less than half of the tuition for the Christians families and sometimes my father could not afford the payment for that month and one time I was so embarrassed when the nun asked me to go and tell my father to pay the tuition in front of the rest of the students "Nuns were tough

²³ Ibid. p. 53.

at that time", the school was freezing cold and no water in summer time to drink during the recess due to the lack of water in all respect. We only ate meat once a week and hardly had any fruits in winter, summer was better as we had fruits trees in the back yards from figs, blueberry (toute), pears, grapes, plums etc., and forget about dessert that was once or twice a year maybe Christmas and Easter. That was the life after 1948 and we were considered the lucky ones, you can imagine the families who were living in tents across from us.²⁴

Second phase Palestinian identity is similar to the third phase identity in its attempt to reconstruct Palestine through memory. Third phase identity, like the second phase, is marked by exile and longing for a homeland while resisting intense pressures from strong outside forces to relinquish land claims and the right of return. Third phase identity is one confined within limited spaces—often confined to roadblocks, curfews, and checkpoints. In other words, third phase identity is distorted, fragmented, and anxiotal much like the second phase. Because the Palestinian story is often muffled or discredited by certain mainstream historians, a true sense of peace internally and a sense of belonging and understanding have yet to be felt as the West continues to discredit Palestinian stories of exile, dispossession, and terror. In this way, third phase identity is marked by a resounding pressure and need to collectivize and cultivate a Palestinian history against a strong current of Zionist agitation which seeks to continually negate and disprove Palestinian identity and its legitimacy in the region. By continually propagandizing West Bankers and Gazans as terrorists, anti-Western, anti-American, anti-Jewish, and harbingers of Muslim extremism for no other sake other than a want and thirst to kill—helps to continue this negation and de-legitimization of Palestinian identity.

²⁴ Fadwa Samara Frangieh, personal communication, Dec. 19, 2015.

Raja Shehadeh in his book, *When the Birds Stopped Singing: Life in Ramallah Under Siege* (2003), describes his life during the Israeli military operation “Defensive Shield” of Ramallah from March 29 through May 3, 2002. Raja begins his book explaining his loyalty to *sumoud* (perseverance)—mainly nonviolent in order to challenge Israeli occupation. His mission has been to document human rights violations through the printed word. Shehadeh believes that the militarization of the Palestinian people, now ever-increasing due to the Oslo Accords, which armed a Palestinian police force under the auspices of the Israeli government. This militant identity has overshadowed the true identity and culture of the people. He writes on March 28,

Over the past nine years, since the Oslo Accords, I have been worried about the growing number of armed civilians I could see around just walking the street. This was not part of a policy of armed struggle. It was more for exhibitionist purposes. Parades were conducted with masked men bearing arms, as if in a masquerade. An arms culture develops as quickly as a drug culture. Once it takes root, it is difficult to eradicate... Its victims are the civilian society who have to endure its violent consequences. (p. 5)²⁵

Shehadeh’s experience through his memoirs gives great insight into current Palestinian identity as one forged under occupation—where the sole interaction between Jews and non-Jews is violent thus propelling stronger *sumoud* and struggle. Occupation and separate enclaves of existence between Jews and non-Jews has created violent caricatures of ‘the other’. Israelis view Palestinians as ‘terrorists’ while Palestinians view Israelis as ‘destroyers’. Identity defined by the outside (or the other) takes on irrational forms and distorts both sides’ humanity and longing for

²⁵ Shehadeh, Raja (2003). *When the Birds Stopped Singing: Life In Ramallah Under Siege*. Steerforth Press, South Royalton, VT.

recognition. From the Palestinian point of view, Shehadeh (2003) writes during the siege of Jenin refugee camp,

There is news that Israeli army bulldozers have demolished homes over the heads of their inhabitants in the Jenin camp. If true, then this is a new escalation, a further demonstration of Israel's position that Palestinians are not human beings. So many of the inhabitants of the camp have been forced out to the mosques and the open fields. They number four thousand. In Israel's eyes they are all terrorists who deserve no shelter or relief. When I heard this and thought about it, I realized that the Israeli propaganda has not changed. In the eyes of the extremists, no Palestinian society with rights exists. We are all a bunch of terrorists, and it is legitimate for Israel to treat us as befits terrorists. We do not deserve to have institutions. We have no right to our achievements, no right to have records for the population, nothing that belongs to us has sanctity, we don't even have the right to our own home. Who will protect us against the ravages of the Israeli army? This is why we can be placed under weeks of twenty-four hour curfew, waiting in our homes for the brutal Israeli army to come to search, vandalize, and arrest...Because, in the view of Sharon and his supporters (now a majority in Israel, according to the polls), we have no right to be there. This land does not belong to us. It belongs to the Jews and must be settled only by them. We must either accept to live under their rule on their own terms or leave. (p. 86) ²⁶

Furthermore,

In his interview with Brian Lamb in 2001, Edward Said states,

²⁶ Ibid.

All Palestinians suffer from the pangs of dispossession, because don't forget, Israel has become a great success story. Except for the Palestinians, in other words, it's celebrated in the Western press, it's considered a democracy, it's a liberal European country...and it gets the largest amount of aid than any country in the history of foreign aid, it gets officially 3 billion but sometimes bordering on 4-5 billion a year from the United States tax payer. And the problem for Palestinians is that our history is not acknowledged...in the peons, in the endless stories about Israel, not anymore, but there was a time when in the 50s and the 60s and the 70s, Israel was celebrated as a bastion of democracy, the outpost of this that and the other thing, we were forgotten and we had to watch as this country which had destroyed us, basically got all the praise and we got nothing. So our main battle has been a) to survive, obviously; b) to recreate our national identity as a people as opposed to a collection of refugees or miscellaneous Arabs as we used to be referred to; and third, to have self-determination, which means some form of sovereignty in a country from which we were expelled and which every protocol in the world including the U.N. Charter, the Declaration of Human Rights, everything, allows us to return to. I mean the cost of our war was fought to let the Albanians return. Every refugee in the world potentially has the right to return except us. And this invidious fate is what we feel as Palestinians.²⁷

Palestinian Identity Today

The nation-state has contributed profoundly to both collective and individual identity, leaving those without a state to ask "Where do I fit in?" or "Who am I?" While these questions certainly emerged prior to 1948 among Jew and Non-Jew/Arab and non-Arab during the Ottoman and

²⁷ Interview with Edward Said "Reflections on Exile and Other Essays". CSPAN interview with Brian Lamb, 2001.

British control, the answers would rest more so in village and neighborhood identity rather than in solely national and religious terms. When thinking about Palestinian identity, we must think in more creative terms, terms which do not consist of national boundaries, but are rooted in shared or divided village spaces. Fluidity of space and identity was common in the years preceding 1948, although British Mandate policies would have contributed significantly to division and contestation between Arabs and Jews as Yair Wallach argues. There is no doubt Arab Jews found themselves torn in identity come 1948 and so too, did Arab Muslims and Christians. To identify as Israeli by that time was to renounce your Arab roots or inter-cultural beliefs so as to create an exclusionary Zionist agenda in the region. The result leaves those who identify as Palestinians with a great hurdle for the future.

Does “Palestinian” today mean “anti-Jewish”? Can a Jew in Israel claim his Palestinian roots without disturbing the Zionist project? Are the terms Palestinian and Jewish antagonisms of each other, rather than binaries that for some historical time blended, at other time quarreled, and still yet respected each other’s space and identity? The results of the recent conflict tell us that identity for both Palestinians and Israelis is often masked in hate and violence, which really is no true identity for either of them at all. Healing today has taken the form of art and storytelling as best illustrated through the works of Issa Boullata, Elias Chacour, Edward Said, Raja Shehadeh, Mahmoud Darwish, and so many others. Mahmoud Darwish, national poet of the non-existent state of Palestine wrote fervently in his poem “Identity Card” what perhaps best sums up Palestinian feelings when he writes, “Therefore! Write down on the top of the first page: I do not

hate people, nor do I encroach, but if I become hungry, The usurper's flesh will be my food,
Beware...Beware...Of my hunger, And my anger!"²⁸

As healing continues to be a challenge for Palestinians living under occupation, a true coexistence among Arabs and Jews may never take place as long as history continues to be shaped by racism and exclusionary policies. The result is an identity which will continue to be fragmented carrying onto future generations for both Arabs and Jews. The historic Ottoman and later British-controlled Palestine marked more or less by coexistence and religious convergence in the years leading up to 1948 can better help us unearth true identity, even if it is hidden beneath the rubble.

²⁸ "Remembering Mahmoud Darwish" (2008). The Electronic Intifada. Retrieved from <https://electronicintifada.net/content/remembering-mahmoud-darwish/7663>.

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