Edited by
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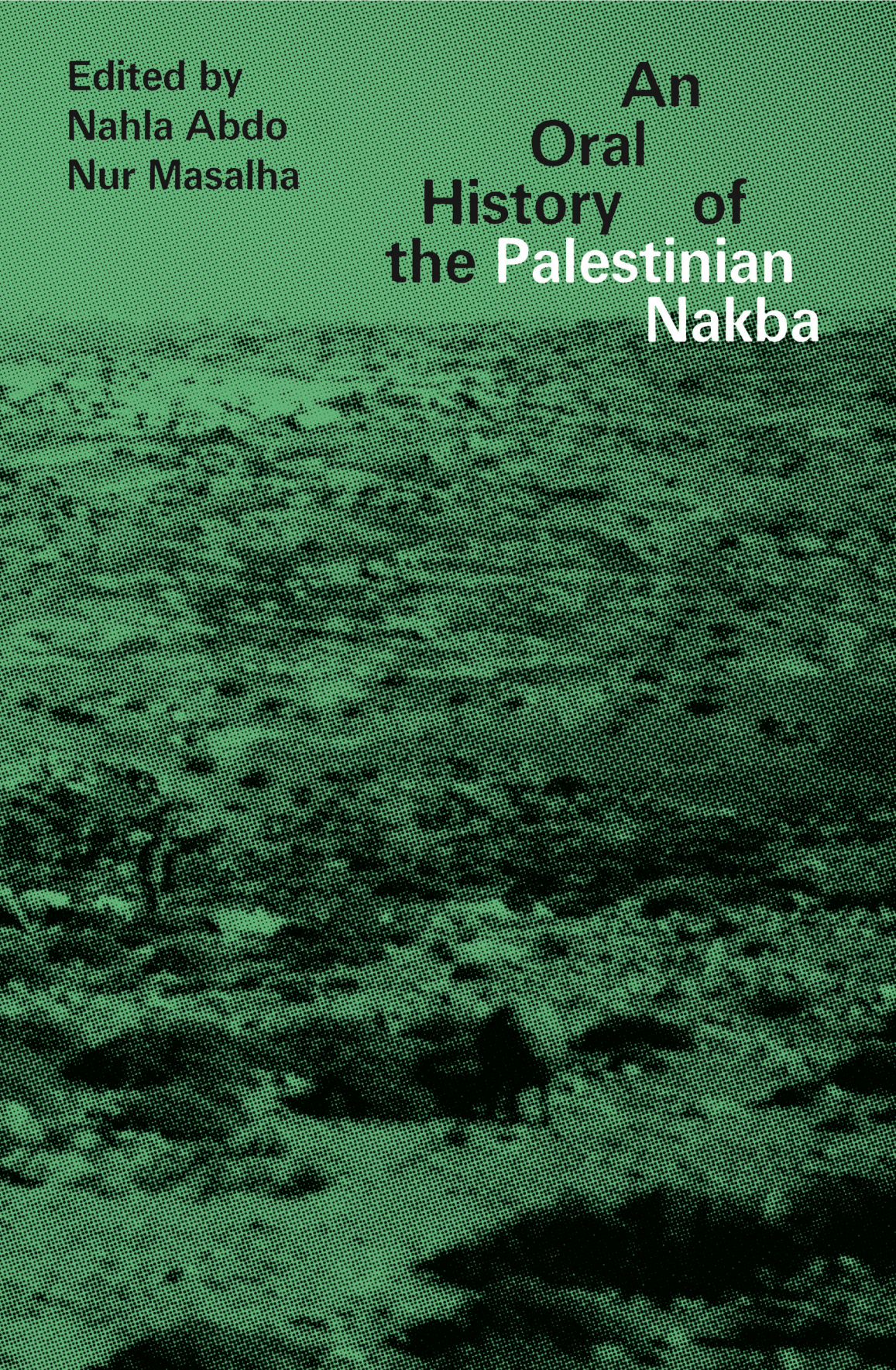
An Oral History of the Palestinian Nakba



MORE PRAISE FOR *AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE PALESTINIAN NAKBA*

'Moving and acutely observed, this timely and necessary anthology is an indispensable addition for all readers concerned with the Israeli colonisation of Palestine.'

Ronit Lentin, author of *Thinking Palestine*

'Reveals the full magnificence of Palestinian responses to Israel's systematic post-1948 programme of memoricide. Abdo and Masalha are here establishing a new interdisciplinary field, Nakba Studies, in which Palestinians become subjects and agents in their own history.'

John Docker, University of Western Australia

'A landmark intervention, this cross-disciplinary book provides innovative analytical frameworks for studying the persistent erasure of Palestine. This insightful and comprehensive work proposes alternative ways of knowing and telling, rearticulating the Nakba as an ongoing process of dispossession.'

Ella Shohat, NYU, and author of *On the Arab-Jew, Palestine, and Other Displacements*

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ZED

An Oral History of the Palestinian Nakba was first published in 2018
by Zed Books Ltd, The Foundry, 17 Oval Way, London SE11 5RR, UK.

www.zedbooks.net

Typeset in Adobe Garammond Pro by seagulls.net
Cover design by Andrew Brash

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-78699-349-6 hb
ISBN 978-1-78699-351-9 pdf
ISBN 978-1-78699-352-6 epub
ISBN 978-1-78699-353-3 mobi

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Acknowledgments

At the outset, the editors would like to extend a special thanks to Dr Rosemary Sayigh for her central role in initiating this project. Thank you Rosemary for your inspiring scholarship and your unwavering commitment to keeping Palestinian memory alive. Our greatest thanks go to ordinary Palestinian women and men, victims of the Nakba/genocide whose voices, oral histories, narratives and memories and indomitable spirit made this work possible and without whom this project would not have seen the light. Our thanks also go the anonymous reviewers of this collection and to the editors at Zed Books for their generosity, patience and practical advice. Finally, and most importantly, our thanks go to all the authors/contributors whose extraordinary insights and passions enabled this collective project to come to fruition.

Introduction

NAHLA ABDO AND NUR MASALHA

> Oral history challenges the artificiality of the academic separation of the disciplines or, in Sherna Gluck's words, "the academic division of knowledge" (Gluck 1991: 3).

This collective work uses oral history, personal memories, narratives and interviews to study, analyse and represent the Palestinian Nakba/genocide, before, during and after the establishment of the Israeli settler-colonial state in 1948. The multiplicity of disciplines and approaches presented in this book cover the complexity, and poignancy, of the Palestinian Nakba, reproducing in the process its historical and lived implications in a new light. Almost all authors in this volume attest to the resilience of the Nakba as experience and memory and its rootedness in the existential life of Palestinians. This rootedness defies all Israeli and international efforts at silencing the Nakba for the past seventy years. All authors in this book see the Nakba as a process and not as an event. Still, the memories and narratives of the specific calamities and horror inflicted on the Palestinians during the months of the establishment of the state of Israel have carved and continue to carve a deep space in the memory of those who lived it and the generations that followed.

Part I theorizes the Nakba and oral history from two different, yet complementary perspectives. Nur Masalha provides a conceptual, analytical and critical framework for Palestinian oral history and memories of the Nakba. His chapter explores the role of individual, social and collective memories in shaping individual and national identity in Palestine. Applying social memory theory and cross-disciplinary and decolonizing methodologies to the knowledge–power nexus in Palestine, the chapter challenges settler-colonial histories and critiques the manipulation of collective memory by hegemonic elites and top-down nationalist approaches.

Nahla Abdo theorizes the Nakba as genocide. She critiques existing feminist approaches to the marginalized, and specifically the colonized, insisting on the need to apply historically and culturally specific concepts to our methodologies. She contributes to the development of anti-colonial feminist analysis suitable for understanding indigenousness and the settler-colonial state. Land and genocide, this chapter contends, need to be placed at the centre of feminist analysis of the marginalized, colonized indigenous analysis.

Part II analyses the close relationship between what women knew and experienced during the Nakba, and focuses on the intimate relation and direct impact this knowledge has on indigenous bodies.

Diana Allan's chapter explores the interweavings of affect and intellect in interviews recorded with Palestinian elders in Lebanon for the Nakba Archive. She examines the role that sensory and embodied experience play in recollection and in the narration of oral histories, and the forms of knowledge carried in embodied gestures, tone and the senses. Rather than viewing the sensuous simply as narrative embellishment, Allan considers what might be gained from re-centring the body as the locus of historical study, allowing for more diverse and non-coercive forms of remembering and knowledge creation.

Lena Jayyusi addresses the themes and idioms of Palestinian memory narratives of the Nakba, exploring the sites and features of affect, connectedness and resistance, both then and now. In this chapter special attention is placed on how the Palestinian population was struggling to hold on, if not to place, then at least to communal space, to vicinity as a lived affective and phenomenal field.

Part III archives the Nakba through Palestinian refugee women's voices. These voices cover various areas, including Shu'fat refugee camp in the West Bank, refugees in Jordan and refugees in Lebanon. Rosemary Sayigh establishes the centrality of oral transmission of family and community histories that enabled and continues to enable the Palestinian people to assert their existence in the face of Zionist settler-colonial and international silencing.

Laura Khoury analyses the process of self-reflexive awareness that women undergo when they narrate the Nakba, contributing to the movement of writing history from below. Based on collective memories of elderly Palestinian women refugees in Shu'fat refugee camp, Khoury offers an indigenous feminist reading of the memorization of the Nakba by Palestinian women as they transmit some

of the past, both consciously and subconsciously, to the present, creating continuity and transcending the present. Under scrutiny here, Khoury asserts, is what was not disrupted: something "old" that transformed into something "new"; new in its effect or its use, new in terms of formulating new activism and situating it in the present.

Faiha Abdel-Hadi's chapter presents Palestinian women's narrations of their displacement during 1948. The chapter focuses on the challenges these women faced and the agency and resistance they presented against such challenges. Women's testimonies uncover the vital role they played in the political, social and economic life in Palestine and the diaspora.

Part IV documents Nakba stories and memories, based on specific cases of cities and villages in 1948 Palestine. Chapters in this part use a multiplicity of methods, including oral history, interviews, personal memories and Zionist archives.

Himmat Zubi adds to this collection the perspective of Haifa (urban) Palestinian memories of the Nakba. She utilizes oral history testimonies to bring to life Haifa women's daily experiences as they re-live the Nakba. Zubi establishes the importance of Palestinian city life and the role that urban Palestinians played before and during the Nakba, and examines the ongoing consequences of the Nakba for Haifa residents.

Amina Qablawi Nasrallah uses personal memory to draw on the experience of her grandmother and narrates the tale of her family and community during and after the Nakba. Particularly poignant in Qablawi's chapter is the murder of her father by Zionist settlers in her own village, Saffouryeh. Hisham Zreik uses oral history of fellow men and women and records their experiences during and after the Nakba. The author used this oral history research in his documentary film "The Sons of Eilaboun" (2007).

Safa Abu-Rabi'a presents voices of Naqab Bedouin women from the 1948 generation and their daughters, and highlights their collective resistance to ongoing displacement, reflecting on how women re-tell Naqab history and reclaim their terrain. Through oral and spatial practices, these stories establish a territorial identity and sense of belonging to the place among their children, and educate them to be owners of the land across the seventy-year gap.

Part V documents Nakba narratives from the Gaza Strip and the *shatat* (refugeeism/exile).

Using personal memory and some interviews, Mona Al-Farra reflects on the Nakba, providing a vivid picture of the events. She uses her own experience during the devastating 2014 Israeli war on Gaza as a backdrop for highlighting the continuous Nakba in Gaza. The author reflects on her late mother's experiences and memory of the Nakba and Palestinian women's resistance.

Malaka Mohammad surveys some of the oral history projects in Gaza, centring on the work of the Oral History Centre in Gaza and on the youth projects of the Tamer Institute for Community Education.

Chandni Desai's chapter outlines how the Israeli/Zionist settler-colonial project engaged in the systematic erasure of the material culture of Palestine, with a specific focus on toponymicide. She argues that Palestinian cultural producers (past and present) disrupt and reconfigure Zionist toponomy and national settler-colonial mythologies of land and belonging, by producing counter-hegemonic and anti-colonial narratives of the *al-Nakba* and its afterlife through "resistance culture" (*thaqafat al-muqawama*).

PART I
Theorizing the Nakba and oral history

1
Decolonizing methodology, reclaiming memory: Palestinian oral histories and memories of the Nakba

NUR MASALHA

> No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself … Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way … Re-writing you I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still colonizer the speaking subject and you are now at the center of my talk. (Hooks 1990: 241–243)

2017 is a year of "fateful anniversaries" for the Palestinians: (a) it is the centenary of the Balfour Declaration, when an imperialist power, Britain, denied the indigenous people of Palestine the right to self-determination and nurtured a European settler-colonialist movement; (b) it is seventy years since the Nakba, which began in late 1947, when the majority of Palestinians were driven out from their homeland; (c) it is fifty years since the military occupation of the remainder of Palestine in 1967. Of the three events, the Nakba was the worst catastrophe that ever befell the Palestinians. The ethnic cleansing of Palestine (Masalha 1992, 1997, 2012; Pappe 2006) and the traumatic rupture of 1948 are central to both the Palestinian society of today and Palestinian history and collective identity.

Erasing Palestine and appropriating its material and cultural heritage has been fundamental to Zionist colonial practices before, during and since the

Nakba. In 1948 the Israeli state appropriated for itself immovable Palestinian material assets and personal possessions including schools, rich private libraries, books, pictures, private papers, historical documents and manuscripts, furniture, churches, mosques, shrines, historic public buildings, archaeological sites and artefacts, urban residential quarters, transport infrastructure, seaports and airports, police stations, prisons and railways (Khalidi 1992; Masalha 2012). The appropriation of Palestinian records, documentation and cultural heritage by the Israeli state has made it possible for Israeli historians ("old and new") to claim that there is no Arab *documentation* on 1948 of the sort historians must rely on (Morris 1994: 42–43).

Conventionally history has been written by the powerful, the conqueror, the colonizer; the discipline of history has long been a tool of dominant elites used to reinforce hegemonic narratives and existing power relations. Clearly there is a need for articulating new counter-hegemonic narratives and devising new liberationist and decolonization strategies in Palestine. The disciplines of history and memory should be a site of hope, liberation and decolonization. To write more truthfully about the Palestinian Nakba is not merely to practise professional historiography, it is also a profoundly moral act of liberation and a struggle for truth, justice, equality, return (both mental and physical return) and a better future.

In recent decades two distinct historiographical approaches concerning the birth of the Palestinian refugee problem have evolved. Recent debates on 1948 tell us something about the historian's method, power and the meaning of the "historical document" (Pappe 2004). Methodologically, many historians have displayed a bias towards archival sources; Israeli revisionist historians, in particular, believe they are both ideologically and empirically impartial (Masalha 2007: 286), and that the only reliable sources for the reconstruction of the 1948 war are in the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) archives and official documents. This bias towards high politics and "archives" has contributed to silencing the Palestinian past. The silencing of the Nakba by mainstream historians in Israel and the West follows the pattern given by Michel-Rolph Trouillot in *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*:

> Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the

> making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history …). (Trouillot 1995: 26)

Not surprisingly, Israeli historians (old and new) have long emphasized and indeed privileged Israeli state papers and official documents and downgraded the voices of the indigenous people of Palestine. By contrast, in recent decades Palestinian oral histories have attempted to redress the imbalance of the modern historiography, by developing methodologies for understanding the contexts, objectives, power and meanings of documents. Oral histories are not just about facts and evidence but also ways of exploring subtle narratives and voices of the people who are silenced in state papers and official documents. Indeed, oral histories revolutionized our "historical knowledge" methodologies by appreciating the "shadows" and by bringing to light hidden, suppressed or marginalized narratives. Oral histories have, in fact, brought together academics, historians, filmmakers, artists, archivists and librarians, novelists, indigenous activists, museum professionals and community-based arts practitioners. As producers of knowledge and meaning, oral histories have become a major catalyst for new creative practices and interpretations in history-related fields and on the construction of alternative histories and the recovery of memories of lost practices.

Furthermore, the ideological context and limits of the Israeli state and archival documents are very clear. Israeli archives can tell us very little about the narratives of the Palestinian victims of the Nakba or the experience of millions of Palestinian refugees. Also, those of us who have used Israeli archival sources know that there are many files of the Israeli army from 1948 which are still closed and not accessible to the historian or the public. But what are the overall historiographical implications of the debate on 1948? The first point concerns the military historiography of 1948, which tends to dominate Israeli and Western historiographies. The clashes taking place in Palestine during the late Mandatory period have been treated as part of an overall war between the Arab and Israeli armies. Such a paradigm calls for the expertise of military historians (Pappe 2004: 185–186). Military historians tend to concentrate on the balance of power and military strategy and tactics. They see actions and people as part of the theatre of war, where events and actions are judged on a moral basis very different from that applicable in a non-combatant situation.

Therefore, conventional writing on the historiography of 1948 is inherently biased and tends to favour military history and the victorious Israeli army. Ilan

Pappe and Nur Masalha have long argued that the events of 1948 should be examined within the paradigm of "transfer", ethnic cleansing and erasure rather than as part of elite military history, written by the victorious conqueror. Unlike the 1937 Peel partition proposal, the UN partition plan of November 1947 did envisage some form of bi-nationalism for Palestine-Israel; the UN certainly did not envisage an exclusive (ethnically cleansed) Jewish state in 1948. This means that the expulsion of Palestinians in 1948 by the Israeli army was part of the *domestic* policies implemented by an Israeli regime vis-à-vis the indigenous citizens of Palestine. The decisive factors in 1948 were ethnic ideology, colonial-settlement policy and demographic strategy, rather than military plans or considerations (Pappe 2004: 186; Masalha 1992, 1997). In *Expulsion of the Palestinians* (1992), I show that the concept of "transfer" was from the start an integral part of Zionism and that much of the "ethnic cleansing" of the Nakba was not related to the battles taking place between regular armies waging war.

This chapter explores ways of experiencing and remembering the Nakba, with emphasis on oral accounts and within the context of the powerful oral cultures of Palestine. It concentrates on Palestinian oral histories and narratives of memory. With the history, rights and needs of the Palestinian refugees being excluded from recent Middle East peace-making efforts and with the failure of both the Israeli state and the international community to acknowledge the Nakba, "1948" as an "ethnic cleansing" continues to underpin the Palestine–Israel conflict. The chapter argues that to write more truthfully about the Nakba is not just to practise a professional historiography; it is also a moral imperative of acknowledgement and redemption. The refugees' struggle to publicize the truth about the Nakba is a vital way of protecting their rights and keeping the hope for peace with justice alive. Other key themes emphasized here are: (a) oral history projects are a major means of reconstructing the history of the Palestinian refugees and internally displaced Palestinians as seen from the perspective of the primary subjects; (b) as is the case with other marginalized groups, Palestinian oral testimony projects are a vital tool for recovering and preserving the voices of the Palestinian peasants (*fallaheen*) who for centuries (and until 1948) constituted the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants of Palestine.

Today, accounts from indigenous memory of the traumatic events of 1948 are central to Palestinian society and its collective struggle. By Palestinian society I mean *all* its three main constituencies: Palestinians inside Israel, Palestinians in the occupied territories and the refugee communities. The Nakba remains a

key site of Palestinian collective consciousness and the single most important event that connects *all* Palestinians to a specific point in time. The collective memory of the Nakba unites *all* three Palestinians constituencies deeply and emotionally – three constituencies separated by geography and expedient politics; by fragmentation and the colonial boundaries imposed by the Israeli state; by differences derived from different legal and political conditions in Palestine-Israel and host countries.

With no independent state or state papers, and with the difficulties of establishing or maintaining "public archives" in exile or in Palestine under Israeli occupation, Palestinian and Arab intellectuals continued to produce Nakba memoirs and "archive" the catastrophe in books and articles. As early as 1949 Constantine Zurayk published *The Meaning of the Nakba* (1956), which was translated into English. This was followed by Palestinian historian and native of Jerusalem 'Arif Al-'Arif, who published six volumes in Arabic in the period 1958–1960, entitled *Al-Nakba: The Catastrophe of Jerusalem and the Lost Paradise*. Also in the late 1950s and early 1960s Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi published three pioneering articles on the circumstances surrounding the Nakba (Khalidi 1959a, 1959b, 1961). However, with the exception of these three articles, based on written documentation, and an important article by Irish journalist Erskine Childers (1961) in *The Spectator* (London), entitled "The Other Exodus", in fact little was published in English about the Nakba during the first two decades following 1948. In 1972 Palestinian author Mustafa Dabbagh began publishing in Arabic his eleven-volume work, entitled *Our Country: Palestine*, describing all the villages of Palestine during the British Mandate (Dabbagh 1972–1986). However, with the exception of a few sympathetic books in English on the Palestinian question – books whose emphasis was on the loss of land and property in 1948 and on legal and political issues – these recorded some Palestinian elite voices but never brought out ordinary people's voices. This almost total silencing of Palestinian people's voices and the Palestinian Nakba, which was associated with defeat and shame, went largely unchallenged until the 1970s.

In December 1963 Walid Khalidi went on to co-found (and since then has served as Secretary General) of the Institute for Palestine Studies (IPS), established in Beirut as an independent research and publishing centre focusing on the Palestinian problem and the Arab–Palestine conflict. Under his guidance the IPS produced a long list of publications in both Arabic and English and

several important translations of Hebrew documents, texts and books into Arabic. In 1984, the IPS published *Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians, 1876–1948*, by Walid Khalidi. However, Khalidi will always be best known for his encyclopaedic work on the Palestinian villages occupied and depopulated by Israel in 1948, *All That Remains* (1992). This work of monumental collective memory includes several hundred photographs and has clearly benefited from the contribution of Palestinian oral historians.

However, in view of the fact that Israel continues to loot and destroy Palestinian archives, and in the absence of a rich source of contemporary Palestinian documentary records, oral accounts and interviews with Palestinian (internal and external) refugees are a valuable and indeed essential source for constructing a more comprehensible narrative of the experience of ordinary Palestinian refugees and internally displaced Palestinians across the Green Line.

TYPOLOGY OF PALESTINIAN ORAL HISTORIES AND MEMORIES OF THE NAKBA

Conventionally memory has been understood in terms of *individual* versus *collective* memory. Individual memories are often studied by psychologists, neurologists and oral historians, while collective memory is studied by sociologists and cultural theorists. However, this binary (individual versus collective) fails to account for a whole range of *particular* memories. By adopting a pluralistic approach to memories and by combining this approach with a knowledge–power analysis (Foucault 1972, 1980) and with a "history from-below" approach (Guha 1997; Guha and Spivak 1988; Prakash 1994), it should be possible to distinguish between top-down elite "collective memory" and people's "shared memories". Oral history "from below" and shared memories are central to historical writing, shared values and the construction of (group) multi-layered, multi-cultural identity.

All histories are forms of representation of the "past" and "present". Representations of the Nakba can be categorized as follows: speaking of the actual experiences of the Nakba; speaking about the Nakba; and speaking for and on behalf of the victims of the Nakba. These multiple representations of the Nakba should be kept in mind. Furthermore, broadly speaking, four distinct types of Palestinian oral histories and memories of the Nakba have emerged since 1948. These forms of representation have also contributed to the emergence of the new sub-discipline of Nakba Studies. These forms of representations are:

a) *Personal experiences and individual memory accounts of 1948*: These oral accounts of 1948 centre on the "Nakba Generation" and those refugees who experienced the 1948 Nakba first-hand through actual expulsion, dislocation, loss, personal trauma and/or exile.
b) *Collective memory of the Nakba*: This nationally constructed macro memory of 1948 is often elite framed and ideologically constructed as a top-down, collective memory.
c) *Shared memories of the Nakba*: These group memories of 1948 are often framed "from below" and focus on ordinary Palestinians or marginalized groups of refugees.
d) *Trauma and cultural memories of the Nakba*. The traumatic experiences of the Nakba have had a profound impact on the lives of Palestinians over seven decades and across three generations. Cultural memories of the Nakba are often produced by the second and third generation. They include poetry, popular songs, folklore, refugee camp embroidery, *dabke* (Palestinian folk dance), fiction, films, landscape paintings, traditional storytelling practices and the literature of exile. These diverse and rich forms of oral testimony and archiving memory began in the late 1950s, with examples found in Ghassan Kanafani's novels (Kanafani 1998, 2000; Kanafani et al. 2004), Mahmoud Darwish's poetry (2000, 2003) and Ismail Shamout's paintings. These forms of oral memory paved the way for the emergence of Palestinian academic works on oral histories of the Nakba in the 1970s and 1980s.

RETHINKING PALESTINIAN COLLECTIVE AND SOCIAL MEMORIES

The seminal and highly influential work of Maurice Halbwachs (1980) on the formation of "collective memory" focused on the construction of socially and politically framed memory and collective identity. Collective memory has also increasingly become a major interdisciplinary area of investigation in several academic fields. Today the production of collective memory is widely recognized as critical in shaping the way in which people not only learn about and view the past but also construct and enrich their collective identity and human experiences in the present.

However, Halbwachs himself – a student of Emile Durkheim, who had reformulated sociological positivism as a foundation of social research – like other positivist scholars of his age, conflated "history" with "the past" and

sharply contrasted "history"' with "collective memory". The poverty of modern positivism derives from its simplistic, reductionist, objectifying thinking. Reality is always complex, multi-layered and multi-dimensional and the human (individual and collective) agency is central to disentangling this complexity. Scientifically driven positivist historians tend to eliminate the human agency and objectify and totalize "historical knowledge". Furthermore, positivist historians tend to confuse "history" with the "past" and conceptualize history as an accurate "knowledge of the past", and memory as "knowledge from the past". This modern positivism has been widely criticized by a range of modern humanist theorists for failing to account for human agency and the living and inner nature of the historical experience. Following this humanist tradition, this chapter argues that the human agency is central to the production of historical knowledge.

In his seminal work on conscious temporality and "sense of being", *Time and Being* (*Sein und Zeit*), Martin Heidegger ([1927] 2010) argued that the abstract concept of "time" is meaningless. Heidegger emphasized the "sense" and "experience"' of "being" over other interpretations of conscious existence and argued that specific and concrete ideas form the foundation of our perceptions; working from abstractions or pure theories leads to confusion and obfuscation. Heidegger also advanced the thesis that ontologically the notion of the "past" is only one dimension of a whole phenomenon which we call "time", and this encompasses the past, present and future. In effect, the Heideggerian methodology encompassed (and linked) the past, present and future and argued that time is only meaningful as it is experienced by human beings. Working from the *specific* and *concrete* human experiences of time, Heidegger advanced the idea that time (Greek: Khronos) cannot just be understood quantitatively or chronologically. Meaningful time (Greek: Khairos) has to be experienced concretely and qualitatively. If the "sense of time" is experienced qualitatively and in particular situations by human beings, then understanding and archiving the particular 'memories' and concrete human experiences of the past become central to narrating and historicizing. In the particular case of the Palestinian refugees, a true understanding of their trauma and concrete experiences of displacement and exile can only begin by allowing them to speak for themselves, by recovering their own voices and recording their own stories.

Moreover, rather than applying abstract strategies or a one-dimensional methodology to explaining the history and shared memories of the Nakba, I suggest

a multiple approach with special reference to (a) speaking of the experiences of the Nakba and history from within; (b) history from below and recovering the voices of the subaltern, marginalized and refugees; and (c) speaking in solidarity with the victim of the Nakba. This multifaceted approach offers liberating strategies and decolonizing methodologies for the practice of narrating and frees history from the straitjacket of objectivity and abstraction. Furthermore, history from below would also mean that the primary object of historicizing and historical knowledge are to give us insight into the historical phenomena and human experiences of people in the past and in the present, including their thoughts, feelings and desires. Knowledge production and empowerment have always been intertwined (Foucault 1972, 1980) and the production of historical knowledge on Palestine and the Palestinians has always been driven by underlying causes and a mix of material, political and epistemological considerations. Moreover, historians live in the present and their knowledge production affects the future. However, although the primary object of history is narrating and explaining the past, historians are also influenced by social and political considerations in the present. I argue here that being/becoming historical narratives and knowledge production on Palestine and the Palestinians can only work within a pluralistic ontological framework by including human experiences, memories and remembering. Historians work like any other human agents. They produce historical knowledge and meanings about the past in the present and this historical knowledge helps shape the future.

It is the recovery of the experiences of the Nakba and production of indigenous knowledge on Palestine which link the history and memories of the Nakba to the wider discipline of oral/aural history. Consequently, rather than treating Halbwachs' socially framed memory within a positivist framework, this chapter argues for a multifaceted approach to representation of "memory" (including individual memories, collective memory, group memories and fictionalized resistance memory) and for treating Halbwachs' socially framed "collective memory" as only one way of seeing memory. Consequently other types of memories such as oral narratives should be conceptualized ontologically differently and epistemologically contextually. By contextualizing, I mean that historians cannot just proceed from pure theories of history, memory or oral narratives, but need to particularize their methodology and show how in practice a particular methodology can be relevant and effective within a particular context.

PALESTINIAN COLLECTIVE VERSUS SHARED MEMORIES OF THE NAKBA

The politics of collective memory can imprison minds and enslave people; but history can also be liberating and empowering. The cynical manipulation of collective memory by powerful and hegemonic elites is often top-down, silencing and exploitative. But collective memory can also be liberating and empowering for oppressed, indigenous and marginalized groups.

In the Zionist and Israeli settler-colonial collective memory and mega-narrative, Palestine was a semi-deserted "land without a people for a people without a land"; a *terra virgina* (virgin territory) of hard soil or swamps only made fertile, productive and "blooming" by the genius and hard labour of the European Zionist settlers. European hegemonic movements and settler-colonial ideologies such as political Zionism have always tried to impose their own mega-narrative and memories on the colonized and indigenous. In response in occupied and colonized Palestine – as throughout much of the Third World – shared cultural and indigenous memory projects have played an important role in decolonization, cultural resistance, counter-hegemonic discourses, decolonization processes, liberation and nation-building processes and as a vehicle for victims of colonialism and historical injustice and violence to articulate their experience of suffering.

Narratives of learning and shared memory have also been part of grassroots democratic initiatives to empower people and bring to life marginalized and counter-narratives that have been suppressed, either by hegemonic discourses or the unwillingness on the part of repressive regimes to acknowledge the past.

The approach adopted here recognizes that social and cultural shared memory has always been more than simply recollecting or recording of 'the past': recollection and "re-membering" serve to create, sustain and nurture collective identity. Individual and group memory should not be treated as dichotomous or constituting oppositional binaries. For both individuals and groups (which can be any group related to tribe, band, ethnicity, gender, class) to "remember" is to learn and form social norms and habits, while incorporating significant memories and experiences of the past in a meaningful way. No experience has shaped Palestinian attitudes and lives since 1948 more than the traumatic events of the 1948 Nakba and the devastating loss of hearth, home and land.

In the case of the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine, the Nakba – the exodus of the Palestinians and the dismemberment of historic Palestine – has

been a key site of collective memory and history that connects *all* Palestinians to the most traumatic event in Palestinian history. In addition to the terrible suffering inflicted upon the Palestinian people in the process of the establishment of the State of Israel, few of the hundreds of once-thriving communities remained. Not only they have been erased from the Palestinian landscape, but their very names have been removed from contemporary Israeli maps.

Although Palestinian national identity took root long before the 1948 Nakba, indigenous Palestinian memory accounts of the post-Nakba period – responding to the new reality of Palestinian dispersal and the fragmentation of Palestinian society – played a major positive role in the recovery and reconstruction of Palestinian national identity and the emergence of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in the 1960s; in recent decades, in particular, there has been an intense and complex relationship between the 1948 Nakba and the preservation, articulation and sustaining of Palestinian national and cultural identity.

Today, with millions of Palestinians still living under Israeli occupation or in exile, the Nakba remains at the heart of indigenous collective memory, national identity and the struggle for self-determination. Also to the millions of dispersed Palestinians living in exile and the *shatat*, the pre-1948 villages and towns were home, and continue to be poignantly powerful symbols of their personal, national collective identity.

One of the key themes for consideration here is Palestinian cultural memory and the recovery and reconstruction of Palestinian cultural identity in the post-Nakba period; there was always an intense relationship between the 1948 Nakba and the formation of Palestinian national identity, especially from the late 1950s onwards.

While the multi-layered Palestinian national identity existed long before the 1948 Nakba, the collective consciousness of the Nakba played a major role in the reconstruction of Palestinian national and cultural identities and the re-emergence of popular Palestinian nationalism in the 1960s. More crucially, it was the (historically marginalized) Palestinian refugees themselves who played a central role in preserving Palestinian national identity and in setting up the PLO and the guerrilla movements in the 1960s.

In the absence of a Palestinian state, which would have been expected to devote material and cultural resources to collective memory projects, archives and museums, Palestinian refugee communities in Palestine and elsewhere in

the Middle East have actively promoted collective memorialization projects as a form of cultural resistance. Since 1948 Palestinian refugees from individual villages marked "their" Nakba, or the anniversary of the date of the fall of their village.

In the post-1948 period Palestinians maintained the multiple meaning of their Arabic names and the multi-layered Palestinian identity deeply rooted in the land and embedded in ancient sites and place names (toponyms).

At the same time, however, in the post-1948 period new naming traditions and new resistance strategies emerged among the different communities of Palestinians reflecting the various fates suffered by the indigenous population of Palestine. The depopulated and destroyed villages and towns were often kept alive by passing place names down through generations of Palestinian family members. Even inside Israel, those internally displaced refugees regrouped in different localities to create new definitions of kinship structures. Post-Nakba conditions of displacement and dispersal gave rise to circumstances in which a person from the destroyed village of Ruways, for instance, would be given the surname Ruwaysi – someone from Ruways – instead of the customary clan eponym. Village solidarity stood in place of the absent village and dispersed clan members. The name of the original village also replaced the name of the *hamula* (clan), and the relationship among persons who belonged to the same original village became similar to *hamula* solidarity. The *hamula* did not disappear or weaken, but some of its basic functions were transferred to the wider kinship structure and social solidarity based on the original (destroyed) village. For those Palestinians forced into exile outside Palestine, one convention was to name children for the lost but not forgotten site.

FROM MEMORY TO ORAL HISTORY: ORAL ACCOUNTS, PEOPLE'S VOICES AND LIVING PRACTICES

The developments in recent decades in the academic discipline of oral/aural history and individual memories has revolutionized historical writing and the recovering of the past by bringing to light hidden, suppressed or marginalized narratives and voices – marginalized in official documents of state archives. Oral history captures a variety of individual testimonies, people's lives and living practices. Oral/aural narrative projects have, in fact, brought together academics, archivists and librarians, oral historians, museum professionals, community-based arts practitioners and community-oriented activists. As producers of

meaning, oral history projects have become a major catalyst for creative practices and interpretations in history-related fields and for the construction of alternative histories and memories of lost practices. Oral/aural narrative projects, like written documentation and archival material, are never free from factual error and have to be treated critically.

State-supervised archival collections and official documents can be restricted and access to them can be limited to powerful elites or favoured social groups and thus the control of access can reinforce hegemonic ideological discourses. The same state-controlled archives and official collections are often based on (individual and collective) memory; and they can distort, misinform, omit, restrict or even fabricate evidence.

Individual memories are also generally selective and fallible; egos distort and contradictions sometimes go unresolved. However, problems of critical evaluation are not markedly different from those inherent in the use of archival documents, letters, diaries and other primary sources. The scholar must test the evidence in an oral history memoir for internal consistency and, whenever possible, by corroboration from other sources, often including the oral history memoirs of others on the same topic (Starr 1984).

From the 1970s onwards, local historical research and oral history studies began to be considered in a highly positive light by the academy (Allen and Montell 1981), partly following work by scholars such as Luisa Passerini who studied the social history of the Turin working class under Italian fascism (Humphries 2009: 78; Passerini 1998). Since then, and especially in the last four decades, there has been a proliferation of oral history archiving memory projects throughout the world, which promote the collection, preservation and use of recorded memories of the past and people's voices.

In the UK, the BBC has developed an archive of World War II memories, based on oral histories and written by the public and ordinary people, and BBC Memoryshare, which is described as "a living archive of memory from 1900 to the present day … the majority of content on Memoryshare is created by Memoryshare contributors, who are members of the public".[1] Ordinary people can contribute memories, research events and link to context material relating to any date back to 1 January 1900. As for the WW2 People's War archive, the BBC asked the public to contribute their memories of World War II to a website between June 2003 and January 2006. This "people's memory archive" has collected 47,000 stories and 15,000 images – stories not just about air raids,

military operations and the armed forces, but also about the concentration camps in Europe created by the Nazis, the roles of women, peaceful resistance and occupation, civilian internment and critical conscientious objectors.

ORAL HISTORIES AND MEMORIES OF THE NAKBA AND HOLOCAUST: DEIR YASSIN AND YAD VA-SHEM

Israeli oral history as a producer of meaning and testimony in the museum and gallery has been of great importance in the recollection and collective memorization and memorialization of the Holocaust. The Israeli state memorial at Yad va-Shem, the Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance institution, is predominantly based on oral history and millions of pages of testimony. Yad va-Shem itself is situated on the lands of Deir Yassin, as is the city of Jerusalem western (Jewish) cemetery (Davis 2003: 25). The irony of Yad va-Shem and Deir Yassin is breathtaking; any Israelis and foreign visitors to Yad va-Shem go to DeirYassin, and during dedication ceremonies at Yad va-Shem no one ever looks to the north and remembers Deir Yassin (McGowan 1998: 6–7).

Founded and managed by the Israeli state, Yad va-Shem is completely silent about the atrocities of Deir Yassin, and contains a contain amount of anti-Palestinian propaganda. In essence, Yad va-Shem represents official Israeli "collective memory" for forgetfulness. Together with genuine oral history of the Holocaust, Yad va-Shem was established in 1953, five years after Deir Yassin, by a Knesset act and located in West Jerusalem. According to its website, Yad va-Shem is a vast, sprawling complex of tree-studded walkways leading to museums, exhibits, archives, monuments, sculptures and memorials. It has been entrusted with documenting the history of the Jewish people during the Holocaust period, preserving the memory and story of each of the 6 million victims, and imparting the legacy of the Holocaust to generations to come through its archives, library, school, museums and recognition of the "Righteous Among the Nations". The archive collection of Yad va-Shem comprises 62 million pages of documents, nearly 267,500 photographs along with thousands of films and videotaped testimonies of survivors. The Hall of Names is a "tribute to the victims by remembering them not as anonymous numbers but as individual human beings". The "Pages of Testimony" are symbolic gravestones, which record names and biographical data of millions of martyrs, as submitted by family members and friends. To date Yad va-Shem has computerized 3.2 million names of Holocaust victims, compiled from approximately 2 million pages of

testimony and various other lists. The collections of Yad va-Shem include tens of thousands of digitalized testimonies.

However, in contrast to the Israeli national memorial at Yad va-Shem and other Holocaust museums (including the Berlin Holocaust Museum and the US Holocaust Memorial Museum), there is no Nakba museum, no Nakba Hall of Names, no Central Database of Nakba Victims' Names, no tombstones or monuments for the hundreds of Palestinian villages ethnically cleansed and destroyed in 1948. The hundreds of Palestinian villages and towns destroyed in 1948 are still forced out of Israeli public awareness, away from the signposts of memory. What is also chilling is the fact that the Deir Yassin massacre of 9 April 1948 took place within sight of the place which became the Holocaust museum in Jerusalem; only a mile from where Jewish martyrs are memorialized lie the Palestinian martyrs of Deir Yassin whose graves are unknown and unmarked (McGowan 1998: 6–7).

For Palestinians inside and outside Israel Deir Yassin has remained a potent symbol of collective memory and cultural resistance. But in Israel the ghosts of Deir Yassin, Lubieh, Kafr Bir'im and the hundreds of villages destroyed in 1948 are rendered completely invisible:

> The villages that no longer exist were forced out of [Israeli] public awareness, away from the signposts of memory. They received new names – of Jewish settlements – but traces [of their past] were left behind, like the *sabr* [cactus] bushes or the stones from fences or bricks from the demolished houses. (McGowan 1998: 6–7)

There are some important recent developments with major implications for the study of Palestinian historical consciousness and Nakba memory. The rise of the new global media and the internet, in particular, has strengthened the role of Palestinian oral/aural histories and personal narratives in shaping Palestinian historical consciousness. In the last decade the internet, in particular, has become one of the most important sites of archiving Palestinian oral histories and personal narratives. Since its creation, the Archive has recorded over 650 video interviews with first-generation refugees in Lebanon about their recollections of 1948. This project was conceived as a collaborative grassroots initiative in which the refugees themselves were encouraged to participate in the process of representing this historical period. The project, which consists of about 1,000

hours of video testimony with refugees from more than 135 villages in pre-1948 Palestine, has its work centred on the twelve official UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) camps in Lebanon. But it has also conducted interviews within unregistered refugee "gatherings", and with middle class and elite Palestinians living in urban centres in Lebanon. Six duplicate sets of the interviews have been produced, along with a detailed database and search engine.[2]

PALESTINIAN ORAL/AURAL HISTORIES "FROM BELOW" AND ARCHIVING PEOPLE'S VOICES

In order to understand and appreciate the richness of Palestinian oral/aural histories and social and cultural memories, rather than imposing settler-colonial narratives on the indigenous people of Palestine, a range of voices and multiple narratives of competing memories, the archaeology of a people criss-crossed with individual experiences − including narratives of suffering (*mua'ana*), survival (*baqa'a*) and *sumud* (steadfastness), of courage and resistance born out of anger and revolt against oppression – must be allowed to flourish and be nurtured further. This section suggests that the "history from below" approach, with its emphasis on "speaking of experiences" and the multiplicity of popular memories and people's voices rather than high politics, decision makers or top-down approaches, can challenge hegemonic discourses or colonial methodologies based on Israeli- or Western-dominated archival sources.

Ilan Pappe makes an important point which centres on the difference between macro- and micro-histories of 1948. The Israeli "new historiography" of 1948 has remained largely macro-historical. This is partly due to the nature of the Israeli archival material. In general, Israeli archival sources give us a sketchy picture of 1948. This means that a detailed description of what happened in the case of each Palestinian village and town remains largely elusive. Often a document produced in 1948 by an Israeli army officer refers briefly to the occupation of a Palestinian village, or to the "purification" of another. Pappe points out that Palestinian oral histories can produce historically accurate accounts of 1948, showing that the same events in 1948 appear in a detailed and graphic form in accounts of memory, often as a tale of expulsion, and sometimes even massacre. Israeli historians who reject Palestinian oral history may conclude there was no massacre until the precise documentary sources assure them otherwise. Avishai Margalit (2003), Alessandro Portelli (1994, 1997, 2006) and others generalize

about "memory" and argue that it should be treated like fiction or as *knowledge from the past*, not *knowledge of the past*. This approach echoes positivist thinking, contrasts "history" with "memory" and tends to conflate "history" with the "past". Although "'collective memory' is not necessarily *knowledge of the past*" (quoted in Fierke 2008: 34), oral testimonies – like archival records – are forms of representation of the past. Of course, oral histories may tell us less about events in the past and more about the significance of the events in the present. But written documents are also often the result of a processing of oral testimonies (Pappe 2004: 186). Therefore Palestinian refugee memory accounts could be as authentic as the documented ones. But also the narrative of individual villages and towns in Palestine can *only* be constructed with the help of Palestinian oral testimonies. Consequently, oral testimony is a crucial methodology for pursuing further research on the Nakba. Although oral testimonies are not a totalizing substitute for archival material, they can supply crucial material for filling gaps and be cross-referenced with archival sources and documentary evidence.

Oral testimony, like written documentation, is never free from factual error and has to be treated critically. Morris (2004: 4) argues that written documents (and Israeli archives) distort far less than interviews with Palestinian refugees. But archival documentations are often based on memory; they can distort, misinform, omit or even fabricate evidence (Humphries 2009: 79–80). Louis Starr notes that memory is "fallible, ego distorts and contradictions sometimes go unresolved". Nevertheless:

> Problems of evaluation are not markedly different from those inherent in the use of letters, diaries, and other primary sources … the scholar must test the evidence in an oral history memoir for internal consistency and, whenever possible, by corroboration from other sources, often including the oral history memoirs of others on the same topic. (Starr 1984: 4–5)

Palestinian oral culture is a significant framework not only for the construction of an alternative, counter-hegemonic history of the Nakba and memories of the lost historic Palestine but also for an ongoing indigenous life, living Palestinian practices and a sustained human ecology and liberation. In contrast with the hegemonic Israeli heritage-style industry of an exclusively biblical archaeology, with its obsession with assembling archaeological fragments – scattered remnants of masonry, tables, bones, tombs – and officially approved historical

and archaeological theme parks of dead monuments and artefacts destined for museums, in recent decades Palestinians have devoted much attention to the "enormously rich sedimentations of village history and oral traditions" as a reminder of the continuity of native life and living practices (Said 2004: 49; Masalha 2008).

As Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) has effectively demonstrated, decolonizing methodologies are central to both settler-colonial studies and indigenous studies. In the context of both Zionist (power/archival knowledge) epistemology and indigenous rural and peasant Palestinian society, Palestinian oral/aural histories are a particularly useful decolonizing methodology; throughout much of the twentieth century the majority of the Palestinians lived in villages and were *fallaheen*; in 1944 66% of the Palestinian population was agrarian with a literacy rate, when last officially estimated, of only 15% (Esber 2003: 22). Their experiences in the fields, in their villages and in exile are largely absent from history-writing and much recent historiography (Issa 2005). Moreover, the Nakba itself, and the political instability and repression faced by the dispersed Palestinian communities since 1948, have also impeded Palestinian research and studies (Khalidi 1997: 89, 98).

As is the case with other subaltern groups, Palestinian oral testimony is a vital tool for recovering the voice of the subaltern: peasants, the urban poor, women, refugee camp dwellers and Bedouin tribes. An important feature of the Palestinian oral testimony of the Nakba from the inception has been its popular basis with the direct participation of displaced community (Gluck 2008: 69). Since the mid-1980s this grassroots effort has shown an awareness of the importance of recording the events of the Nakba from the perspective of those previously marginalized in Palestinian elite and male-centred narratives. Although gender (both female and male) imagery and symbols have always been prevalent in Palestinian nationalist discourses (Khalili 2007: 22–23), the Palestinian National Charter of 1964 (revised in 1968) and the Palestinian Declaration of Independence of 1988 had both imagined the Palestinian nation as a male body and masculinized political agency (Massad 2005).

FROM MEMORY TO HISTORY: PERSONAL EXPERIENCES, ORAL HISTORIES AND MEMORIES OF THE NAKBA

Palestinian oral histories of the Nakba should not be conflated with the Israeli "new historiography" of 1948. However, Palestinian oral histories of the Nakba

both preceded and were incentivized by the emergence of Israeli revisionist historiography in the mid-to-late 1980s. Yet not until the 1970s did scholarly Palestinian oral history begin to offer a picture of events in the eyes of the refugees. It should be pointed out, though, that these new oral narrative perspectives based extensively on interviews with and testimonies of the refugees began in the early 1970s – before the opening of the Israeli governmental and institutional archives in the late 1970s and at least a decade before the emergence of the Israeli "new historiography" in the mid-to-late 1980s.

In the 1960s and early 1970s the Palestinian collective nationalist resistance discourse about history, as articulated by the PLO, was dominant, effectively eclipsing personal narratives of individual refugees. Typically, this "heroic" nationalist memory was designed to paint an ideal type of history and suppress the darker side of Palestinian history, including accounts of internal infighting and stories about many Palestinian collaborators with Zionism. From the early 1970s, however, the *Journal for Palestine Studies*, *Shuun Filastiniyah*, the Centre for Palestine Studies, the Palestinian Research Centre and *Arab Studies Quarterly* began to publish pioneering articles and books based on individual oral evidence, personal narrative and interviews with ordinary refugees to tell the history of Palestine before and during the Nakba. This included works by Elias Shoufani (1972), Nafiz Nazzal (1974a), Fawzi Qawuqji (1975), Rega-e Busailah (1981), Elias Sanbar (1984), Walid Khalidi (1984) and 'Ajaj Nuwayhid (1993). In 1978 the Institute for Palestine Studies in Beirut published Nafiz Nazzal's, *The Palestinian Exodus from Galilee 1948* (1978), based on his doctoral dissertation (1974b), which brought to academic attention important oral accounts of Galilee dispossession as recalled by refugees exiled in Lebanon.

Ironically, Israeli historian Benny Morris (1987: 2), who claims to distrust Palestinian oral evidence on 1948, cited Nazzal's work repeatedly and extensively (as well as Shoufani's) in *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949* (Morris 1987). Despite his anti-Palestinian polemics, Morris found Nazzal's oral evidence research extremely useful in reconstructing several of the Israeli massacres of Palestinians in 1948.

The 1970s and 1980s were two of the most creative and inventive decades in Palestinian history and popular memory. In the 1970s Rosemary Sayigh, an anthropologist based in Lebanon, pioneered a whole new discipline of narrating the subaltern. She began to record and translate conversations with and individual testimonies of Palestinian refugees in the mid-1970s and she made