

The Nakba: Narrating the “Non-Existing” Palestinians into History!

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I have been engaged in a constant writing project that intends to highlight Palestinian narratives since 1948 up to the present. The dispossession narrative touches every Palestinian family including my own. During the 1948 Nakba and the war period, two family members on my father side were martyred, Jawdat Ali Rida Muhammad Bazian and Imran Ali Rida Muhammad Bazian, while another relative, Rida Ali Muhammad Bazian, was tortured by the British and released to the family bleeding and unconscious in a coma and died at home after a few days, in 1946. The Bazian's narrative is but a small part in a large picture that includes Faouzi As'ad Bazian and 14-year-old Khalid Bazian who were martyred in 1967 and 2000, respectively. The Bazian family narrative includes the dean of prisoners, 'Alaa Bazian, a blind man but endowed with piercing vision for freedom, resistance and a towering figure in the prisoners' movement.

On my mother's side of the family, my uncle Yusuf went missing during the war and until this day no one knows what happened to him. Every Palestinian family has one or more of its members killed, wounded, imprisoned or expelled first by the British and then followed by the Zionist during the 1947-48 Nakba.

On a daily basis, I receive hundreds of requests via email, Facebook and Twitter to highlight a cause, an important issue or a silenced narrative that can benefit by adding one more badly needed voice. Being a Palestinian in the diaspora and an academic that does work on Palestine and its painful history adds a personal dimension to requests coming from people living under occupation. How to narrate the stories of so many victims past and present? How can one record the past when the present Israeli death machine is still adding more bodies and countless victims daily?

Narrating Palestine means to write back into history the names, faces and narratives of all those who were killed, maimed, wounded and dispossessed to bring Israel into existence. Names of Palestinians killed are not recorded and are mere numbers mentioned in passing as if having no families, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, cousins or neighbours who recall their joys and sorrows. Palestinian bodies have been piling up since the beginning of the 20th century and Europe's plan to solve its "Jewish question" by creating a Palestinian-Arab one.

Palestinians have been facing structured, multi-layered and systematic erasure at local, regional and global levels. Locally, they suffer under direct and brutal Israeli occupation with daily attempts at dispossession and never-ending violence. The visible scars are itched into people's faces speaking of trans-generational sufferings. Young Palestinian bodies made old by the suffocation of occupation, dispossession of land, checkpoints and fascist settlers stomping over everything that has meaning including the human him/herself. The Nakba continues in the building of the Apartheid Wall that separates families and villages, and pollutes the senses with a most profound ugliness that has no contemporary parallel on earth.

Yet more painful for Palestinians is the never-ending disfigurement of the land since 1948 and erasure of the past to replace with the architecture of violence, destruction of meaning and a "spirituality" rooted in worshipping power as the new modern deity. Adding insult to injury on the anniversary of the Nakba is a Palestinian Authority that acts as the face and hands of the occupation that protects the settlers while punishing again its own population. How to narrate the multiple stories of betrayal and the selling away a people's rights for some VIP privileges for the few?

The Palestinian Nakba anniversary is again ushered in with a continuation of structured violence committed against the Palestinians by the Israeli State. In Western press, the custom is to look at events in Palestine through the Israeli lens. On the one hand, the press erases past and present Palestinian narratives while on the other, humanizes and rationalizes Zionist violence. A Palestinian is either murdered or violently attacked daily but the Western press never finds the time or space to narrate their story and give a name, face and complete picture as to who they are as a person. Palestinian deaths and suffering is narrated in numbers while their victimizers are introduced as people with feelings, families and histories that matter.

At a regional level, the Nakba for Palestinian has transformed them into refugees and tools for settling accounts between various Arab states and leaders. Consequently, whenever two Arab countries had a conflict, the Palestinians became the bargaining chip to exert pressure or gain the upper hand in whichever distorted sense of nationalism was being introduced. Also, the Nakba transformed Palestinians into stateless people and subject of states that have accepted their dispossession as a pre-condition to gaining their own post-colonial banana republics. Palestinians post Nakba became a regional toy to raise, abase and bundle in all types of Cold War machinations, monarchies versus nationalist, Sunni-Shia rivalry, oil market manipulations and war on terror obfuscation. How to narrate the violence of regional machinations that makes of Palestinian refugees as instrument for state craft?

On the global level, the Nakba has meant that the Palestinians have become wards of the international community. Importantly, the international community as a group celebrates Zionism and the founding of Israel as an atonement for their own historical anti-Semitism and the death visited upon European Jewry during WWII. The Nakba meant that Palestinians have become a fixture at United Nation meetings and a never-ending spectacle for obtuse foreign policy “experts” to offer ideas on how to solve the unsolvable. How to solve the Palestinian dilemma in an institution and among member states who celebrate Palestine’s dispossession, provide economic and military aid to Israel, cooperate in targeting Palestinians around the world and cast the Veto to prevent any change from taking place?

Narrating Palestine is the order of the day and it has to be undertaken under the most cruel of circumstances. How to narrate the Nakba when Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Egypt, Myanmar, Yemen and Somalia are all ablaze and facing various levels of death and destruction? Arguably, the Nakba could be seen as a minor issue in the face of the destruction currently under way in Syria and Iraq, which is of biblical proportions. However, the level of destruction should not obscure the nature of the Zionist settler colonial project and its connection and investment in the on-going regional conflicts.

The alliance between Israel, Saudi Arabia and Egypt is undertaken within the framework of a regional containment strategy that made Syria and Iraq the acceptable terrain to settle strategic accounts. Palestine and Palestinians are once again the bargaining chip to be offered to safeguard seats of power in various capitals and Israel is in the driver seat to secure its land robberies.

The Nakba is not a single event that unfolded in the past and Palestinians have had a long period of time to recover from it. Indeed, the Nakba, for Palestinians, is a never-ending epic that continues to shape their daily lives. The stories of dispossession are continuous and trans-generational in nature since the losses and destructions inflicted upon Palestinians in 1948 was followed by constant dislocation, targeting and movement as refugees in near and distant places. Israel was built on top of Palestinian graves and a wholesale robbery of Palestine's cities, villages and orchards. What started in the 1948 Nakba continues today in land confiscations, settlement building and the suffocating occupation that has no end in sight.

A narrative of every Palestinian family is intertwined with the 1948 Nakba, 1967 Nakhsa, 1970 expulsion from Jordan, 1976-80s multiple wars in Lebanon and a new exile in Tunisia, the 1st and 2nd Intifadah, 1991-92 removal from Kuwait, ejection from Iraq and wards of U.S. occupation forces on the borders, siege in Yarmouk and camps in Syria, and sadistic assaults on Gaza. The Nakba rears its ugly head every time a Palestinian is stopped at a boarder and in airports to be incessantly asked about violence, terrorism and why are they traveling in the first place, as if it is a crime. How does it feel when you are asked to justify your existence and innocence to the criminal enterprise that committed the crime in the first place?

The Nakba is Zionism's trans-historical bullet that is lodged deeply into Palestinian bodies and minds, continues to torment daily and works to negate Palestinian peoplehood, history, connection to land and the ability to narrate itself. Narrating the Nakba is writing Palestine and its people back into history while asserting their centrality to the past, present and future. The Nakba continues in the daily humiliation suffered by Palestinians inside and outside of Palestine. The Nakba continues in the building of the Apartheid Wall that separate families and villages, and pollutes the senses with a most profound ugliness that has no contemporary parallel on earth. Lastly, narrating Palestine is not complete without the thousands of Palestinians who languish in Israeli, Arab and world prisons for no other reason than demanding freedom and dignity. Certainly, a prison may lock-up the body but it never can capture the mind of a free people!

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