

# History from Below

## Writing a People's History of Palestine

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## Abstract

This submission for PhD by Publication includes three studies designed to reflect the popular view of ordinary Palestinians regarding events and politics in Palestine throughout modern history. They aim to primarily provide a 'history from below' political discourse of the Palestinian people. While the studies do not purport to determine with certainty the exact dynamics that propel Palestinian politics and society - as in where political power ultimately lies - they attempt to present a long-dormant argument that sees 'history from below' as an indispensable platform providing essential insight into Palestinian history to explain present political currents.

Over the course of 11 years, I conducted three studies which resulted in the publication of the following volumes: The first work, *Searching Jenin: Eyewitness Accounts of the Israeli Invasion* (2003) is centered on the events that surrounded the Israeli siege, invasion and subsequent violence in and around the Palestinian West Bank refugee camp of Jenin in April 2002. The study includes forty two eyewitness accounts, collected from people who witnessed the violence and were affected by it, were recorded and positioned to create a clear and unified narrative. The reality that the refugees portrayed in these accounts was mostly inconsistent with the official Israeli narrative of the violent events that occurred in the refugee camp, on one hand, and that were provided by the Palestinian Authority (PA) or factions, on the other. *The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People's Struggle* (2006) shows the impact of the Israeli military policies used against revolting Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, and the popular response to these policies during the first five years of the Second Palestinian Intifada (2000-2005). The results of the study also demonstrate the inconsistencies between the views and practices held by the official political representation of Palestinians, and the popular view, as demonstrated in the discernible collective behavior of ordinary Palestinians throughout the Occupied Territories. In *My Father was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza's Untold Story* (2010) my research pursues the roots of the current situation in the Gaza Strip – that of siege, political deadlock and violence. The

study traces the lives of selected refugees before the Nakba - the Catastrophe of 1947-48 - back in Palestine during the British Mandate in the 1920s and just before the Zionist colonial project went into full swing.

In the three studies, the central argument is that historical and political events are best explained through non-elitist actors, who although at times lack political representation and platform, are capable of influencing, if not shaping the course of history, thus the present situation on the ground. The studies also indicate that such notions as popular resistance, collective memory and steadfastness (*sumud* in Arabic) are not mere idealistic and sentimental values, but notions with tangible and decipherable impact on past events and present realities.<sup>1</sup> The central argument endeavors to demonstrate that although the Palestinian people are divided into various collectives, they are united by a common sense of identity and an undeclared political discourse, and they have historically proven to be a viable political actor that has influenced, affected, or, in some instances, deeply altered political realities.

To examine my thesis, my paper will be reviewing several theoretical notions of historiography including the Great Man Theory, which uses an elitist approach to understanding the formation and conversion of history. The Great Man Theory argues that single individuals of importance have made decisions that drive the outcomes of history. This notion is challenged by Group Theories which argue that history is shaped by the outcome of competing interest groups belonging to socio-economic elites, and that multidimensional forces often shape political realities. Furthermore, I examine a third theoretical approach that of 'history from below', which argues that history is scarcely shaped by 'great men' or socio-economic elites. Such historiography rarely contends with how history is formed; instead, it is mostly concerned with attempting to reconstruct the flow of history. It does so through deconstructing largely collective phenomena that are believed to be responsible for shaping current political movements. I attempt, through these

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<sup>1</sup> In *Catastrophe and Exile in the Modern Palestinian Imagination: Telling Memories*, Ihab Saloul conveys that "with respect to Palestinian national memory.. if Palestinians don't remember, their dreams of the homeland will never become a reality." (p.80)

volumes, to present a flow of Palestinian history based on the 'history from below' approach. The following paper will attempt to explain the logic behind my choice.

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## List of Accompanying Material

*My Father was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza's Untold Story.* (London: Pluto Press, 2010). Forward: Professor Noam Chomsky (Massachusetts Institute of Technology); pages: 256.

*The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People's Struggle.* (London: Pluto Press, 2006). Forward: Kathleen and Bill Christison (Authors: *Palestine in Pieces: Graphic Perspectives on the Israeli Occupation*); pages: 240.

*Searching Jenin: Eyewitness Accounts of the Israeli Invasion.* (Seattle: Cune Press, 2003). Forward: Salman Abu Sitta (President: Palestine Land Society, London); pages: 320.

The total length of the books is about 280,000 words.

## Note on Style and Spellings

Two of the three books accompanying this submission are published in the United Kingdom, while one is published in the United States. However, American-English especially with respect to punctuation, spelling and phrasing is used throughout the three volumes. This report follows the same style and spellings of the three books. This paper which presents the context of, and the link between, my publications has works cited here in footnotes. All footnotes and reference citations in my published works in this submission remain in those published works.

There is a list of references at the end. Closing quotation marks are after punctuation rather than before; for example; I use, "Palestinian history," ... instead of "Palestinian history", to conform to the style of the books. Chicago-style citations are used throughout.

My three published volumes will be originally referenced with full titles and thereafter with abbreviated titles. *Searching Jenin: Eyewitness Accounts of the Israeli Invasion* will be referenced as *Searching Jenin*. *The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People's Struggle* will be referenced as *The Second Palestinian Intifada*, and *My Father was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza's Untold Story* will be referenced as *My Father was a Freedom Fighter*.

## Introduction

The three books in this submission study the Israeli siege and assault on the West Bank refugee camp of Jenin (2002), the Second Palestinian Uprising (2000-2005) and the history of the Gaza Strip (1948-2008). They seek to address the following themes:

In *Searching Jenin: Eyewitness Accounts of the Israeli Invasion*, I provide a platform of oral history as a way to decipher complex events of military and political nature. Oral history here is not employed as a tool to supplement political and official military discourses, but supersedes them altogether to serve as the initial platform for any reliable political understanding.

In *The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People's Struggle*, I place people's narrative within a larger framework of political events and military tactics applied by the Israeli government and army respectively. I present the destructive impact of Israeli political and military strategy on the majority of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, and explain the collective reaction to these tactics throughout the first five years of the uprising. I also highlight the divisions within Palestinian society around ideological, socio-economic and political lines.

In *My Father was a Freedom Fighter: Gaza's Untold Story* I combine both styles into one, weaving in the personal and collective narratives into historical events. This book is the culmination of experiences gained in writing the first two books, where I attempt to corroborate the oral history and personal narratives that can be utilized as a foundation of understanding history at large.

In these studies, I use three different approaches to historical events: one that is based entirely on oral history - situated within a political framework; another that examines the impact of political and military policies on large collectives; and a third that gives personal narrative ascendancy over elitist discourses. While the three approaches are valid methods of inquiry, I argue that history is better

comprehended when it is viewed and presented from below, through the accounts and experiences of ordinary people, not politicians or official historians.

## **Genesis of the Publications**

Through the years dedicated to writing these books, I reached a realization that Palestinian history was not merely and entirely shaped by Israeli military bulldozers, men in military fatigues or politicians of either side; there are other important but missing components in the way the history of the Palestinian people is told. Because of my interest in telling a 'different' history of Palestine - one that is not tailored to fit preconceived historical notions<sup>2</sup> or to serve political or factional agendas<sup>3</sup> - I became keenly interested in the ongoing debate that delineates the inherent tension in the way historians perceive the inner workings of history. The questions that I found both relevant and intriguing were: How is history made, and who ultimately has a greater impact on resulting historical events? But this is not just a matter of history as an academic discipline - as in how we should write history or learn from it. I am also concerned about the current political dialectics, for there is a parallel tension that continues to exist regarding how political analysts determine defining political events and struggles in the history of any nation; and how these momentous events influence present political settings, and partly determine future realities.

Considering my keen interest in the subject, which led to the writing of several books and hundreds of journal and newspaper articles, I decided to get involved in a more formal and constructed engagement with these issues, to tailor the subject of my research and books into a PhD program.

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<sup>2</sup> In his book *The Case for Israel*, Alan Dershowitz highlights the type of arguments that are often made in Israel's defense, recounting the typical accusations leveled at Palestinians. His book serves as a good model of an argument made to serve preconceived notions.

<sup>3</sup> An example is Azzam Tamimi's book, *Hamas: Unwritten Chapters*, 2006.

As someone who was born and raised in a refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, whose family survived 'The Beit Daras Massacre,' the Nakba (1948), the Naksa (1967) and all the violence and destitution that accompanied and followed them, I grew disenchanted by many historical narratives on Palestine. Even many volumes written by Palestinians themselves fell short of truly capturing the struggle of the refugees, the daily lives of ordinary people and the collective aspirations that unite Palestinians as a nation everywhere. Following my graduation from the University of Washington in Seattle in 1998, I began my work as a writer and journalist, travelling around the world reporting on struggles and conflicts that carried few or many similarities to what I witnessed growing up in Palestine. What became known among Palestinians as the 'Jenin Massacre,' which took place in April 2002, was my first attempt at reflecting on a possible alternative reading of history. With valuable input from Professor Noam Chomsky and other authors and journalists, in my first book I tried to imagine the violence in the camp from a third party's point of view - not the Israeli government/army or the Palestinian Authority, but the residents of Jenin themselves. That approach was quite successful, as was the book, which paved the road for my other two books in subsequent years.

The intention of my three books was for them to be read as a Palestinian history from below that directly challenge two dominant narratives concerning this subject: the first is the elitist rationalization of Palestinian political reality (which sees history as an outcome of the workings of an individual or a faction/group, whether presented by Israeli or Palestinian scholars); the second is the reductionist approach to any subject concerning Palestinians, a discourse that teeters between denying their very existence<sup>4</sup> or presents their struggle and national aspirations as a 'problem' to be quickly - if not haphazardly - remedied.

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<sup>4</sup> Golda Meir's famous quote "There were no such thing as Palestinians" in the Sunday Times (15 June 1969), also in the Washington Post (16 June 1969) is often highlighted as the most prominent example of denying the existence of Palestinians as a people. But that statement has been repeated throughout modern history by other Israeli and Zionist officials and intellectuals, and their supporters.

## **The Nature of the Research and Research Methodology**

One of the main objectives of my research is to fill existing gaps in literature regarding the field of knowledge concerning Palestinian studies.

Moreover, throughout the three books, I also offer an alternative reading of the same political and historical events using qualitative research methodology. One such technique is to locate and position oral history as a way to understand and analyze political and military events. This method is mostly used in *Searching Jenin*. Another technique is using political analysis to understand the interests and possible motives of actors, their actions and consequences that lead to the ethos of collective action, violence and resistance in Palestine, which is largely applied in *The Second Palestinian Intifada*. Finally, a third technique is mixing both types of research to confirm the relationship between people and politics as is the case in *My Father was a Freedom Fighter*.

## **Research Design**

### **Searching Jenin**

If memory is the active process of the creation of meaning, then my book, *Searching Jenin* is an attempt at interpreting and distilling memory as part of that active process intended to create meaning. The research addresses the topic of what took place in the West Bank refugee camp of Jenin during what the Israeli military labelled Operation Defensive Shield in April 2002. The Israeli government and media explained the events that followed as a necessary military response to a wave of Palestinian suicide bombings, notably the 'Netanya Passover' bombing of March 2002. Palestinian officials and media accused Israel of collective punishment.

Missing in both narratives are the details of the story involving the people who lived through the events in Jenin. Using oral history as an appropriate method of unearthing the Jenin story is consistent with the overall aim of oral history, which is to gain first-hand knowledge from people who have lived through different social-historical-political periods and events.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the book refrains from interviewing both sides of the conflict. First, it would have been extremely difficult to gain access to the Israeli military at the time, especially as the Israeli government was clear in its desire to control and guard the Jenin storyline, and all of the violence that took place during that phase of Operation Defensive Shield. Second, Israeli army officials and spokespersons had unhindered access to both local and international media. Third, the idea of the book is not to juxtapose narratives, but to give access, credence and platform to a largely neglected one. What made the research necessary, thus the importance of the book, was the fact that the oral history it provided was not available through any other source, and could not even be gleaned from research conducted by human rights groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. Following the publishing of my oral history of the Jenin events, rights groups published semi-comprehensive reports that did use oral testimonies as a method of research.<sup>6</sup> The contents of this volume were presented by myself at dozens of universities around the world, as well as the House of Commons.

*Searching Jenin*, however, tries to avoid steering the oral accounts with too limited a focus in a way that could hinder the collective experience of the refugee camp's inhabitants. While the 42 interviews were conducted with the overall aim of trying to comprehend the nature of the siege on the camp over the course of two weeks (early to mid-April 2002), it opens up a space for individuals to reflect freely about their own experiences. My interference in the text was to edit it and position it in a way that would give it greater fluidity, and allow it to read as a cohesive body of work, without selectively influencing and analyzing the testimonies themselves.

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<sup>5</sup> This articulation, about the value of oral history was poignantly highlighted by Julia Chaitin in her elaboration "Oral History" in the online [SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods](#).

<sup>6</sup> Human Rights Watch report of 2 May 2002 on the fighting in Jenin remains one of the most comprehensive reports on the subject. <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/05/02/jenin-0>

The original number of interviews exceeded sixty accounts. Nearly twenty of them were discarded, not for being inconsequential for any reason, but because they overlapped with other personal accounts, thus proved redundant in terms of details and repetitive in terms of language. All interviews were recorded as audio files at the refugee camp of Jenin, other areas in the West Bank where the refugees fled, and in Jordan where some of the wounded were finally allowed to seek treatment at King Hussein Hospital. One of the victims' stories was conveyed through his brother due to the fact that he was shot in the throat (95-111). Shortly after the book was published, he passed away upon his return to what remained of the refugee camp of Jenin.

### **The Second Palestinian Intifada**

Qualitative Research was also the main methodology used in *The Second Palestinian Intifada*. The research for the second book was conducted over the course of five years.

In *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis*, Sarah J. Tracy identifies three core qualitative conceptions: 'self-reflexivity,' which is concerned with the ways in which researchers' "past experiences, points of view, and roles impact these same researchers' interactions with, and interpretations of, the research scene." Second is 'context,' which is defined as immersing oneself in trying to make sense of it; and finally, 'thick descriptions,' where researchers engage themselves with a culture, investigating the particular circumstances present at that scene and only then move towards grander statements and theories.

The second Palestinian uprising, which arguably lasted for five years (from the end of 2000 to the end of 2005) was the 'scene' of my research per Tracy's depiction. My concern with the subject was mostly related to my work as a journalist, commentator and media critic. The 'self-reflectivity' allowed me to view the daily

accounts published in Palestinian, Israeli, Arab and Western media regarding the violence in Palestine from a critical viewpoint. Throughout my research, I tracked reporting in newspapers, statements by human rights groups (Israeli, Palestinian and international), statistics and figures, and prevalent viewpoints from all sides on the political issues and the violence that ran rampant during those five years. By reviewing and analyzing a larger volume of primary and secondary sources, I developed the needed 'context' to make sense of all the competing narratives regarding the uprising. The 'thick description' was my own analysis based on findings - the relationship between politics and violence, and their direct impact on the people.

The book is made of five chapters, each dedicated to one year of the uprising. Each chapter starts with a detailed timeline, highlighting important events related to the intricate political scene and to the adjoining violence. Weaving in the politics and violence on the ground helps highlight the inherent relationship between both realities. Each chapter also begins with a one page summary reviewing the purpose of the text, and underscoring the centrality of the 'people' to the overall narrative.

To accentuate the importance of ordinary people to the central argument throughout the text, my research goes further, examining evidence of an existing link between the Palestinian collective in Palestine and other political actors (as in international civil society) outside Palestine, who, until then, were not viewed as political actors. The brief introduction to chapter 2 highlights the point:

"This chapter explores how the Second Palestinian Uprising garnered international attention and support from people and organizations the world over, chiefly through the inception of the International Solidarity Movement (ISM). It details how Israel's assaults magnified, citing the April invasion of the Jenin refugee camp, where scores of Palestinians were killed. Shortly thereafter, United Nations worker, Ian Hook was shot and killed by the Israeli army, and 23-year old international activist Caoimhe Butterly was wounded but survived what appeared to be a premeditated

killing attempt by the Israelis as well. It also investigates issues surrounding the highly controversial Separation Wall, which is still under construction. While Israel claims that the intent of the Separation Wall is to prevent Palestinian terrorists from penetrating Israeli cities, the reality is that thousands of Palestinian homes, farms and thousands of acres of land have been stolen to make way for the monolith. ...” (36).

### **My Father was a Freedom Fighter**

My third volume, *My Father was a Freedom Fighter* is an earnest effort at Palestinian history from below. It combines both methods of research highlighted above: oral history and structured qualitative research while adhering to the three core values previously discussed.

While the study uses oral history in the traditional sense of allowing individuals to reflect on specific personal experiences that ultimately shape collective memories, it also conveys much of the history using my position as a researcher, a product of the very story I am researching. Both my position (positionality) and reflexivity – the clear self-consciousness about the researcher’s political and value positions in relation to how these might have influenced the design, execution and interpretation of the research served as an advantage, for they allowed me to gain special access to the topic as a researcher and explore other dimensions to the story that would have otherwise remained unexplored.<sup>7</sup>

By being positioned within the history I was researching, I was able to communicate ideas, deep feelings, sentiments and nuances that are exceedingly difficult to achieve using a detached method of research. It also allowed the narrative a level of coherence and continuity, which helped supplement the relative scarcity of such narratives, at least within the context of Gaza’s history and politics.

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<sup>7</sup> Griffith goes further, arguing “bias comes not from having ethical and political positions – this is inevitable – but from not acknowledging them. Not only does such acknowledgment help to unmask any bias that is implicit in those views, but it helps to provide a way of responding critically and sensitively to the research.” (p.133)

There was also a need to write a book on Gaza; partly because the history of Gaza has been ignored, distorted and misrepresented, not just by Israel, but arguably by Palestinians themselves. Successive Israeli governments had deemed Gaza a problem and a perpetual security threat. But even within the Palestinian narrative, Gaza's history was lumped into a larger history, that of dispossession and inherent victimization. I was born and raised in Gaza and I am an integral part of its story. My years of research and writing about the subject allowed me to see Gaza from a different light. It was a unique position, being a character in a story, and a researcher on the story itself. That flexibility allowed me to navigate a position for myself as an insider and outsider at the same time, involved and detached, a cast member and a critic.

*My Father was a Freedom Fighter*, the most successful in terms of its popular appeal, was a challenging volume. I attempt to adhere to qualitative research methods while maintaining the data's important value of 'trustworthiness.' While all historical events mentioned in the book are verified and cross-referenced, the personal narrative - that of histories of individuals - is either conveyed through oral history or my own account of that history. The intention is to highlight the synergy, if not direct relations, between significant historical events and ordinary individuals. The aim is not the precision of the personal details of the way some of these characters conducted themselves or their daily habits and such, but to underscore several important points:

One, it is an attempt at re-imagining the history of Gaza from the viewpoint of its refugees, Palestine's former peasants, starting with pre-Nakba years to several decades later, ending with the Israeli Operation Cast Lead war (2008-9), which followed the elections of Hamas to government (2006), and the subsequent siege (starting in 2007).

Second, with that alternative history in mind, the book tries to unravel the direct and indirect impact that war, exile, siege and other earth shattering events leave on

the individual, as a representation of the collective, his/her relationship to his/her surroundings – how he/she interacts, makes decisions, reaches certain political realizations, and subsists under difficult circumstances.

Third, once such a narrative is established, with the individual at its core, the study in turn reveals how the individual becomes a significant actor, thus influencing the direction of the narrative altogether.

The study uses qualitative research and oral history to do more than document history from a popular perspective. It also seeks to prove the validity of the idea that popular forces are an integral part, not merely of the historical narrative, but are themselves an instrument that compels, at times, massive changes in the direction of history - as was the case in the First Palestinian Uprising in 1987.<sup>8</sup>

The book's main character, Mohammed, was made a refugee at the age of 10, when his village of Beit Daras - located in the south of Palestine - was destroyed following several battles with Zionist militias (14-39). From that early stage, the peasants of Beit Daras show their willingness to engage with, or at least attempt to reverse the course of an impending history through their resistance, however humble. The ineffectiveness of their resistance and the dispossession that follow are not the end of the chapter, but the start of new ones. Mohammed, reduced to beg for crumbs of bread from fleeing Egyptian soldiers in Gaza, had himself grown up to join the Palestine Liberation Army (56). The 'freedom fighter' was a member of an early generation of resisting Palestinians in Gaza. It is his very act to join the *fidayyeen* (47) that impels a course of parallel history that accompanied the elitist history of war and political intrigue.

The research in its entirety is positioned within that alternative history - personal in its narrative but essential in trying to understand popular phenomena, mainly that

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<sup>8</sup> In his book *Occupied by Memory: The Intifada Generation and the Palestinian State of Emergency*, John Collins, drawing conclusions from stories of youth who participated in the Intifada, argued that the Intifada's lasting affect was not only felt throughout Palestine for years after Oslo, but had 'a lasting regional impact as well.' (p.232)

of resistance. The evolution of the alternative history accompanies the book's main characters, Mohammed and his wife, Zarefah, from their birth in Beit Daras to their death in a Gaza refugee camp, and intersects popular narratives with political events such as elections, factionalism, war, US, Israeli and Arab foreign policy trends and so on. It follows Mohammed on his travels as a cheap laborer throughout the region to expand the narrative beyond the confines of Gaza's geography, thus allowing a better understanding of the relationship between the ordinary individual and larger, more multifaceted contexts.

## **Review of the Relevant Literature**

### **Great Man Theory**

There are competing historical narratives that exist outside the realm of Palestinian history and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, however, they are very much relevant to the ongoing debate on Palestine in general and my research in particular. Scottish author, Thomas Carlyle's ideas on how history is ultimately made - *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (1907) - were discounted by many as lacking or irrelevant. But the *Great Man Theory*, which reached its peak in the mid-19th century, continues to impact, although in a more subtle way, our understanding of how history is made, and remade. That understanding, in which history and politics are intertwined and inseparable, is as ancient as the early written political diatribes. But most renowned political authors and historians were those who insisted on an elitist approach to history, a singular explanation of historical events, which if masterfully manipulated, could indeed alter the very foundation of political currents, thus rewrite history altogether.

### **Group Theories of Politics**

In *Group Theories of Politics*, G. David Garson stretched history as a platform that gave space to various interest groups, competing parties and collectives, who, in

his opinion, shaped policy process - and, arguably, the history - of any politically diverse society. He juxtaposed pluralism versus elitism as two competing schools of thought, the former arguing that multi-dimensional forces often shape political realities, while the latter contending that a more concentrated socio-economic group holds most power and influence in politics. Garson's ideas were perhaps less restricted - in terms of his understanding of the power distribution mechanisms that influence history - but was equally selective, like the hero-worship theories of Carlyle.

### **History from Below**

However, my work is largely based on a third approach, which sees major fallacies in the academic discourses concerning histories, arguing that history and politics are neither shaped by 'great men' nor socio-economic elites, but by ordinary people over extended periods of time, which French historian and philosopher Georges Lefebvre referred to as 'history from below.' According to this method of historical analysis, political and historical discourses are re-imagined from a different historical angle: *A People's History of England* by A. L. Morton, and *A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn, and other 'people's histories' come to the fore to offer a whole new perspective.<sup>9</sup> The new discourse, although more democratic and plural than the rigid and inclusive approach of Carlyle, seems mostly focused on political outcomes resulting from history of conflict. "The history of any country, presented as the history of a family, conceals fierce conflicts of interest (sometimes exploding, most often repressed) between conquerors and conquered, masters and slaves, capitalists and workers, dominators and dominated in race and sex." (Zinn, 10)

'History from below' advocates don't necessarily make arguments as for how history is made, or who largely or partly determines its flow, thus shaping current

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<sup>9</sup> The 'people history' library is quite rich with some notable titles, which include: *A People's History of England* by A. L. Morton (Victor Gollancz: London, 1938); *A People's History of the United States* by Howard Zinn (London; New York: Longman, 1980); *A People's History of the World* by Chris Harman (London: Bookmarks, 1999); *A People's History of the Vietnam War* by Jonathan Neale (New York: New Press, 2003), and so on..

political movements. What they decidedly emphasize, however, is that while individuals might prompt certain historical events, it is largely popular movements that at least significantly influence outcomes. By Zinn's logic, it turns out that regardless of whether Christopher Columbus 'discovered America,' or not, it's the fervent and ongoing struggle within American society - as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century - that continues to shape the present. History is not made of 'great men' or wholly controlled by small elite groups, but is constant, dynamic, conflict infused (violent or otherwise) and changing; within that dynamic struggle, mass movements, at times organized and at others decentralized, tend to contribute to the type of outcomes which eventually write historical discourses and current political realities.

'History from below' however, is the outcome of a fierce and strenuous challenge to the traditional approach to history, a task in which Marxist historiography and the Annales school of thought play major parts. The social class centrality in Karl Marx's historical materialism, despite its inevitable view of history, fundamentally helps place the study of history in a non-elitist direction. The emphasis on socioeconomic tension in Marxist historiography however, arguably neglects other factors of historical consequence. The Annales School methods of research, which, like Marxist historiography, has a lasting effect on the research and recording of history, evolves into a more comprehensive and intricate form of research. Like Marxism, it rejects the traditional view of history, that which is concerned with military, politics and government (the empiric school of thought). Instead, it adopts a layered approach to historiography, one that considers socioeconomic factors, but also sociocultural, anthropological, geographical, psychological and sociological.

Positivist historians championed traditional historical interpretations that were mostly predicated on political-military point of view examined within a determined period of time. But followers of Annales School rebelled against the history of great individuals, that which is formulaic and chronological, offering instead a protracted study of history in which historical events are placed in a complex mosaic of interdisciplinary studies. It was the hope of one of its original founders, Mark Bloch that

history might become “a wondrous, indispensable school of psychological and social analysis.”<sup>10</sup>

Although the Annales School evolved into three different branches, starting in the late 1920's, the model behind its interests and approaches to the study of history remains committed to the original principles of its founders, Bloch and Lucien Febvre. The school, however, unlike other currents of thought didn't rely on the charisma of its founders, but the ideals for which they stood.<sup>11</sup>

Locating the ‘truth’ through some form of ‘historical science’ however remains elusive, if at all possible. Even the Annales Schools had itself evolved, or perhaps branched into less distinct and definitive sets of interests and approach. However, what has been challenged to a degree of success is the ‘scientific’ approach to history as originally developed by Leopold von Ranke. The deterministic Rankian approach of “How did things really happen?” might have achieved the objective of history from the viewpoint of ruling classes at specific points in time, but that pre-determined historiography proved insufficient, needless to say outmoded in studying, recording and explaining historical phenomena that went beyond the interests of influential groups and individuals.<sup>12</sup>

The advancements in the field of historiography were cemented by the rise of new theories that too challenged scientific, empirical approaches. The narrative theory came to liberate the narrative itself from that of a structured flow, into a more elaborate and layered design. The narrative theory “assumes that the unit of analysis is ultimately an entire narrative, understood as a concrete story of some aspect of the world, complete with characters, settings, outcomes or projected outcomes, and plot.”<sup>13</sup> Such a model of analysis changed the historian relationship

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<sup>10</sup> Burguiere, Andre, 2009. *The Annales School: An intellectual History*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, p.17.

<sup>11</sup> Burguiere, Andre, 2009, pp.1-2.

<sup>12</sup> *The Future of the Past: From the History of Historiography to Historiology*. Alexandre Grandazzi. Diogenes, Volume 38, 1990, pp. 59-60.

<sup>13</sup> Narratives of terrorism and security: ‘Accurate’ translations, suspicious frames. Mona Baker. *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Volume 3, Issue 3, 2010. pp 5-8.

to the text and event, as it called for the contextualizing and understanding of text and events within larger corresponding contexts, as in other texts and events of direct and indirect relations, a concept that itself is a discernable manifestation of the Annales School model of research.

Despite the concentrated development of historiography, Palestinian history was facing major obstacles, thus for decades persisting in forced inertia. On one hand, Middle East historiography barely advanced. It neglected ordinary people, and remained hostage to narrating the history of the elites, their political institutions, diplomatic events, and their self-indulgent understanding of conflict, whether at a socioeconomic level or that of violence at war. That regression was hardly surprising, for Middle East historiography is arguably “a stepchild of ‘orientalism.’ Middle East history bears the imprint of its birth up to the present in its use of sources, its methodology, and its isolation.”<sup>14</sup> Another obstacle is related to the Palestinian national context and the unwavering attempt by Zionist (and western) historians and institutions to replace the Palestinian historical narrative, whenever it existed, with a Zionist one. That hurdle proved much more difficult to surmount.

### **History and Politics in the Palestinian Context**

Historical and political friction is most apparent in the academic, political and even popular perception of Palestinian history, and of the largely political events that shape Palestinian reality, in Palestine/Israel or in Diaspora communities around the Middle East region and the world. As is the case of other colonial and anti-colonial movements, discourses regarding Palestine, the Palestinian struggle, and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict tend to be polarizing as if no overlapping exists between two discourses that pertain to the very same subject. Within some Israeli political and academic circles, Palestinians merely ‘existed’ to be ‘cleansed’, to make space for a different state, one that exists as the supposed racial antithesis to what Palestinians represent, or are perceived to represent. That convenient existence is

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<sup>14</sup> Problems in the Historiography of Women in the Middle East: The Case of Nineteenth-Century Egypt. Judith E. Tucker. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Volume 15, 1983. pp 321-323.

meant to be temporary from an elitist Israeli political view, for it is as simple as this statement by David Ben-Gurion: "We must expel Arabs and take their places."<sup>15</sup> Such clarity in political discourse (backed by military action) was and remains championed by historians, media and political scientists without much quarrel. In his January 15, 2004 interview with Haaretz, Israeli historian, Benny Morris' views on the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians sufficiently pronounce the Israeli reasoning: "I don't think that the expulsions of 1948 were war crimes. You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs. You have to dirty your hands...There was no choice but to expel that population."

The assigning of the role to Palestinians as dislocated people without worrying much about the ethical/moral, historical and political implications of such decisions has presented Palestinians as a group with characteristics of a docile, irrelevant collective; a historical anomaly, even. Again, they merely existed to be denied that very existence.

In his seminal essay, *Permission to Narrate*<sup>16</sup>, Edward Said charted the illusive and ever-changing political landscape through which Palestinians were 'permitted' to present their own narrative, by both international media and official western discourses. Indeed, a cohesive Palestinian narrative was taking shape, challenging the methodological Zionist Israeli narrative (of Jews returning to an empty 'Promised Land'), on one hand, and a prevailing international consensus that, more or less, adopted a narrative of particular sympathies to the carefully constructed Israeli story - mostly appealing to western political expectations and historical sensibilities. Even when the PLO, more or less, accepted western-led international consensus regarding the 'solution' to the 'Arab-Israeli conflict', including that of the 'refugee problem', that too was not accepted by Israel and the US, and others; for that acceptance reflected a degree of 'Palestinianness' - an inclusive Palestinian national discourse that has evolved, at least since 1970, independently, reflecting a

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<sup>15</sup> A letter from David Ben-Gurion to his son Amos, written 5 October 1937 and published widely including by the [Institute of Palestinian Studies](#), Beirut.

<sup>16</sup> *Permission to Narrate*. Edward Said. *London Review of Books*, Volume 6, Number 3, February, 1984, pp. 13-17.

level of national cohesion, bridging the narratives of alienation and diaspora with that of occupation and 'right of return.' And that too was to be deemed unacceptable.

But by being denied access to develop an independent and interconnected political and historical narrative, however, didn't mean that Palestinian historians didn't do so, at times, with a great degree of success, as Edward Said's own legacy demonstrated. For many years, Palestinians and non-Palestinian historians tried to respond to the selective reading of history, with its grave present and future political implications, largely insistent on the political marginalization of the Palestinian people. The responses arrived in many forms; famous among them is Walid Khalidi's *Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians, 1876-1948*. Others arrived in the form of personalized narrative, for example, Ghada Karmi's *In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story*, and Leila Haddad's *Gaza Mom: Palestine, Politics, Parenting, and Everything In Between*. Others took on the personal history of prominent Palestinians, or specific chapters in Palestinian history that are predicated on consequential events (for example, the Nakba and war of 1948) or history of Palestinian political factions, or that of non-violent resistance, and so on.

Expectedly, the counter narrative to that of exclusion and denial of existence largely focused on demonstrating that Palestinians did in fact exist as 'a people' prior to the establishment of Israel in 1948; that Palestinians possessed a sense of nationhood, a unique cultural and political identity that distinguished them from other collectives in their immediate surroundings. But the relatively large academic and political edifices of text didn't come without flaws. They often lacked originality - they were a counter-narrative - originating from the very misrepresentation of Palestinian history and reality by the colonial and imperialistic discourses that saw Palestine as 'land without people' that should ultimately and rationally belong to a 'people without land.' But more importantly, the Palestinian discourse tended to follow western academic approaches to history and politics - circulating between a Great Man Theory representation of Palestine: *Arafat and the Dream of Palestine*:

*An Insider's Account* by Bassam Abu Sharif, and other more representative, but still reductionist representations, for example *Hamas: A History from Within*, by Azzam Tamimi. The latter can be seen as the model for Group Theories of Politics within Palestinian discourse. It must not be discounted, however, that others did offer a more pluralistic representation of Palestine, as did Mazin Qumsiyeh in *Popular Resistance in Palestine: A History of Hope and Empowerment*. However, even then, Palestinian political and historical realities were co-opted to demonstrate specific points, and ignore others. Instead of offering an inclusive historical view, it selects convenient, although demonstrable facts.

The outcome of the three types of counter narratives is that few introduce non-politicized, non-elitist, non-ideological, inclusive historical discourse of Palestine and the Palestinians that can be fully useful in shaping an honest understanding of Palestinian history, independent of Israel's official history, the often self-serving viewpoint of specific individuals, however 'great' factions and their advocates or detractors. In other words, a useful (useful in terms of its relevance to current and future political discourses) Palestinian history from below is largely lacking.

Despite the fact that people's history is an area of study that has not been thoroughly explored as an academic discipline in Middle Eastern studies, there is an abundance of literature that directly or indirectly contributed to my research.

My research relies on existing literature that presents - or misrepresents Palestinian history. Part of my researched examines Israeli and Zionist literature, which either purposely ignores, reduces or overlooks Palestinian history, fashioning a restricted narrative that is either based on nationalistic sentiments (*The Making of a Nation: The Beginnings of Israel's History*, Charles Foster Kent), political misrepresentation and ahistorical diatribes (*The Case for Israel*, Alan Dershowitz; *Why Israel is the Victim and Why There is No Peace in the Middle East*, David Horowitz), or overly religious (*A Biblical History of Israel*, Iain Provan). This goal of probing the Israeli version of history and politics is to provide a literature-based justification of why the subject at hand is largely misrepresented in

Israeli, western imagination, thus the need for an alternative reading altogether. That said, it must be noted that a growing faction of Israeli historians have challenged the dominant Zionist narrative, in Israel and outside. Some of these expressions come in the form of compelling historical retorts as in Ilan Pappé's *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, narrative-based political and historical discourses, as in Miko Peled's *The General's Son: Journey of an Israeli in Palestine*, or a mixture of disciplines that combined history, genealogy, geology and political science as demonstrated in Shlomo Sand's *The Invention of the Jewish People*.

As far as Palestinian literature is concerned, there has been a large and growing library in the Arabic language, which explores Palestinian history and politics. This was important to my research, due to the fact that it is the most relevant in terms of documenting an authentic history. Although most of this literature is in Arabic, there were also ample resources published in their original form in English as well. In my examination of Palestinian literature, I examine a good number of resources that cover areas of history, politics, society, culture, etc. Some of these volumes are specific to certain regions in Palestine. Examples include, Hasan Abu al-Namel's *Gaza Strip, 1948-1967: Economic, Political, Sociological and Military Development*; also, Ziad Abu-Amr's *The Roots of the Political Movements in the Gaza Strip, 1948-1967*. I also reviewed Palestinian literature of general historical value as in such seminal books as that of Walid al-Khalidi's *Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians 1876-1948*, and, by the same author, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*. Other important volumes are specifically focused on the history of factions and factionalism in Palestine, which were reviewed due to the repeated occurrence of the subject to my research. They include Ziad Abu Amr's *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza: Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Jihad*, Chehab Zaki's *Inside Hamas: The Untold Story of the Militant Islamic Movement*, Abdallah Frangi's *The PLO and Palestine* and Anat Kurz's *Fatah and the Politics of Violence: The Institutionalization of a Popular Struggle*. Most of these volumes don't seek 'permission to narrate,' and perhaps at times inadvertently follow the lead of such scholars as Said, by reflecting a coherent Palestinian

narrative (one that is sympathetic to it, or to non-mythological historiography in general), that corresponds to nationalistic Palestinian priorities.

I also look into Palestinian literature that attempts to counter-analyze Israeli politics and society in relation to the Palestinians. Such material might not be as common, but is certainly available, including Nur Masalah's *Imperial Israel and the Palestinians: The Politics of Expansion*, and Edward Said's *The Question of Palestine*.

Invaluable to my research was the large edifice of narrative-based Palestinian literature that provided, although in a less defined academic structure, a personal history. Noted among these attempts are Ghada Karmi's *In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story*, Susan Abulhawa's *Mornings in Jenin*, Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun and Other Palestinian Stories*, and Sari Nusseibeh's *Once Upon a Country: a Palestinian Life*.

### **Oral History Review**

My books are largely narrative-based accounts of the history of Palestine. They attempt to reconstruct history through personal testimonies, that arranged together, provide understanding of events of a collective nature, with continuity and cohesion. My involvement in the text was my way of ensuring that the accounts are situated within proper political context because "Palestinian memory is, at its heart, political."<sup>17</sup> Other authors have attempted to do so, with varying degrees of success. Although my three volumes are driven by the same intentions - of assigning the Palestinian people a greater role in explaining the dynamics of their own history, not as mere victims or aggressors, heroes or villains, terrorists or freedom fighters, but as active political actors - oral history is used in each volume as an essential vehicle to deliver meaning and to reflect on history of a specific or broad-based nature. The intention of employing oral history is not to underscore

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<sup>17</sup> H. Sa'di, Ahmad, Lila Abu-Lughod, 2007. *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*. New York: Columbia University Press. P7.

Palestinian victimization, lining up refugees to demonstrate their haplessness in a world seemingly shaped by greater powers and strong actors with complete monopoly on shaping and writing history; but to recast the roles of political actors by placing the people at the helm of historical narration, with the hope of achieving greater insight and better clarity regarding the present, and to an extent, the future as well.

The debate on whether memory was a reliable historical source was to an extent settled, largely because of the astounding amount of texts produced after World War II. It is argued that it was perhaps the availability of portable tape recorders that contributed to the consequential development of oral history then as a trusted field of historical research.<sup>18</sup> Regardless of the medium, the 1960's saw increased interests in people's history in which oral history was a major component of research. That alternative history was quickly employed in the service of the erstwhile undocumented history of national liberation movements, minorities, women and working class struggles around the world. Paul Thompson's *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (1978) was an erudite defense of oral history. In it he argued that oral history was transforming the content of history "by shifting the focus and opening new areas of inquiry, by challenging some of the assumptions and accepting judgment of historians, by bringing recognition to substantial groups of people who had been ignored."<sup>19</sup> Awareness and appreciation of oral history grew as it was validated by time and experience. Alistair Thomson in *Memory and Remembering in Oral History* (2010) argued that "memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings." Julia Chaitin argued that oral history is not simply an attempt at locating an alternative historical text, but to glean new information that otherwise cannot be located, for it was simply undocumented.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Thomson, Alistair, 2010. *Memory and Remembering in Oral History: The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p 79

<sup>19</sup> Thomson, Alistair and Robert Perks, 1998. *The Oral History Reader*. New York: Routledge. p26hpda.hackinghistory.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/the\_oral\_history\_reader\_0.pdf

<sup>20</sup> Chaitin, Julia. *Oral History*. [SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods](#), last accessed 30 August, 2014.

Considering that many aspects of Palestinian history, especially those concerned with Palestinian refugees, went undocumented, oral history grew in its importance and relevance to increasingly fill the many gaps in that narrative. Susan Slyomovics's *The Object of Memory: Arab and Jew Narrate the Palestinian Village* is a pertinent example of using oral history as a way to isolate a specific event to illuminate a broad-based history. It is a narrative that is situated in a Palestinian village, Ein Houd, which was conquered by Zionist militias in 1948. Although many of its residents were exiled and dispersed into many corners of the world, some of Ein Houd's Palestinian inhabitants sought refuge in a nearby mountain as a 'temporary' shelter before returning back to the village, a wish that was never to actualize. Ein Houd is now an Israeli village named Ein Hod and is made of Jewish immigrants that gathered in Palestine from many corners of the world. The juxtaposition of the accounts are valuable in the sense that the overall narrative demonstrates how war, conquest and political circumstances have changed much of the physical landscape, yet it didn't change the relationships between Ein Houd's residents and their village. In fact, that relationship is now more intimate than ever, since it is coupled with loss, grief, exile and Nakba. Equally important, a new relationship, between Jewish residents and their village, has given birth to an entirely different narrative, a Jewish Israeli one, which co-exists but doesn't overlap with Palestinian remembrance of the same place. It is about two peoples that narrate and reconstruct their pasts in relation to their present, which is a value I attempted to underscore, particularly in my book, *My Father was a Freedom Fighter*. The Ein Houd equivalent was the Jewish colony of Tabiyya which neighbored the Palestinian village of Beit Daras (26). The present and past correlation in my book is in many ways similar to Slyomovics's account.

Ahmad H. Saidi and Lila Abu-Lughod's *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory - Collection of Memories* is another valuable model of allocating and positioning memory to serve a greater role than mere reflection or expression. It has successfully linked the present to the past, which naturally required a much deeper and more intimate understanding of the past, thus oral history. The book didn't purport to be concerned with memories of the past per se, as it is about the

work they do and can do in the present. "Making memory public affirms identity, tames traumas and asserts Palestinian political and moral claims to justice, redress and the right of return." This volume in both style and value overlaps with much of the narratives in my books. However, the similarities are much greater in the case of *Searching Jenin* oral history accounts. Although the accounts in Saidi and Abu-Lughod served the larger purpose of internalizing and injecting collective memory into the framework of Palestinian history, starting with the Nakba, *Searching Jenin* served a more specific purpose of using oral history as a tool to gain better understanding of specific events (the siege, battle and 'Jenin Massacre') and only then to place the events that took place in April 2002 at that West Bank refugee camp to gain broad-based understanding of collective Palestinian history. Jenin is used here as representation of many refugee camps invaded during the second uprising, as Beit Daras of my third volume (and Ein Houd, and the many other references made in the books highlighted above) was used as representation of hundreds of Palestinian villages ethnically cleansed and destroyed during the Nakba.

Saree Makdisi's *Palestine Inside Out* was in some ways also similar to the structure and style of my *Second Palestinian Intifada*. Most notably, the rationale throughout both books were political: mine narrating the events of the second uprising and Makdisi's shedding light on the political reality with all of its restrictions - the military curfews, closure, the isolation of entire communities behind the Israeli wall, and so on - that took place throughout and following the uprising. His conveying of personal accounts and oral history was not the driving point of the narrative, but closely accompanied and strongly supplemented the arguments made in his book, a style similar to mine. My volume, however, was intended to read by way of a chronology of historical events, while in Makdisi's case it was largely thematic, despite the fact that the history in both books overlapped in numerous ways.

*Positionality* was an inescapable approach for me, as has been the case for most Palestinian historians. When one is too involved in a story, it becomes unfeasible

to achieve a complete intellectual distance even for academic purposes. This was not as relevant in the case of *Searching Jenin* and much of *The Second Palestinian Intifada*, due to the physical, although not psychological distance between me and these events. However, in *My Father was a Freedom Fighter*, ignoring the intimacy and proximity between the author and the subject matter would have been impossible, if not insincere. In my third volume, I used Edward Said's definition of the intellectual - that of being detached and involved, outside society and a member of society and constantly agitating against the status quo. Said's idea of the intellectual's mission in life was to advance human freedom and knowledge (1993 Reith Lecture), but doing so while oftentimes standing outside society and its institutions, while remaining a member of society, disturbing the status quo and addressing wider concerns. Spending half of my life living in Gaza as a refugee and the second half in exile allowed for the inescapable attempt of aspiring to that kind of intellect. My last volume on Gaza was a manifestation of that attempt. Other Palestinian intellectuals tried and succeeded to locate themselves within that milieu. The book by Palestinian author and poet, Mourid Barghouti, *I Was Born There, I Was Born Here* carried a similar tone to my Gaza history book: that of the outsider, the insider, the cast member and the narrator at the same time. In *I was Born There*, Barghouti delves into the everyday life of Palestinians in the West Bank. Like them, he struggled to cross checkpoints and navigate life under occupation as an exiled person returning home to a reality that was becoming increasingly alien yet innate, and predictably harsh.

Rosemary Sayigh's *Voices: Palestinian Women Narrate Displacement*, narrates the stories of 70 Palestinian women from the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and Jerusalem. The women, mostly refugees from poor and peasant backgrounds in historic Palestine, speak about their own lives following the displacement of Palestinians after the Nakba. Sayigh's interviews – conducted between 1998 and 2000 – look into displacement and its effect on women in various Palestinian societies across the occupied territories, the impact of the Nakba on the identity of women, and on their sense of 'self.' It also considers its bearing on society as a

whole in a way that is centered on the criticality of women to the Palestinian narrative.

The centrality of the narrative of Palestinian women was justified by Sayigh based on her demonstrable assertion that “women have been a basic element in the Palestinian capacity to survive poverty, oppression, exile. They have been models of courage, tenacity, resourcefulness and humour. Though all were victims of expulsion and of gender subalternity, I would never think of them primarily in these terms, but rather as people who knew/know how to live against poverty and oppression. Palestinian women have the inner resources to make a good life for their children. They pack, and move, and set up again in a new place, among new people.”<sup>21</sup>

Not only did Sayigh’s efforts help rearrange history from the dominant metahistorical narratives into a more egalitarian narration of history, she rightly positioned refugee women at the center of Palestinian history from below, thus offering a more representative understanding of Palestinian history altogether. Her characters include Umm Abdel Jabbar 'Adwan of Gaza City - whose story<sup>22</sup> is saturated with familial struggles, oppressive familial hierarchies that were typically male-dominated and the difficult survival of everyday life - is actually pinned against the backdrop of the very political conflict that unifies all Palestinian refugees. Although women interviewed by Sayigh are unlikely to have known one another, the unity of their narrative is unmistakable. It is a unison that bridges geographic divides, where Amm Abdel Jabbar of Gaza’s story overlaps with that of Haji Fatima Da'jen of the West Bank<sup>23</sup> and Alayan as-Sanaa of Naqab.<sup>24</sup>

Like most of her seminal work, notably, *The Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries*, which examines oral history of Palestinians beyond gender

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<sup>21</sup> Sayigh, Rosemary, 2005. *Voices: Palestinian Women Narrate Displacement*. Halden, Norway: Al Mashriq. <http://almashriq.hiof.no/palestine/300/301/voices>, p13

<sup>22</sup> Sayigh, Rosemary, 2005. [http://almashriq.hiof.no/palestine/300/301/voices/Gaza/umm\\_abdel\\_jabbar.html](http://almashriq.hiof.no/palestine/300/301/voices/Gaza/umm_abdel_jabbar.html)

<sup>23</sup> Sayigh, Rosemary, 2005. [http://almashriq.hiof.no/palestine/300/301/voices/Westbank/hajji\\_fatima.html](http://almashriq.hiof.no/palestine/300/301/voices/Westbank/hajji_fatima.html)

<sup>24</sup> Sayigh, Rosemary, 2005. [http://almashriq.hiof.no/palestine/300/301/voices/Israel/alayan\\_assanaa.html](http://almashriq.hiof.no/palestine/300/301/voices/Israel/alayan_assanaa.html)

classifications and *Women's Nakba Stories: Between Living and Knowing*<sup>25</sup>, Sayigh offers individual life stories that attempt to reorganize history and recapture the popular forces that lead to social transformation in society.

*Searching Jenin* was my own attempt at utilizing oral history in a similar style to that used by Sayigh. While her stories were aimed at 'narrating displacement,' mine aimed at finding the correlation between the narrative of ordinary people and that of popular resistance, on one hand, and recording the collective impact of Israeli violence on the life of one Palestinian refugee camp in the West Bank on the other. The geographic landscape was quite limited in my volume, but Jenin was meant to serve as a microcosm of a larger narrative, one that Sayigh has recorded with utmost diligence. "Displacement is a defining experience of Palestinian people in modern times," she wrote<sup>26</sup>. Jenin was, in my view, one of these defining experiences of the Palestinian people in modern times, not least because of its massive psychosocial impact on the Palestinian people as a whole.

*Palestinian Women: Narrative Histories and Gender Memory* by Fatma Kassam is a blend between Sayigh's work and mine. It is situated within the principals of positionality and reflexivity, discussed earlier in this chapter (see page 15 and 31), which were mostly at work in *My Father Was a Freedom Fighter*. "The story they told me when I was growing up shaped my life as much as it did theirs," she wrote, in reference to the oral testimonies she collected from her subjects that were 20 urban Palestinian women who live in today's Israel.<sup>27</sup> Her book, however, fits into Sayigh's narrative - *In Voices: Palestinian Women Narrate Displacement* - which narrates the stories of Palestinian refugee women in Gaza, the West Bank and Jerusalem. Unlike Sayigh's, however, Kassam raises questions regarding those who stayed in the Palestinian homeland, whose life stories are as pertinent, although rarely told as part of the larger Palestinian national narrative.

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<sup>25</sup> In H. Sa'di, Ahmad, Lila Abu-Lughod, 2007. *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*. New York: Columbia University Press. p135.

<sup>26</sup> Sayigh, Rosemary, 2005. [http://almashriq.hiof.no/palestine/300/301/voices/Intro/intro\\_page1.html](http://almashriq.hiof.no/palestine/300/301/voices/Intro/intro_page1.html)

<sup>27</sup> Kassem, Fatma, 2011. *Palestinian Women: Narrative Histories and Gender Memory*. London: Zed Books. pvi

While the identity of refugee women in the post-Nakba reality was shaped by variables pertaining to exile, poverty, multilayered oppression, societal conditions, and centered around military occupation, Palestinian women of today's Israel were forced to contend with other variables including, per Kassam's definition: "the complex intersections of gender, history, memory, nationalism and citizenship in a situation of ongoing colonization and violent conflict between Palestinians and the Zionist State of Israel."<sup>28</sup>

Kassam's book utilizes oral history, and her direct interaction with Palestinian women makes it closer to the work of Sayigh. However, the fact that she and her family are an important component of the story drew sharp similarities between her book and *My Father Was A Freedom Fighter*. While she locates herself at the very start of the story of 20 other women, my book connects all the characters into one continued narrative, revisiting the same individuals throughout the entire journey from pre-Nakba, to Nakba and finally to exile.

However, other similarities were quite obvious in both narratives, her and mine. Her focus on "life story as the principal tool for eliciting information from interviewees," allowed her to utilize a methodology that blurs "dichotomy between history and memory".<sup>29</sup> *My Father Was A Freedom Fighter* sought to achieve similar results where history is not discussed as a series of events that took place in the past, but recurring events that continue to manifest themselves in the present. Moreover, the actual oral history as a research methodology was utilized fully in *Searching Jenin*, which allowed my interviewees unhindered access to their own narrative without much intervention or interpretation of researcher.

Drawing on the spirit of utilizing oral history as a method to use memory to reconstruct present reality, other historians went further. "To remember is not simply to retrieve stories and images out of the storehouse of memory, but rather to reconstruct, reinterpret, and represent events for specific audiences and in

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<sup>28</sup> Kassem, Fatma, 2011, p1

<sup>29</sup> Kassam, Fatma, 2011, p16

specific contexts,” wrote Isabelle Humphries and Laleh Khalili in their chapter in Abu-Lughod and Saadi’s edited volume, *Nakba: Palestine, 1948 and the Claims of Memory*.<sup>30</sup> Humphries and Khalili’s essay, *The Gender of Nakba Memory*, examines a largely overlooked aspect in Nakba-linked collective memories of Palestinians.

*The Gender of Nakba Memory* is an essential addition to the discussion considering the many confines facing the female-centered narrative in Palestinian society. For example, when looking at the male-oriented nature of the Palestinian historical narrative of men - whether as revolutionaries in the battlefield or victims – women’s narratives are often cast aside. In Rosemary Sayigh’s words, cited by Humphries and Khalili, women’s narratives are seldom “recognized as history, either by themselves or others.”<sup>31</sup> Umm Khaled’s assertion, “I can’t say I know all this history; others know it better” is particularly telling, for, despite the fact that she is an ‘eloquent history teller,’ she still would assign the responsibility of telling history that she is quite familiar with and affected by those “who would know better.”

Although *The Gender of Nakba Memory* is predicated on the researchers’ fieldwork and oral history, but also secondary sources, the complexity of their endeavors called for the writers’ interference to ‘reconstruct and reinterpret’ the outcomes of their oral history research. Sayigh’s approach provided minimum, although essential framing to oral history collected from refugee women. Kassam’s followed a similar approach, in addition to locating herself and family as the starting point of the oral history conversation. Humphries and Khalili’s, however, used oral history research as a tool to embark onto a critical reading of the role of gender in Nakba memories. One of their goals was to “examine both how the Nakba is remembered by women, and what women remember about it,” but equally important was to examine how women’s memories “were imbricated by both the nationalist

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<sup>30</sup> In H. Sa’di, Ahmad, Lila Abu-Lughod, 2007. *Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*. New York: Columbia University Press. p208.

<sup>31</sup> In H. Sa’di, Ahmad, Lila Abu-Lughod, 2007. p208

discourse and the same patriarchal values and practices that also shape men's lives and their memories."<sup>32</sup>

In other words, Humphries and Khalili did not record women's memories in isolation of the larger context, or did not necessarily opt to see women's history, or view of history, as central to the overall Nakba narrative. Instead, they confronted the multiple-dominant discourses that both silenced and circumscribed the role of women as a conduit of Nakba memory.<sup>33</sup> They examined the specificities of women's memory and the unique references to that memory, notably, rape, loss of gold jewelry, loss of family, communities and livelihood. But even the unique sense of loss endured by women as a result of the Nakba has its own multilayered meanings, with rape being the obvious example.<sup>34</sup> Rape was not just the brutal violation of women's bodies but also an assault on the man's honor<sup>35</sup>. The word 'rape' itself grew to represent the loss of Palestine altogether and many of the events associated with the Nakba, as in 'the rape of Palestine.' The fact that rape - which partly forced many Palestinians to flee the Zionist invaders in terror, justifiably fearing a dark fate that could await their women - became the overriding value that described the violation of Palestine itself, is an important detonation of the importance of gender role in the Nakba memory.

In *My Father Was A Freedom Fighter*, or the uprising-related narrative in the *Second Palestinian Intifada*, or the battlefield/massacre narrative of *Searching Jenin*, I didn't examine the role of women or gender separate from the overall Nakba narrative. But the role of women in capturing memory as a tool to delineate loss, resurrection, resistance and grief are unmistakable throughout the three volumes. In *Searching Jenin*, women were witnesses, victims and the resilient mothers and wives who refused to abandon the fighters during the siege. In the *Second Palestinian Intifada*, gender was blurred purposely to define the shared victimhood, but also the burden of resistance. Women were resurrected again in

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<sup>32</sup> In H. Sa'di, Ahmad, Lila Abu-Lughod, 2007, p209

<sup>33</sup> In H. Sa'di, Ahmad, Lila Abu-Lughod, 2007, p223

<sup>34</sup> In H. Sa'di, Ahmad, Lila Abu-Lughod, 2007, p211

<sup>35</sup> In H. Sa'di, Ahmad, Lila Abu-Lughod, 2007, p223

the characters of Umm Adel and Umm Mohammed, who narrated the Nakba of their village in Beit Daras, and post-Nakba characters like Zarefah, who persistently raised a family throughout wars and intifadas, only to fall victim under the overwhelming weight of life in a refugee camp, to be buried in the Martyrs Graveyard among other women and men who shared the same fate and struggles.

My women characters stood on their own, convincingly enough that if seen in isolation, they could indeed highlight the role of women as unique in both their memories and contribution to Palestinian history. However, in my books their voices, while amplified, are merged into a collective voice that is not exactly male-dominated.

Salam Tamari's *Year of the Locust: A Soldier's Diary and the Erasure of Palestine's Ottoman Past* took the discussion in a whole different direction. His is a major contribution to the social and cultural history at the early years of the 20th century. It is history from below as narrated via the diary of Ihsan, an Ottoman soldier, who watched his world disintegrate around him.<sup>36</sup> The disintegration of Ihsan's own world, his hopeless love, his quashed dreams, never-actualized 'recipe for happiness' and his death were a reflection of the much larger ailment that afflicted the whole of Palestine at that most critical, yet despairing historical juncture.

"The skyrocketing food prices in the city, followed by the disappearance of vegetables and meat. Women and children (..) formed long queues in front of bakeries and fought for meager amounts of bread. Famine struck every major town in Syria, Palestine and Mount Lebanon and as Ihsan notes, it was man-made (..) by the summer of 1915 the locust attack reached Jerusalem, followed by the spread of cholera, typhus and other epidemics."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Tamari, Salim and Ihsan Salih Turjman, 2011. *Year of the Locust: A Soldier's Diary and the Erasure of Palestine's Ottoman Past*. Oakland: University of California Press. p51

<sup>37</sup> Tamari, Salim and Ihsan Salih Turjman, 2011. *Year of the Locust: A Soldier's Diary and the Erasure of Palestine's Ottoman Past*. Oakland: University of California Press. p52

Tamari's introduction served to lay out the historical context for Ihsan's diary, situating his notes within a carefully detailed political description of events that eventually shaped the future of the Palestinians following the fall of the Ottoman Empire, the advent of British colonialism and the earnest push for the Zionist takeover. The rest of the book is Ihsan's diary, presented in chronological order. The diary itself speaks of Ihsan's political ideas, his unreciprocated love affair with a woman he referred to as 'S,' and a struggle with his own identity; all serving in delineating a sense of hope (that the war will be over, and that he will be united with his beloved) and despair (that all hope is lost, that an impending crisis was in the making, and that his beloved is but a love affair that will always be confined to his own diary.)

Although Tamari's intervention in the text was confined to the elaborate introduction - setting the stage for Ihsan's diary - and the careful selection of diary entries that truly stood out as a cohesive narrative in their own right; an overriding similarity between the *Year of the Locust* and *My Father Was A Freedom Fighter* was present from beginning to end. Ihsan was Mohammed. They were both simple soldiers, who experienced their moments of hope and despair, and eventually defeat. They are both real and representative of two important stages in Palestine's history: Ihsan was a product of pre-Nakba history, and Mohammed of the post-Nakba reality. Their existence was interlaced, although Ihsan died before Mohammed's birth.

Tamari's vivid account of the disintegration of the Ottoman's influence in Palestine and my account of the reality that shaped Palestinian society in later decades underscore the significance of history from below as a tool to link historical narratives in ways unmatched by traditional historiography. It is similar to how Sayigh's characters in *In Voices: Palestinian Women Narrate Displacement* were linked through a unified narrative despite their geographical disconnection, and how Kassam's *Palestinian Women: Narrative Histories and Gender Memory* appears as if to be a continuation of the same conversation that Sayigh had

started, although in a different geographical and perhaps more overlapping political landscape.

However, the historical narrative provided by Tamari about Ihsan and his beloved differs from the history of Mohammed and his beloved, Zarefah, as narrated in my book. Tamari's character was allowed mostly to represent himself directly, leaving the reader with the ability to decipher historical events based on their understanding of Ihsan's entries. In my narrative, Mohammed was a cast member in a complex script that involved many other characters. Although Mohammed was the unifying character throughout the book, it was my narrative, not his direct writing that brought his character to life, against the backdrop of social, cultural and political upheaval that began before his birth, and continued after his death in a besieged refugee camp in Gaza. Ihsan's history lasted for a few years, and was restricted by the limitations of his entries. Mohammed's lasted for decades. While Ihsan's Ottoman world disintegrated, Mohammed's refugee camp remained after his death.

Yet Mustafa Kabha's *The Palestinian People: Seeking Sovereignty and State* was a middle ground between a historical narrative that subscribes to Group Theories in politics and a people's history. It was not quite a history from below in the way that Kassam's was, nor an oral history-oriented narrative in the style used by Sayigh. But, it was a comprehensive attempt at reclaiming a Palestinian historical narrative, for it challenged the conventional wisdom through which Palestinian history is told. For example, it located the Palestinian identity - itself a major question for Kabha - in exclusively Palestinian priorities, challenging the claim that the Palestinian people's collective identity is simply a retort to the Zionist project per se. The Group Theories play out throughout his book in such a way that challenge the singular narrative on how Palestinians became a people, united by common rapports and an overriding set of political aspirations:

“The history of the Palestinian people in the twentieth century was shaped by three triangles. One was externals consisting of Britain (and the other superpowers),

prestate Zionism and the State of Israel, and the Arab World, encompassing Arab countries and their vested interests. The second triangle relates to aspects of national identity: the pan-Arab dimension, the national Palestinian dimension, and the political Islamic dimension. The third triangle is social and intrinsic: the veteran, traditional family-based elite, the intellectual middle class that entered politics mainly from the 1930s and working class groups."<sup>38</sup>

For Kabha, it is the 'triangles' – in constant collision and conflict – that shaped Palestinian history, and largely influenced the Palestinian identity, a reminder of Zinn's take on history, one that "conceals fierce conflicts of interest (..) between conquerors and conquered, masters and slaves, capitalists and workers, dominators and dominated in race and sex."<sup>39</sup>

While Kabha's research relied on multiple sources, including many primary sources, his account was less reliant on oral history as a core component of his research. His book was similar in style to my second volume, the *Second Palestinian Intifada*, in the sense that it attempted to narrate Palestinian history through a Palestinian-centric narrative, providing analysis and drawing conclusions, but without necessarily committing to a history from below method of narration.

Moreover, *My Father Was A Freedom Fighter* offered similar political context to that of Kabha, including the insistence on reclaiming the Palestinian narrative. However, a major difference that separate both *My Father Was A Freedom Fighter* from Kabha's *The Palestinian People: Seeking Sovereignty and State* is that my last volume contextualizes Palestinian history within the story of ordinary individuals, refugees, and working-class Palestinians. Kabha, who utilized such sources, was largely concerned with specific questions like that of the formation of political identity, and the question of statehood and sovereignty, telling history with these objectives in mind. *My Father Was A Freedom Fighter*, while it touched on all

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<sup>38</sup> Kabha, Mustafa, 2013. *The Palestinian People: Seeking Sovereignty and State*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, p6

<sup>39</sup> Zinn, Howard, 1980. *A People's History of the United States*. London; New York: Longman, p10

of these defining issues in Palestinian history, was mostly concerned with ordinary people's relationships with these values, among others, without contending with the centrality of the question of Palestinian statehood.

Reviewing Palestinian literature on the history of the Nakba, on documenting the Intifadas, on describing everyday life in Palestine, in linking the present to the past and the past to the present, was not just necessary and central to my research, but it was central to understanding the relationship between the Palestinian intellectual and his own history. While one can be fair-minded and truthful in recounting history, one cannot be fully detached. It seems that it would be impossible, even unfair, to expect a historian to be removed from his own history, especially in the case of Palestinian history. Most Palestinian history books are testament to this fact and mine were not the exception. In my books, however, I tried, and hopefully succeeded, in positioning popular Palestinian narrative to stand on its own, liberated from the secondary role it often served as a method to regurgitate memory not as political necessity, but to merely underscore another typical narrative of victimhood. In my books, Palestinians don't adhere to any political agendas, factional divides or easily fit into any existing stereotype placing them in one category or another. They are presented with all of their complexities and ordinariness, and through their collective memories, I attempted to understand Palestine's often neglected history, and mine.

### **The Case for the Publications to Be Regarded as a Coherent Body of Works**

*Searching Jenin* highlighted one of the second Intifada's most violent and politically charged events through a series of oral testimonies gathered from the residents of the Jenin refugee camp. The fighting or the massacre of Jenin served a most germane example of how Palestinian and Israeli official discourses clash. The book attempted to provide an alternative to the dominant discourses on Jenin, and the Intifada as a whole. First, it tried to explain what had in fact taken place in Jenin;

second, it attempted to do so through the use of oral history, thus giving credence to the concept of history from below; and third, it used the Jenin story by way of introducing the events of the larger subject of the second Palestinian Intifada.

*The Second Palestinian Intifada* expanded the discussion on the second Intifada, which started in *Searching Jenin*. In fact, the events in Jenin were also discussed in the book (32-3, 39-44, 45, 49, 57-9, 61, 70, 99, 112) but within a much larger context that reached most of the occupied territories. Although *The Second Palestinian Intifada* extended the discussion, it followed the same historical rationale introduced in *Searching Jenin* where the plight of ordinary people, but also their resistance and steadfastness, was a point of departure in clarifying historical events. *The Second Palestinian Intifada* located the story of the Jenin refugees in a much larger political and historical context, discussing the reasons behind the people's uprising, the involvement of external actors and the international dimensions to the Intifada, the internal struggle within the Palestinian community and push for change and reform from within, the challenges that met the uprising in its final stages, and finally the political context of its termination.

The conclusion of the Intifada in early 2006 ushered in a new stage of struggle for the Palestinian people, where the collective rebellion in the occupied territories was finally concentrated in the Gaza Strip. That was the historical juncture that *My Father was a Freedom Fighter* attempted to document. The West Bank was eventually co-opted under a combination of a strong Israeli military pushback and the lack of resolve among Palestinian elites. Yasser Arafat's death in 2004, the elections of Mahmoud Abbas as president of the Palestinian Authority in early 2005, the Israeli redeployment around Gaza later the same year, and finally, the legislative elections that brought Hamas to power, albeit under Israeli occupation in 2006, were enough to change the dynamics of the Palestinian struggle, and the form of Palestinian popular resistance as well. Gaza became the focal point of these profound historical shifts: the split within the Palestinian elites, the role played by the people to sustain their resistance, and also their constant challenge in their own internal political status quo, as in swapping Fatah with Hamas.

*My Father was a Freedom Fighter* located Gaza within a much larger history that goes back to the pre-Nakba years, thus positioning the refugees as a central component to the narrative. Then, through their own stories, using a mix of storytelling and oral history, the book follows a people's chronology - as in events that registered in people's collective consciousness and other events that they had themselves fueled. An example of the former would be the mass protests witnessed in Gaza to reject the Roger Plan in the 1950's (90, 102) and the latter, voting Hamas into power in 2006 (176-77).

The three volumes are a consistent contribution of the same narrative which mostly revolves around the second Palestinian Intifada: *Searching Jenin* highlights a specific event as a start of the discussion; *The Second Palestinian Intifada* expands on the discussion into a larger political framework; and finally, *My Father was a Freedom Fighter* discusses events in Gaza that culminated following the conclusion of the Intifada, but within a much larger historical context.

The three volumes are committed to presenting a political and historical narrative that is predicated on history from below, where the refugees are positioned as a central actor in influencing, shaping and being affected by history. The centrality of the refugees to the narrative is a unifying theme between the three books, regardless of the research methodology applied. That said, oral history, which is conveyed directly as is the case in *Searching Jenin* or at times narrated using secondary sources, is another important method that gives the text greater cohesion and a unified identity.

The text throughout the three volumes is chronologically fused and follows a cohesive historical narrative and rationale inspired by the same idea of people's centrality to history. It uses compatible research methodology and lucidly expounds on a unified political and historical discourse.

There are many events and concepts in the three volumes that can be used to demonstrate the above:

*My Father was a Freedom Fighter*, for example, addresses the collective dynamics that contributed to the inception of the first Intifada (Chapter 10, pp. 127-151) among other types of social/political movements in Palestinian history. *The Second Palestinian Intifada* is an earlier elucidation of that same narrative, where the undercurrents that influenced popular revolts are highlighted within a larger historical context, and where mostly ordinary people's narratives, and the stories of refugees have a central position within that larger discussion. *The Second Palestinian Intifada* highlights the Jenin battle (Chapter 2, pp 36-52) or the 'Jenin Massacre,' as Palestinians remember it. However, *Searching Jenin* is fully dedicated to the refugees' narrative as constructed by the refugees of that camp. Aside from an introduction that serves to place the oral history within conforming political context, most of the work is a platform for Jenin voices, starting with Tayseer Damaj who expressed guilt for failing to save the lives of loved ones who were killed during the Israeli attack (pp 47-51) and ending with Abdelrazik Abu al-Hayjah, who insisted that the war will not break Jenin and that resistance will carry on unabated even after the destruction of the camp (pp 187-191).

The adherence to the popular resistance option also echoes throughout the other two volumes, and can be seen as a furtherance to the same discussion on resistance from the viewpoint of refugees that have channeled and championed resistance for decades. Moreover, that correlation of concepts and chronology is present throughout the three volumes. At the heart of that effort is the constant attempt at telling the history of Palestinian refugees, whether directly through them, or by relaying their stories indirectly.

The three volumes are intrinsically linked. They evolved organically per my attempt at presenting a Palestinian history from below. The first book, *Searching Jenin* was the most intuitive of the three volumes. It was not meant as a first step in a larger project. Instead, it was driven by my own desire to fill what I saw as a narrative gap

in which the story of the Jenin refugee camp was communicated via official channels, be it Israeli or Palestinian, and also international media. *Searching Jenin* was aimed at giving the refugees a platform to express their version of events. It was my first attempt at history from below, although it was done in all frankness without fully comprehending the full impact of that decision.

*Searching Jenin* did add a dimension to the Jenin story that was, until then, missing; that being the accounts of the refugees themselves. But I felt that something else was still lacking. It was in 2004-05, when the Palestinian uprising was winding down that I felt the concept of history from below in the case of the second uprising required further elaboration, beyond the specific events that took place in a single refugee camp. I wanted to apply the approach to the entirety of the occupied territories. Although the *Second Palestinian Intifada: A History of a People's Struggle* was my second volume, it was my first deliberate attempt at providing a Palestinian history from below. Expectedly, the end of a major historical event - like a popular uprising - would usually lead to various interpretations regarding what had taken place. Every Palestinian faction would naturally want to position itself at the heart of the popular movement that sustained the intifada for years. Israeli historians had their own interpretation of events, which stood at a sharp contrast of most Palestinian narratives. The *Second Palestinian Intifada* was my own early and representative effort at writing a history of the Second Intifada; 'early' because it was meant to serve as a frame of reference for future historians, and 'representative' in the sense that it tried to counter the official Israeli version that expectedly saw the intifada as a 'terrorist' and 'violent' campaign orchestrated by Yasser Arafat, but also the official or factional Palestinian view of these same events. My reading of the intifada originated in refugee camps. Its characters and victims are mostly refugees. Thus, the story was meant to represent them, the bulk of the Palestinian people, whose narrative is either overlooked entirely, misrepresented, or tainted by the elitist history from the above type of discourse.

But while the intention of both books, *Searching Jenin* and the *Second Palestinian Intifada* was the same, as they delineated a history from below of defining events in

the history of the Palestinian struggle, the sources and style were different.

*Searching Jenin* relied almost completely on oral history, with an introduction that meant to provide the needed political context for the refugee narrative that followed. The *Second Palestinian Intifada* was largely a political narrative that was positioned in refugee camps, and located in the political priorities of the refugees.

The genre used in the *Second Palestinian Intifada* was that of political analysis, situated in a history from below approach. Some of the sources used were primary sources, including personal narrative, but mostly secondary sources, media reports and such. The media debate occurring at the time was essential to my reading of the intifada, for it allowed me to familiarize the readers with these existing discourses, as I attempted to chart an alternative answer to what had taken place. In other words, it would have not been possible to provide an alternative reading of the intifada – based on history from below approach - without juxtaposing that reading with the existing conventional narratives.

My third book, *My Father Was A Freedom Fighter*, was not meant to be an urgent investigation of alleged war crimes, as was the case in Jenin. Additionally, it was not as concerned with official or media depictions of events, as was the case with the *Second Palestinian Intifada*. Like the earlier two volumes, *My Father Was A Freedom Fighter* was intended to be a history from below, but it utilized both styles used in the Jenin and intifada books. It conveyed history using different sources, whenever the use of such sources were necessary or compelling. The third book utilized oral history, conveyed history through my own personal narrative and experiences (positionality), and my understanding of political and historical contexts based on these narratives (self-reflexivity). The sources were mixed, although situated in primary sources. It also included secondary sources that cemented the personal narratives within documented historical narratives, though constantly giving the voices of the refugees' centrality in the overall discourse.

Although *Searching Jenin* was indeed an intuitive attempt at recording history from below, the two other books evolved organically, compelled by a single common denominator: history from below, which at the heart of that history stood the

Palestinian refugees, their aspirations, and their own narrative and political priorities. Due to various limitations, such as physical ones, and restrictions including time and resources, but also the uniqueness of each project, the type of sources used in each project differed. However, those variations remained committed to a non-elitist narrative of history, challenging all official and factional narratives, and presenting history from below in the most representative way possible under the circumstances.

### **Original and Distinctive Contribution**

The concept that united my three books grew organically. *Searching Jenin's* oral history was a platform for ordinary people's voices to be heard. *The Second Palestinian Intifada* was a political discourse that was largely aimed at challenging elitist historical discourses - history from above – by championing a popular narrative in defense of Palestinian refugees. And finally, *My Father was a Freedom Fighter* attempted to present a unique combination between oral history, popular narrative and a people-centered political and historical discourse. In the end, *My Father was a Freedom Fighter*, a culmination of both previous efforts, managed to provide more than a token reading of a people whose history is often overlooked or marginalized by the frequently told stories of the elites and their self-serving political discourse. It has actually offered something more valuable, and that is a serious documentation of historical and political events that shaped the collective conscience of the Palestinian people. Over the course of many years, these events shaped the political outlooks of the Palestinian people, pushed forward their struggle for justice and human rights, and influenced their sense of identity. History from below, the method I utilized to tell the story of the Palestinians, is truly qualified to convey Palestinian history in ways that cannot be addressed through official or media narratives. Studying the collective history of Palestine requires a deep, patient and empathetic look at history of the poorer classes of society, the refugees, who are the descendants of Palestine's fellahin.

All of the three studies in my submission rely heavily on a popular narrative of Palestinian history as explained in previous sections. Although other books have used popular narrative as a central point of their research, few have vividly relayed Palestinian history through popular narrative with the purpose of unravelling historical and political events with the kind of complexity and involvement discussed in my books. Locating the entirety of major political and historical events within popular narrative is a distinct aspect of my submission. My argument through the three books remains committed to that distinct narration of history – history from below.

- One of the original and distinctive contributions of *Searching Jenin* is that it is comprehensive in documenting the violent events in the Jenin refugee camp from the point of view of the refugees.

Although other writers have included eyewitness accounts in their writings about Jenin, they did so to validate particular arguments, some of which either denied that Israel committed war crimes and crimes against humanity, or attempted to establish that such crimes did in fact take place in Jenin. Major international human rights groups such as Human Rights Watch<sup>40</sup> relied in their research on eyewitness accounts, but mostly to examine the validity of the claims that human rights were violated during the Israeli siege and the fighting that followed. My book, however, provided a narrative that is free from the confines of the legal arguments or the political debates instigated by the 'Jenin Massacre.' While *Searching Jenin* gives a chance to the refugees to discuss the violent events that were experienced in the camp during the Israeli invasion, the direction and nature of the history relayed by residents is determined by their own priorities based on their own collective aspirations and urgencies. The oral history relayed is as much a testament to the resistance in the camp as much as to the victimization that took place. Jenin, although discussed in the book on its own, separate from the overall second uprising, is in fact used as a representation of the larger phenomenon of violence, resistance and collective punishment that characterizes the entire

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<sup>40</sup> Human Rights Watch report of 2 May 2002, *ibid.*

occupied territories at the time. The uniqueness of that argument made in the book sets *Searching Jenin* apart from much of what has been written about the April 2002 fighting in the camp.

- At the time of its publication in 2006, my book *The Second Palestinian Intifada* attempted to describe the events of the second Palestinian uprising with a high level of cohesion and remained committed to the concept of popular history with greater emphasis on the struggle and hardships endured by Palestinian refugees, who fuelled and championed the intifada, thus carrying its punishing burden.

Despite attempts by Palestinian factions and the Palestinian Authority to co-opt the uprising for political or narrow ideological reasons, the second uprising was an essential popular revolt that could only be properly approached through a 'history from below' type of narrative. My book on the Intifada does just that, but equally as important, it offers a date that suggests the end of the Intifada, thus attempting to reflect on the uprising from beginning to end. The book's timeline concludes between the end of 2005 and the start of 2006, when the popular aspects of the Intifada are replaced by a succession of events that lack popular involvement. The last of these events were the January 2006 legislative elections, in which Hamas won a decisive victory. The following years were defined by the political tussle within the Fatah elites on one hand - following the death of Arafat and the struggle for Mahmoud Abbas to win legitimacy among his constituents - and the Hamas-Fatah clash that ultimately turned into a mini civil war on the other. Although segments of Palestinian society were very much affected by and to a degree participated in shaping these events, it was not the type of popular immersion that defined the first five years of the second Intifada, where Palestinian society enjoyed a level of unity and cohesion, and behaved, in a way, as a single political actor. To make the determination that the Intifada had ended requires a level of understanding of history from below and the ability to read into the unfolding internal and external events that cemented a sense of collective resolve among Palestinians. The book represents a diary of events and a timeline, wrapped into

political arguments and situated within the collective action of the Palestinian people throughout the occupied territories. *The Second Palestinian Intifada* greatly contributes to the discussion on the second Intifada and its aftermath.

- *My Father was a Freedom Fighter* places popular resistance at the forefront of Palestinian history in the Gaza Strip, linking a history of nearly eight decades to the political events that transpired following Hamas's election victory in 2006. At the heart of this history stands Palestinian refugees and their descendants, whose stories remain the unifying theme throughout the three volumes.

There is a discernible tendency by historians to locate the history of Gaza within specific arguments that present the Gaza Strip as an example of historical victimization by Israel. In this model, it is always conjoined with the West Bank with little historical significance in its own right. According to this version of Gaza's history, Gaza derives its importance and relevance from subsequent Israeli action, such as war and siege. The counter argument is one that presents Gaza as a security burden on Israel due to its militancy. Here, Gaza is rendered as a constant threat to Israel's security, if not for its very existence. Few volumes broke away from the confines of these two discourses. The distinct contribution of my book on Gaza is that it has lifted Gaza from the margins of historical narrations and positioned it as a central component of the Palestinian history of resistance and collective action. Understanding the roots of Gaza history is critical to understanding the current political dynamics and upheaval in the strip. This is an undertaking that cannot be achieved without tracing and recording the history of Gaza through its internal actors, mainly the refugee population of the strip.

The three books are chronologically linked through a cogent timeline and are conceptually connected through their emphasis on the quintessence of history from below, on one hand, and the type of methodology employed to accentuate that history. Individually, or collectively, the three studies included in this submission represent an original contribution to knowledge in the field of Palestinian history

and politics. However, much still needs to be done to further stress the importance of 'history from below' as an explicit academic discipline in its own right within the context of Palestinian history as a whole.

## **Scholarly Endorsements and Reviews**

The three books have attracted comment from scholars and reviews have been published in academic journals, many print newspapers and hundreds of websites. References to the books and their author on Google's Books search is numbered at over 2,000 results. The books have inspired intense debates and much discussion as well, and some, especially in the Israeli media and outlets sympathetic to Israel, found the books objectionable and undeserving of the attention they acquired.

### **Searching Jenin**

In her review of *Searching Jenin*, Kim Jensen wrote in the *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*. "like an electric beam of light, a single phrase flashed through my mind as I read this terrifying, yet crucial document. The phrase was devastatingly simple: Everyone should read this book. With each passing page, each description, each photograph and each personal testimony, the phrase pronounced itself again and again: Everyone should read this book." She commented that "by publishing this document, Ramzy Baroud has performed an invaluable service not just to the Palestinian people and the international community, but to future historians as well." This book, she wrote "is perhaps the only such written record that will ever exist" on the subject.

In his review, Israeli historian Ilan Pappé commented "with these memories, the search for Jenin continues throughout this powerful document. It is a search for truth, but for other things as well. It is a search for loved ones unaccounted for, long after the massacre ended, and then there is a search for a remedy to the pain

of the nightmare, and these searches were far more important than the question of how many exactly died in Jenin. Even without this question being answered, there is a sense that this is the most authoritative report we will ever get.”

## **The Second Palestinian Intifada**

*The Second Palestinian Intifada* also invited much discussion and praise and was released in Turkish and French editions. Norman Finkelstein described it as a “masterful prose.” He wrote, “In this curious blend of passionately subjective yet dispassionately objective journalism, Ramzy Baroud chronicles the unfolding of the second Intifada in masterful prose. Almost no one is spared his caustic pen: neither the brutal rampages of Israelis through Khan Yunis and Jenin nor the dirty backroom deals of Palestinian leaders selling Israel cement for the Apartheid Wall. Only the Palestinian people, in their quiet, grim determination, emerge from Baroud's scathing but heartfelt portrait with dignity intact.”

Professor Hanan Ashrawi wrote Baroud “presents a compelling narrative of Palestinian victimization without being defensive, and with no attempt at disguising internal shortcomings. In the same way, Baroud exposes Israeli culpability and international abrogation of responsibility with candor and uncompromising integrity.”

Professor Fred Wilcox, an author and a professor in the writing department at Ithaca College, wrote, “In *The Second Palestinian Intifada*, Ramzy Baroud defies such polite conventions by taking readers on a journey into the heart of the Palestinian peoples' struggle to survive war, massacres, assassinations, poverty, and exile.” He commented on the book by saying that it is “not a book for those who want surface, sanitized, accounts of the Palestinian Diaspora. Ramzy Baroud is committed to truth telling, and his new book will undoubtedly disturb, shock, and outrage his readers.”

Noam Chomsky observed that “Few are spared [Baroud’s] perceptive eye, and only the morally callous will fail to respond to his pleas to act to remedy the injustice that he exposes to our view, as we surely can.” He added, “Ramzy Baroud’s sensitive, thoughtful, searching writing penetrates to the core of moral dilemmas that their intended audiences evade at their peril.”

### **My Father was a Freedom Fighter**

*My Father was a Freedom Fighter* also received many good reviews in newspapers, academic journals and was endorsed by many intellectuals around the world. Editions of the book were published in Arabic, Korean, Malayalam and French.

Writing in the *Socialist Review* Lewis Morris wrote “the book paints a picture of the Palestinian experience since 1948, encompassing every twist and turn in the plight of his people from the Nakba through to the popular election of Hamas in 2006.” He commented on the exceptionality of the new discourse offered in the book. The book, he wrote, “refreshingly places its focus on the Palestinian perspective on events that have shaped Palestinian history since 1948 - a vital contribution to a discourse that has been dominated by debates between Zionists and the left. As a result of this, Baroud is able to convey the complicated links and conflicts between Arab nationalism, Palestinian nationalism, Islam and Communism within Palestine. He does this in such a way that Palestinians are the active protagonists of their own resistance rather than the subject of a broader political debate.”

Nigel Parsons wrote in the *Middle East Journal*: “Ramzy Baroud’s engaging book is as personal as it is political and may be welcomed on both counts. By way of conveying the story from Gaza, Baroud sets the life of his father, Mohammed, against the broader sweep of Palestinian history. Tracing family roots back to the last days of the Ottoman Empire, the narrative extends through familiar despair and hope to the torments of life in the ‘hostile entity’ decreed by Israel in 2007.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> The Middle East Journal, Volume 65, Number 1, Winter 2011, pp. 145-146.

Palestinian historian, Salman Abu Sitta wrote in his forward (xi) to the book that the author's book "is one of the few books, written in English about the life, depopulation and struggle for survival (literally) of the people of a village in south Palestine. He portrays their ordeal in over six decades, with no end in sight for their suffering. Gathered patiently from the recollections of the survivors, it stands out as an unblemished depiction of their plight."

Robin Yassin-Kassab described the book in his review published in *Electronic Intifada* and other publications as "an instant classic, one of the very best books to have examined the Palestinian tragedy... a historically pinpointed setting which involves Cairo, Jerusalem and Washington as much as Gaza or the Egyptian desert. And the interpenetration of inner and outer worlds is accomplished to an extent that is rare in fiction, let alone in non-fiction."

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