

In Search of a Palestinian Identity

A Personal Odyssey

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Of which “Palestine” I think, and how was this “Palestine” stolen from me?

I am of Palestine’s al-nakbah generation—the first nakbah of 1948. What I knew of Palestine then, was what a child of five years chose to store in his memory, of fear, destruction, and the sight of a foreign army occupying his village and his house, ejecting him from it, and allowing him to return, all intermingled with the incessantly reiterated parents’ narrative of “how we were kicked out of our homes ...”, which had become an inseparable part of the Palestine I perceived then. I knew “Palestine” as a “village”, as a “house”, nothing more.

Until the end of my elementary school period, I knew nothing about “Palestine”, or about the surrounding Arab environment. I did not study about it in school books, nor in other places. I started getting little inklings about the life of the village, before it became distorted and dissipated under the weight of al-nakbah and foreign rule, from the oral narratives, which my parents never ceased to reiterate, about the revolt against the British, how oral messages and weapons were transmitted from here to there, how olives and oil were transported during the olive season on the back of donkeys, from my village to the markets in Bint Jbeil in South Lebanon, and how “people” were sneaking during the night from Lebanon to their villages in Galilee from which they were ejected, etc.

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During this period, perhaps through the mid-fifties, as I started learning, from the home's oral environment, bit by bit about the commercial (and identity) relations between my village and Lebanon, perhaps because of geography, But I knew nothing about the existence of people "like me" in my immediate narrow environment, like the Triangle and al-Naqab, and, most certainly, I knew nothing about al-Quds, the West Bank and Gaza. What I remember knowing about al-Quds then was the "Mandlebaum Gate", which was the entry point into Jordan, where Christians were permitted to cross "the Gate" during their holidays to visit the holy places, and to visit their relatives who sought refuge in Jordan or Lebanon, only, of course, after obtaining a special permit from the military governor, through the use of "wasta". I became aware of this because my mother obtained such a permit, and did the "crossing", and returned after she bought a dozen of China dishes to be used for the guests.

This is al-Quds that stuck in my mind then. It was an entirely different space, remotely distant from my perception and understanding. As for Palestine and its Arab extensions, I was in an utter geographic, historical, educational and cultural isolation. Even though my father decided to purchase one of those big radios (that operated on a 12 volt battery) when King Abdallah of Jordan was assassinated in Jerusalem. Since then, my father started listening to the news broadcasts regularly, all hours of the day, from the moment he got up until he went to bed, and he continued this way until his death, despite the fact that, in the meantime, we got electricity and TV.

In such an all-engulfing isolation, and in the absence of an

alternative discourse and narrative to confront the hegemonic Israeli Jewish discourse, I, and my generation, were bombarded with the legends of the heroics of the "Jewish people", their creativity and innovation throughout history, and that the creation of a modern Jewish state and the victory over all hostile elements and the Arab armies combined, is nothing but another proof of the "genius" of the "Jewish mind". We heard and learned by heart the words of the "Jewish national anthem" for Israel; we repeated it in word and in song. We studied Jewish poets and writers whose writings swelled up with the aspirations and dilemmas of the "Jewish people", while we knew nothing about the aspirations and dilemmas of our people. Like my generation, I was subjected during this period to systematic fabrication of consciousness and perception, so much so that we aspired to become a part, however marginal and accidental, of this "genetic" Jewish genius, which develops the land, and creates states where none existed!

The beginning of my awareness of Palestine was connected with the beginning of my awareness of the attack of Western imperialism on us as Arabs in the Suez war. During my secondary school years in my "boarding" school environment in Nazareth (or the "orphanage", as it was referred to for accuracy), away from home, and influenced by Haikal's weekly articles in Al-Ahram newspaper, I began listening, reading and discussing about Egypt, Abdel-Nasser, the Western imperialist onslaught on Egypt, the non-aligned countries and the pivotal role of Abdel-Nasser in that group, etc. We did not read Haikal's weekly articles, but we listened to them, as I remember waiting for them anxiously every Friday afternoon. The articles were read and broadcasted on the radio, as if they were scenes from a play. What I remember is

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that these articles were not specifically about Palestine, but, as it appeared to me, Palestine always nested in the margins. Ironically, I began searching for how to reach Palestine and connect with it, while I was in its heart, through the wider open Arab space, exemplified then by the eminence of Egypt. With which Palestine I sought to connect, I had no clear idea.

My identity began to develop as an Arab identity, antithetical to my occupied environment, through my daily interaction with my colleagues and friends in the “Bishop’s” school environment in Nazareth, some of whom came from the occupied and destroyed villages of Iqrith and Bir’im, and some came from Arab cities that became mixed Arab-Jewish (e.g., Lidd, Ramleh, Akka) as a result of occupation. However, the required space for the natural expansion of this identity was not available due to the absence of a crystallized national liberation movement. The crux of contradiction in my existence as an Arab oppressed by the new Jewish political system imposed on me revolved around the idea and approach of imperialism. I came to realize, finally, that Arab nationalism was the only antidote that could disrupt that idea and approach. Which “Arab nationalism”? I don’t remember having had a clear idea.

During that period, I expressed my views in the local press. I did not write directly about Palestine, since the concept of political Palestine was absent from my mind. I wrote about “lived” Palestine, day after day, in a foreign and contradictory context. I attacked in my views those “Arabs”, some of whom were my relatives, who collaborated with the new colonial system, which was imposed on me, either through collaboration with Zionist

parties in the Knesset for the purpose of mustering the votes of their relatives in the elections, or as "land brokers" to facilitate the sale and transfer of indigenous Arab land to Jews, and, by consequence, to facilitate the process of dispossession. I was doing this without having had a clear idea about the nature of occupation and the alienation of Palestine. However, despite the absence in my mind of the correct concepts which would properly describe the nature of the new system, it became clear to me, upon graduating from secondary school, that the practice of the new system towards me is characterized by overt racism, simply because I was not Jewish.

As I was preparing myself (1961-1963) to travel to the USA for my university education, the rapid course of events, in my local environment and the world, reinforced, in my mind and my memory, the structural racism of the new system, towards me and towards all "non-Jews". It enforced the concept that our land, as Arabs and as natives in this country, is a real target for theft by the racist regime, for the benefit of Jews (just as the lands of three neighboring villages to mine: Nahef, Deir al-Asad and Bi'neh were stolen from them to construct the colony of Carmi'el on them). Notwithstanding is the approach, championed by the Israeli Communist Party, of Jewish-Arab struggle for equality of the "Arab minority in Israel", with which I did not share, due to my persuasion that the objective of "equality" is unachievable, as long as racism is inherent in a Zionist-Jewish structure whose *raison d'être* is the removal and de-legitimization of all non-Jewish national minorities.

As for what happened in the global space, I came to realize, as

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we watched the unfolding of the frightening drama and eminent military confrontation between the US and the USSR over Cuba, that we, as Arabs, and as others, could be the target of American imperialism, as long as we refuse to be in the American orbit, and as long as we dare to experiment with different systems of government and economy.

When I went to the US for my university education, my village had no electricity to light its dark alleys; whereas the bright electric lights of the nearby Jewish colonies perched on top of the neighboring hills pierced the darkness of Arab Galilee. Likewise, the natural water springs that supplied the village since it existed, were expropriated and channeled through the national Israeli water network. Thus, the faint hint, which existed inside ourselves about the possibility of a “localized” self-determination, abruptly dissipated.

I left Israel with a personal identity label called “Israeli Arab”, which clearly was not comparable to the label of “Israeli Jew”, the label of the other who imposed himself on me by force. Then, I had no other identity. The “Arab” part of it, however, was not developed at all, except for some cultural and historical symbols. Nor, did I have access to other springs of cultural and political resistance in which I could delve to strengthen my meager identity reservoir.

During my undergraduate study (for the Bachelor’s degree), I was isolated from my natural environment, which I had left behind, and from any other Arab extension. In the Benedictine college where I studied, I was part of a category of “foreign students”

(who are labeled today "international" students). Beside myself, this category included two Arab students: a Jerusalemite who was living with his family in England, and a Jerusalemite who was living with his family in Jordan. But, neither was Palestinian. In addition, we had students from Kenya, the Bahamas, Mexico, and other places. On occasions, and in special events, we spoke about the "holy land" (never about occupation), we spoke about customs, traditions, food, etc. For three and a half years, during my period of study, I was bombarded, through lectures, readings, courses, discussions, etc, with issues reinforcing what is called "the Judeo-Christian tradition". Even though my study major was "Sociology", I studied, in reality "Western social science". Neither Islam, nor Arab social thought, was at all present in these subjects, which exacerbated my genuine cultural and intellectual isolation.

Not once I returned "home" during this period. My first "return" since I left my village, was with my wife, a month after the Israeli military occupation of Jerusalem, the West Bank, Gaza and the Golan. This is the same occupation whose news I followed through US media, and through a "short-wave" radio I bought especially for that purpose. Following the news of the "six-day war" of occupation from America filled me with a deep sense of depression and shame.

During my first "return" in July 1967, after getting my Bachelor's degree and marrying, I entered East Jerusalem for the first time in my life. My wife and I felt our way through; and by trial and error we stumbled into Bab Elamoud (Damascus Gate). Finally, we succeeded in penetrating into the heart of the Old City, into

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a strange world whose essence we could not comprehend—it was part of Palestine severed in favor of Jordan, and returned to Palestine for the second time (perhaps for the third and fourth!), as a result of the Israeli military occupation; its “return”, however, was not natural or organic, as would be the return of a severed organ to its body. Through this visit, we got exposed, however superficially, to other parts of Palestine like Jericho, Ramallah, Nablus and Jenin, which were unveiled to us for the first time.

Pursuing my graduate studies (for the Master’s and the Doctorate) in Anthropology, I moved to another university with about 50,000 students, and in a different state where I spent four years. During this period, the American scene witnessed violent social and political upheavals because of the Vietnam war. The ruthless American military onslaught on Vietnam generated wide popular protest movements, and laid bare the structural racism of the American system against its Black citizens, the American native population, women, and against all those who were external to the White-Protestant-Anglo-saxon race. This social upheaval forced the posing of serious questions and discourse which led to the deepening of my concepts and awareness of the nature of American colonial rule and its practices, and the essence of racism and how it gets applied by relying on fabricated principles of legitimacy and religious myths. I started reading in depth and with comprehensiveness about these interconnected issues. I read about the nature of human societies, their history and cultural values; the essence of racist ideas, and the bases of intellectual, political and economic hegemony in human societies, and how the law of the strong gets legitimized and becomes the basis for governance over all, and how transformations could take effect

in human societies, etc. The more I read, the easier it became to connect what was happening on the American scene with what was happening in Palestine. All of these things became connected in my mind. I developed a clear understanding of geographic and historical Palestine, and how it was targeted, occupied and dismembered. This concept included the entire Palestine. Further, I clarified my understanding of the racist ideology to which we were subjected, as Arab citizens within the colonial Israeli system, and as a part of the Palestinian people. My concept of the Palestinian "I" became inseparable of the Palestinian "we". Here, my hope in the ability of "Arab nationalism" as a panacea for undermining the colonial project retreated.

During this period of my graduate study, I met a number of Arab students from different Arab countries. Many of whom were sent on scholarships from their own countries, but did not show any real drive for academic achievement, as if time, for them, was not important; and as if their objective of being there was for recreation and play and for spending as much time as possible in the "cafeteria". My interaction with them, at the outset, was dubious because of my being "an Israeli Arab", except for Palestinian students coming from the refugee camps in Lebanon. This doubt subsided once all of us lined up in the anti-Vietnam war camp, and became aware and convinced of the nature of organic alliance between the American and Israeli strategy, and its reflection on what was happening in Palestine then.

As part of the requirements for the Ph.D degree in anthropology, I spent a year of field work in Israel, where I focused on studying the nature of local government in two Arab villages in Galilee,

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as it was affected, on the one hand, by the weight of the racist political system on which it was imposed, and, on the other, the tyranny of prevalent traditional kinship and religious factional values. I studied local social and economic interactions in these two villages, and the social transformations impacted by twenty years of occupation (my field work was in 1970/71). I researched and studied, in depth, the social and political coalitions for local council elections, and how it was affected by the continuous penetration of the Israeli “mukhabarat”; I researched, with determination, land ownership and distribution system, and the historical, social and economic pattern of transformation, which undercut local land ownership, and the Israeli strategy aiming at the marginalization and containment of these two villages, through the elaborate expropriation of lands in favor of the encroaching Jewish colonies.

I reviewed, in this context, the history of Galilee, as part and parcel of Arab-Muslim-Druze-Christian history of this region, going all the way back to the rule of Sheikh Dhaher al-Umar, the local Bedouin leader who exercised some form of autonomy from the Ottoman central government, and who based himself in the town of Shafa-Amr. I began to comprehend, however partially, the essence and modalities of social demographic mobility, which defied currently imposed political and administrative boundaries, and how people of the region interacted among themselves as part of a bigger geographic entity, and how their mobility within the region was contingent on the search for livelihood, or knowledge, or in pursuit of refuge from oppression and tyranny, if they had the means. As a result, I came to understand the minute particles of

the society, in which I delved through my research, and I became aware of the process by which these particles complemented, or negated, each other, through the different periods in their history, and how, in the moments of their complementarity, they created a coherent whole, and a solid society, reinforcing its social fabric through the critical revival and validation of its norms, customs and cultural values; and how, adversely, in the moments of their negation, they fragmented the social fabric, and weakened it, and rendered it an easy prey for colonialism and foreign imposition of power. Then, I persisted in searching for the reliable source of collective and positive energy, which could safeguard "my society" from destruction and decimation. I reached the conclusion that the essence of this energy lies in our clarity of thought, objective and direction.

This small society, which I studied on the detailed "micro" level, helped develop my understanding and comprehension of the bigger society that came to be my "national home", and which embodied my understanding of the "Palestine" to which I aspire.

Upon finishing my doctoral studies, I started teaching at an American university. Some years later, I was invited to be a guest lecturer for the academic year 1975/76 at the University of Haifa in Israel, to assist in the establishment of a Master's level program in anthropology. At the time, the University of Haifa perceived itself as an Israeli Zionist "liberal" university (compared with other Israeli universities), and it contained within its student body the biggest percentage of Arab students, due to its proximity of Arab population centers. This was the first time that an Israeli university invites a "non-Jew" as a visiting lecturer. And to my

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knowledge, this was the first time that the university did not cover the travel expenses of the guest lecturer. When I investigated about the reasons for refusal, I was told in no uncertain terms, and in the clearest and least ambiguous fashion, that carried no apology, that “the National Jewish Fund” was the source that covers the expenses of visiting lecturers to Israeli universities, and that it covers the expenses of invited “Jews” only! Despite this, and pursuing my conviction that it was important for me to spend the year at the University of Haifa, and to be able to interact with Arab students, I succeeded in convincing “my” university to cover the travel costs for me and for my small nuclear family.

In my first lecture, for which about 120 Arab and Jewish students registered, as I recall, I expressed, for the first time, and in sharp clarity, my national identity, as I wrote my name and affiliation on the board: “I am a Palestinian from the village of Rameh in Galilee”. A number of Jewish students protested on the grounds that there are no Palestinians in Galilee, and what there is in Galilee are “only Israeli Arabs.” The reaction of Arab students expressed itself in broad smiles. This was the comprehension that directed and informed my interactions during the year, with Arab students and the Arab teaching staff (they were five in number, then), on the one hand, and Jewish students and the university administration, on the other. Thus, my behavior and interaction during the year focused on the basic comprehension, and raising the level of consciousness of that comprehension, that we, the Arabs in Israel, are an organic part of an occupied people, having been subjected to occupation since 1948. And that the framework of the state in which we live is unacceptable to us, as long as it defines itself as a “Jewish state”, with a more superior right over

us, and practices racism, and legitimizes colonial occupation and ruthless oppression against me and my people, because of the mere fact that we are not Jews, based on the claim that there is no allowance for us, as a people, in Palestine/Israel. The "Land Day", which happened as I was teaching at the University of Haifa, and where the Israeli police and army killed 6 Palestinians for protesting against government plans to expropriate Arab lands and "Judaize Galilee", was a poignant testimony for this perception.

Within a period of few months following "Land Day" (specifically on 18.9.1976), I published a brief article, titled, "Views about our National Situation" in Al-Manjal newsletter (the publication of the Arab Students' Committee at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem). I expressed in that article my views about our relationship, as a national minority in the Zionist state, with that state and with our Palestinian people. There I wrote:

In my view, we should reject the notion of the expropriation of Arab lands not because the lands are not fallow or not rocky, but because the development of these lands targets only Jewish colonies, and because expropriation (of our lands) is premised on the nationalist Zionist racist principle that grants priority in this country to what is called the "Jewish people". Our rejection does not emanate from an Arab nationalist isolation, since any other political system that is based on absolute equality among different national groups in this country is acceptable to me.

Those of us who reject Israel in the 4 June 1967 borders do not do so because they reject the right of self-determination for the Jews

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in this country, nor because they are chauvinist and do not tolerate co-existing in this country with other nationalities, but because a return to the 4 June 1967 borders does not guarantee any change in the ideological frame of this state, a frame that we reject, as a national minority subjected to it, within these borders or any other arbitrary borders.

In my view, we should determine our position on the basis of an organic connection between Galilee and the West Bank, Imm al-Fahm and al-Khalil –a connection of two parts of one people, otherwise, our demand for equality would lose its content, and our national identity would lose its essence.

In the meantime, the Israeli Communist Party, in its new Arab-Jewish structure, which became known as the “New Communist Movement” (Rakah), was the sole organized source of political inculcation within the Arab Palestinian minority in Israel. The Party did not inculcate on the “Palestinianization” of the national identity of future generations in the Arab minority in Israel. On the contrary, this organized political enculturation force worked incessantly in lowering the ceiling of the Palestinian identity of the Arab minority in Israel, by reducing the focus of struggle of what came to be labeled “the Arab masses in Israel”, or the “country”, and redefining its goal towards achieving “equality” in a racist system, without addressing the ideology of the system that precludes, by definition, “equality in rights” for a non-Jewish minority, who is a part of a people struggling for his freedom and prevented from realizing it because of that same ideology. This process opened the field for posing more radical questions, such as: what is our understanding of being Palestinians? Are we a

part of the Palestinian national movement? Or, is our relationship with other parts of our people under occupation, a relationship of solidarity and moral and financial support? The trend which ensued, pushed for a steady lowering of the type of radical questions that were permitted to be posed, and the concepts that nurture those questions.

During my year at the University of Haifa, I conducted field research about the relation between national political consciousness and university education among Arab university students and university graduates. Through this research, I attempted to understand the prevalent state among Arab university students and graduates, which I labeled "nationalistic inefficiency". In the process of analysis and deconstruction, I focused on the components of formal education and inculcation to which Arab Palestinian students in Israel were exposed, and the insularity of those educational and cultural concepts and their isolation from the Arab cultural context. I focused, as well, on analyzing some of the positive initiatives, emanating basically from community-based organizations, which aimed at achieving what I called "the desirable change in the national identity concepts". (This research was published as a book in English under the title, *Palestinian Dilemma: Nationalist Consciousness and University Education in Israel*, in 1979.)

After spending a year at the University of Haifa, I returned to my teaching post in the US. Since that time and until I left the US in 1984, I was deeply immersed in the activities of the Association of the Arab-American University Graduates (AAUG), which aimed, through its scientific and politically-committed publications,

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to educate American and Arab public opinion about Palestine. The effectiveness of the AAUG was low, and the impact of its intellectual and political efforts was not much felt, for a number of reasons, important among which is: lack of intellectual and political coherence among its members, which reflected the lack of intellectual and political coherence among the different components of the PLO who, through open channels with some of the prominent founding members, invested serious efforts at influencing the work of the AAUG on the American scene. Thus, the main line of the AAUG echoed that of the PLO, which was characterized with ambiguity, and was reduced to two points: defend and support the PLO as the legitimate representative body of the Palestinians, and the call for the liberation of Palestine.

This was the unifying line. Gradually, educating around the first point was becoming easier, following the legitimacy granted the PLO by the UN. However, educating around the second point was never easy, because it required a clear conceptual idea and vision—which was lacking—for the type of liberation was sought, and the nature of the “Palestine” we wanted. Working on this point was becoming more and more complicated and treacherous, as the PLO’s position oscillated regarding its perception of what the Palestinian people wanted, and what Palestinian enemies were planning.

We called in our literature for the liberation of “Palestine”, without defining which “Palestine” we meant. Our “struggle” position deteriorated, as was the PLO’s position. At times, the common denominator for our Palestinian struggle in the US revolved around a progressive line—struggle against colonialism

and imperialism; a line around which, we attempted to recruit forces and organizations from the Third World who supported our Palestinian struggle because of the clear connection between it and their struggles. This, however, was not sustained, due, on the one hand, to the incoherent and fragmented Palestinian vision for its struggle, and, on the other, the lack of persuasion and commitment among segments of AAUG membership to this approach of anti-colonial struggle. For example, when I was elected the president of AAUG for the year 1981, I introduced a new, signed, "President's Column" in the AAUG Newsletter, to address critical strategic issues facing the work of the AAUG. One of the issues I dealt with (March-April 1981) was the placement of our Palestinian struggle within the global context of struggle against colonialism, racism and the militarization of the world, and how it is imperative that we connect our struggle with that of other oppressed groups. I wrote in that column:

Now, we can elucidate the connections that tie Palestinian oppression under Zionism with the oppression of the Egyptian people, Blacks in the U.S., Blacks in South African, Haitians, El Salvadorans, etc. The new-old emphasis on 'terrorism' by the current American administration is nothing more than another attempt to delegitimize and invalidate the ongoing and difficult struggle of liberation movements for self-determination the world over ...

Since one of our goals is to inform ourselves and the public about the nature of Arab struggle by exposing the inherent racism in Zionism, it becomes imperative for us to expose and oppose other racist ideologies that feed on and nurture Zionism. Instead

of assuming an apologetic posture about the so-called ‘global network of terrorism,’ we need to take the initiative in exposing the actual global network of racism, oppression and militarism in which the Zionist state and the ‘moral majority state’ play pivotal roles.

Some members reacted by accusing me of “politicizing” the AAUG, as if it was a social club for the intellectuals!

Our struggle as Palestinians living in the US, which was anchored in the principle of “Palestinian self-determination”, began to retreat towards “ending the occupation of the occupied Palestinian areas in 1967”, as a result of the increasing harmony between the position of the “Palestinian National Front in the Occupied Areas” and, what became known, as the “pragmatic revolutionary” direction in the PLO. This position led, gradually and steadily, to disregarding the Palestinian areas occupied in 1948, and the extricating of parts of Palestine’s geography and population from the proposed solutions.

I tried repeatedly to reaffirm the concept, that represented my view, where I looked at Palestine as one complete and complimentary whole, and where I emphasized the organic connection between the “1967 areas” and the “1948 areas” (since many objected, then, to the use of “Israel).

During the AAUG annual conference, held in November 1980, I presented an analytic study, under the title “Palestinian Struggle Under Occupation”. My focus in that study was on Palestinian struggle in Israel. My conclusion in that study was

the following:

I have argued from an involved perspective that we have reached a state in our struggle under occupation that compels us to examine seriously and non-apologetically what we did and where we are going. By assessing the premises, goals and results of what we have done so far, I feel that that process has exhausted its logical resources; that, in other words, we have arrived at the dead end without crossing the entire distance needed.

My views of what is to be done are premised on my conviction that: 1) liberation cannot be compartmentalized, i.e., we cannot seek liberation from an oppressive political structure without a mentality that struggle for liberation from all kinds of oppression. 2) definitions of reality are themselves reality. Dismantling an imposed oppressive reality, therefore, has to begin with dismantling the conceptual paradigm that created it. 3) our major resource is our stored collective energy as a people, once it is totally transformed into a Liberation-Prone Mentality.

(This lecture was published as a special paper in English, but it was translated into Arabic and published in a 3-part series in Al-Sharq al-Awsat newspaper, from London, 10-12 December 1980, and, as I came to know later, the Israeli intelligence apparatus was interested in it and translated it into Hebrew, as an internal document.)

During 1979 – 1980, I was a member of an Arab (Palestinians and non-Palestinians) academic team, headed by the late professor Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, to conduct a feasibility study for the

“Palestine Open University” (which was transformed into “al-Quds Open University” following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon). My responsibility was specified in writing an analytical chapter on the educational system for the Palestinians under Israel’s jurisdiction, which comprised Palestinian communities in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip. I spent the year residing in Galilee, where, in addition, I had the responsibility of coordinating the scholarship program of the Washington-based Jerusalem Fund, and which targeted Palestinian university students enrolled in Israeli universities. I shared, then, in the concept and belief that connecting the various parts of the Palestinian people, starting with those living in the land of Palestine, and in the camps of refuge in the region, is feasible through educational and cultural institutions and activities. From that perspective, I considered the initiative to establish a “Palestine Open University” to have been an important strategic initiative.

Coordinating the Jerusalem Fund’s scholarship program afforded me opportunities to interact with Arab university students and other progressive nationalist forces in the Palestinian communities in Israel. In a lecture to the Arab students at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, on the topic “The current state of the Palestinian revolution and the relationship of the progressive nationalist forces with it” (on 27 February 1980), I reiterated my emphasis on the point that stresses “our organic connection with the Palestinian national liberation movement”, as an integral part of the entire Palestinian people, and who remained on its land, even though it became known as “Israel”. I stressed, there, that “our responsibility is to insist that we interact with the Palestinian revolution in an analytical and critical approach, emanating from

our objective conditions, but seeking to transform them in the direction of a clear strategy." I raised, in that lecture, the point that our cultural and political identity is as Palestinian as that of the Palestinians who were born in the camps of refuge, or those in the cities, towns and villages of the West bank and Gaza, or those in the Gulf states or America. I added, further, that the stress in our case should be deeper and more committed, since we were born on this land; were raised on it, and remained in it, irrespective of the political system that was imposed on us. Thus, I argued, it becomes our duty and responsibility to circumvent the leadership of the Palestinian revolution from accepting any solution that leads to the fragmentation of the land and the people.

Through my writings, and on various occasions, I aimed at raising the level of discourse and developing the hitherto entrenched concept of connecting the dispersed parts of Palestine, not only through emphasizing the unity and complementarity of Palestine, as a geography and history, embedded into our strategic planning, but also through aware and scientific consciousness of the nature of our enemy—the enemy of the "Palestine" for which we struggle, and an in-depth understanding of its actual practices on the ground. While I was resident at the Institute of Arab Studies in Boston, for four years, as its director and a resident fellow, I wrote a paper in English, titled "The Two Galilees" (published later on as an AAUG "Occasional Paper" in September 1982). I showed in this "paper" the close similarities in Zionist practices in the approach of their "Judaization" of Galilee and the West Bank, through the use of military occupation as an effective means for the expropriation of Arab lands and the entrenchment of settler colonialism, in order to reach their ultimate ideological goal. I

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concluded in this article: “For their goals, Zionist planners could never afford to make the distinction between Galilee and the West Bank; and for our goal towards a successful liberation, neither can we.”

Having been responsible for Welfare Association’s program planning and field implementation monitoring, for eight years, since the Association’s founding, (or from 1984-1992), and benefiting from the Association’s strategic umbrella, which defined the scope of its activities to include all parts of historical Palestine, I worked relentlessly, through the provision of necessary funds, to argue in favor of supporting activities, which aimed at creating organic links among the dissipated four corners of Palestine. Through the presentation of explicit national and cultural rationale, the Association’s Executive Committee was most often convinced to allocate funding for activities that would strengthen and deepen Arab Palestinian presence in Arab-Jewish “mixed cities”, threatened by “cultural judaization”, particularly, Yaffa, Haifa, Akka, Lidd, and Ramleh. Further, I endeavored to support indigenous, community-based, cultural, educational and social organizations, who were active in reinforcing and strengthening the Palestinian cultural identity of the Arab Palestinian communities that remained on its land, under the hegemony of an antithetical Jewish-Zionist political ideology, whose aim was to distort this identity and to negate it. The underlying premise, underpinned by my inherent and immutable conviction, was that through steady, sustained and committed intervention, accumulation on the level of concepts and consciousness will result, which would lead to connection and interaction among the dispersed parts of Palestinian geography and history, which, consequently, will

maximize our inherent collective resisting energy.

Accumulation and sustainability were not realized. Later on, it became clear, to me at least, that these strategic objectives were absent from the level of consciousness and conceptualization of the owners of "national capital" who, in effect, were the decision-makers in the Association. On the contrary, their concern was how to safeguard their economic interests, and how to maintain an open, non-conflictful communication channels with the dominant faction within the PLO. This de-facto approach of non-connection among the various dispersed parts of Palestine was translated into the PNC's official declaration of independence in Algiers in 1988, which paved the way for the official and public acceptance by the PLO of the division of Palestine, both geography and people, through the signing of the Oslo Accords, and all what followed.

I returned with my wife after an absence from Palestine for 30 years. I returned, but my return was different from that, for example, of Zakariya Muhammad (which he depicted in his recent book, *The Korean Monk*), and the return of other Palestinians like him, who were forced to leave. I did not return from a "forced exile". When I left my country, by ship from the Haifa seaport, for my university studies in the US in 1963, it was I who fixed the travel date, according to the academic calendar. When I decided to return, it was my wife and I who decided on the timing, as a phase in our life plan, and to meet the requirements of our small family, and ours, since we became somewhat independent from our two sons who left, each in his direction, in fulfillment of themselves.

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We returned to Palestine from Switzerland, one week before the signing of the “Declaration of Principles”, which we watched on our TV screen in a rented house in Beit Jala. I returned to see and live the “Palestine” I always thought about, the “Palestine” which I endeavored through the years to develop my comprehension and consciousness of it, and to modify and tame the most conducive concepts for it ... I returned with a conviction that there is no substantial difference between my village—my birth village—in Galilee and Beit Jala, where we lived for four years. Consequently, I did not waste any effort to respond to the question, often posed: “why did you return to Beit Jala?” My answer was always: “why not?” In my consciousness and understanding, Beit Jala is a part of the same land, the same broad Palestinian history, and aches from the same wounds!

During that period, a euphoric tide swept the local scene, and us with it, in anticipation that a state of peace will prevail, in spite of the Oslo Accords, which eliminated Palestinian unitary geography, and fragmented the unity of the people. But, in the meantime, it legitimated the name of “Palestine”, and left its contents so ambiguous and floating that any Palestinian, residing in Palestine, can tighten, or expand, the boundaries of this definition. It became possible for us, without any pre-required discussion, argumentation, mental effort, rationale, revolutionary or political commitment, to utilize the name “Palestine” in our correspondences and writing, without having to specify whether we mean by it Beit Jala, or Ramallah (where we live now), or the areas under the jurisdiction of the Palestinian National Authority, or historical Palestine. This was on the level of discourse only.

In reality, I returned to "Palestine" fragmented, with a loss of direction, and absence of social coherence; Palestine that is shrinking bit by bit with the writing of these words. I returned to "Palestine", which has been scrapped from an idea of a national home (patrie) to the reality of a city or village. I returned by my own volition to live in "the Palestine of today", which is the antithesis of my concept of it!

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Born in Ar-Rameh on 2 Jan. 1943; received his high school diploma from the St. Joseph's Seminary in Nazareth; BA in Sociology, St. John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota, USA (1967); worked as a teaching assistant at the Dept. of Anthropology at Indiana University, Bloomington, from 1969-72; earned a PhD in Socio-Cultural Anthropology from Indiana University in 1973; became Assistant Professor at the Dept. of Sociology at St. John's University from 1972-79; was also a visiting lecturer at

* Source: *Palestinian Personalities - A Biographic Dictionary*, Edited by Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi, Jerusalem: PASSIA, 2005

the Dept. of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Haifa, during 1975-76); worked as program field coordinator at The Jerusalem Fund in Washington, DC, and developed the fund's scholarship program from 1979-80; became Director of the Institute of Arab Studies, Belmont, Massachusetts, USA, running the Institute during its infancy (1980-82), then joined it as research fellow (1982-84); left to take up the post of Program Director at the Welfare Association in Geneva, Switzerland, serving 1984-93; during 1993-94, worked as a Consultant for the Welfare Association, the Euro-pact in Versailles, France (on behalf of the European Commission), and NOVIB in The Hague, Netherlands; returned to the West Bank as Consultant of the UNDP-commissioned Center for Engineering and Planning in Ramallah in 1994; also acted as Consultant for the European Commission Representative Office in Jerusalem from 1994-98); was briefly a Program Manager at the UNDP in Jerusalem in 1995; worked as Educational Planning Coordinator at the Palestinian Curriculum Development Center in 1996, and as Acting Dir.-Gen. at the PA Ministry of Higher Education, Ramallah, in 1998; became an education expert with the MEDA Team West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1998-1999, then team leader and education expert of its technical assistance to the European Commission Representative Office from 1999-2001; was a Board of Trustees member of the Arab-American University

of Jenin from 2000-02; member of the Steering Committee on the Strategy of Palestinian Higher Education (and Advisor to the Palestinian Minister of Higher Education) from 2000-02; served as head of the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission for Higher Education Institutions from 2002-2004; and the Advisory Board member for the Ministry of Women's Affairs since March 2004; Consultant/ Advisor to the Ministry of Women's Affairs in 2004; was Director of the Qattan Center for Educational Research and Development from mid-2004 until March 2005; since then works as independent thinker, researcher and writer from Ramallah; has published numerous studies and articles as well as authored and edited several books, incl. his publications include *The Sociology of the Palestinians* (with Elias Zureik, London & New York: Croom Helm and St. Martin's Press, 1980), *Indigenous Organizations In Palestine* (Jerusalem: Arab Thought Forum, 1990), and *The Myth of Palestinian Development: Political Aid and Sustainable Deceit*. Ramallah (English by PASSIA; Arabic by Muwatin, 2004).