# PALESTINIAN WOMEN

Narrative histories and gendered memory

Fatma Kassem

Palestinian Women

## About the author

Fatma Kassem completed her Ph.D. in the Department of Behavioural Science at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. Her research stemmed from deep interest in how structural and hegemonic power relations work within and between societies, and how they influence women and marginal groups. Kassem has both academic and practical training in conflict resolution, with practical experience of facilitating dialogue in groups of Jews and Palestinians in Israel. During 2007–08 she was a fellow of the research programme Europe in the Middle East/The Middle East in Europe (EUME).

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# Contents

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the author. They do not reflect the positions of anyone acknowledged above; nor do they reflect the opinions of any of the interviewees. I alone am responsible for these views. If there is any correspondence between my views and those of others, this is just a happy coincidence. Likewise I bear full responsibility for any errors in the text.

# Introduction

This book traces and documents the gendered memory and narrative histories of a group of ordinary urban Palestinian women who witnessed the events of 1948, when the State of Israel was founded. Importantly, these women have all remained on their homeland after it subsequently became Israel, the Jewish state. Told in their own words, these women's experiences serve as a window for examining 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. Known in the Palestinian discourse of nationalism as the Nakba, or the Catastrophe, this event and those that have followed since 1948 still exert a powerful influence on the present-day lives of these women – as women, as members of the broader Palestinian community to which they belong and as Israeli citizens. Examined from a sociological perspective, the unique experiences of these Palestinian women from the margins can shed more light on the multiple continuing effects of the Nakba.[1]

The year 1948 is the most crucial in the lives of Palestinians, at both the personal and the collective level. At this time, between 750,000 and 780,000 Arab Palestinians were dispossessed and displaced, taking to the road of exile (Said, 1980: 14; Masalha, 2003: 26).

Of this number, only 156,000 Palestinians remained on their homeland, indicating enormous devastation. At the end of 2008, the Arab population in Israel numbered nearly 1.49 million people, or 20 per cent of the total population in the State of Israel (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2009).[2] Although Palestinian scholars, among many others, have investigated 1948, 'the story is still full of silences regarding the experiences of different Palestinian communities' (Lentin, 2008: 211). The experiences of the Palestinians in Israel are more in the shadows; information about ordinary Palestinian women's experiences in marginal cities is scarcely documented.

This study is based on the analysis of twenty interviews with Palestinian women living in Lyd and Ramleh, cities that were populated by an overwhelming Palestinian majority before 1948 but are now radically transformed. It addresses two central themes: (1) the ways in which these women formulate their sense of agency as a result of experiencing collective trauma within the context of an as yet unresolved violent political conflict; (2) their roles in relation to, and the ways of telling, the forbidden story of their experiences, as women, as part of a collective Palestinian identity, and as citizens in the State of Israel. The primary assumption guiding this undertaking is that these women are active agents in the production and preservation of knowledge and history. As such, it is possible to demonstrate their equivocal position with respect to power relations. How do power relations shape and influence their perceptions, and how do these women simultaneously subvert these very relations?

The book examines three specific contexts in which these women exercise their manifold history-making agency: their language, their sense of body, and the way in which they conceptualize home. This study therefore accompanies the increasing shift in focus away from top-down approaches to theorizing that have prevailed in most modern histories (Al-Ali, 2007). In particular, it seeks to contribute to a small yet growing body of knowledge in the social sciences that places greater emphasis on forgotten communities. Suffering multiple forms of marginalization and exclusion, the ordinary Palestinian women interviewed here constitute just such a community: a

forgotten one. With experiences far removed from familiar political and nationalistic slogans, the viewpoint of these women is existential – addressing everyday social, economic and cultural concerns.

This study also challenges established concepts in existing theoretical writing on personal and collective memory. In the absence of any legitimacy, for example, the stories these women tell about their lives indicate how they present and transfer memory and history through popular and cultural languages, home and body. These are alternative sites of commemoration in which history and memory are constructed and passed on in non-institutional apparatuses that are distant from any state or nationalist agendas. Instead, these stories focus attention on marginalized women as they understand history from their own perspectives. This is a dialectical interpretation of memory: how are these recollections in the present shaped by the past and how do they actively shape that past? Perhaps more importantly, what might this unique historical perspective mean in terms of alternative political possibilities for the future?

## History and memory

The efficiency of the oral source does not lie in the preservation of the past, but in the effort of the teller to give significance to the past from a present-day position. Thus, 'memory is not a passive depository of facts, but an active process of creation of meanings' (Portelli, 2000). In this sense, history as a scientific discipline acts as a formulator of memory because historical 'facts' represent no more than the domination of the stories of the holders of power over those of others (Foucault, 1980). This is a primary reason that illuminates why women are a marginal group, consistently excluded from history and sites of memory and commemoration. Masculine hegemonies efface women as a category of analysis from the areas of public memory, transforming them into dispossessed and non-historical beings, and failing to acknowledge their active social participation and contribution in the process. History is written by the victorious, from their point of view. Those who have access to power can make

their voices heard, can publish these voices and influence debates and decision-making in the public 'political' sphere. In short, the dominant have 'the power of publicity to determine which voices will be heard in the public forum' (Hutton, 1993: 113).

Canonical history typically does not consider women's actions and experiences as fit or desirable to be integrated into history. As Alison Baker (1988: 1) puts it, 'Women are recognized neither as important agents of history, nor as reliable reporters and interpreters of history.' In this sense, '"ordinary women" suffered in the way of repression, ignorance and backwardness' (Al-Khalili, 1977: 80). Historically, women also have had far fewer opportunities, and less access, to write and publish their personal and social experiences.

As historian Ellen Fleischmann (2003: 11) claims, there is a 'surprising silence that shrouds the subject of Palestinian women in almost all historical writings on Palestine'. Although her book focuses on middle- and upper-class Palestinian women's activism in the public sphere through charity and their participation in politics, especially the national movement, rather than the daily life of 'ordinary' women. Rema Hammami (2004) also finds that women are absent in studies of the Nakba, except when they are mentioned in relation to issues of honour, fashion and clothing, which in turn demonstrates women's status as objects (and not subjects) of cultural norms. As Yuval-Davis (1997) comments, Hammami's observation highlights the way in which national historiography excluded women from its narratives and portrayed them only as symbols related to national honour. Rosemary Sayigh and Julie Peteet (1991) likewise note the absence of women from historical records in relation to their work in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Sayigh (2007: 13) concisely summarizes this: 'Class and gender combine to silence women, and exclude their voices from the historical record.'

Sayigh (2007: 137) goes on to point out that because they do not perceive themselves as responsible for the failure to protect the Palestinian homeland in 1948, 'women's narratives of the past may in this sense be more complete than men's'. As my interviews indicate, women's stories offer a radically innovative contribution to the on-

going construction of the Palestinian historical narrative. 'In the case of anti-colonial struggles', Sayigh (1996: 146) asserts, 'the discrepancy between women's participation and their marginalization in national politics and histories has fuelled specific forms of feminism that often take the form of attempts to reconstitute a "female collective memory".'

Although every woman's life story is unique, all of those that I heard in the course of this research raised issues related to their experiences of 1948. Along with the Palestinian population as a whole, these events shaped their young lives and continue to haunt their present-day lives. As such, the life stories of these women do in fact constitute a type of 'female collective memory'.[3] This is exemplified in three specific themes that these life stories reveal: shared language; descriptions of both female and male bodies; and descriptions of home. Through these three themes, the women I interviewed remember and commemorate historical events, both as these have affected their own personal lives and as they reflect broader Palestinian experience at the national level. Given that the experiences of ordinary urban Palestinian women such as these are under-researched, the documentation of their life stories here serves as a much-needed corrective to their ongoing exclusion from historical documents and collective memory.

Memory – personal and collective, public and private – is studied in a wide range of different academic disciplines. Sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1992: 38) was the first to address the question of individual and collective memory within a social context, for 'it is in society that people normally acquire … recall, recognize and localize their memories'. Jeffrey Olick (1999: 346) addressed the relation between public and private spheres, arguing that memory 'occurs in public and in private, at the tops of societies and at the bottoms, as reminiscence and as commemoration, as personal testimonial and as national narrative, and each of these forms is important'. The production of historical memories and experiences has been approached in different ways. Halbwachs, 1980), for example, asserts that individual reminiscences are shaped and guided by communal

trajectories, complete with their inevitable political and historical overtones. He also examined the perceptions and needs raised by the present and how these impact on the constitution of the past. This is clear in Barry Schwartz's assertion (1991: 221–2) that 'Every conception of the past is construed from the standpoint of the new problems of today.' There is a dialectical relation between the past and the present and its connection to the individual's and the group's standpoint in the present. Recalled past experience and shared images of the historical past are kinds of memories that have particular importance for the constitution of social groups in the present (Fentress and Wickham, 1992: xi). This is very important for groups that are not recognized as collective national ones, as is the case with Palestinians in Israel. They continue to 'experience the present as connected to the past. This embedding of memory in present experience can also be at the root of its weakness as a source of knowledge of the past' (Fentress and Wickham, 1992: 24). Therefore documentation of such experiences of women, their remembered events, constitutes a kind of 'social memory as a source of knowledge' (Fentress and Wickham, 1992: 26). Remembering is, therefore, an act of communication as well as information-retrieval, and so our memories of the past are shaped by the interpersonal contexts in which they are encoded and retrieved.

Foucault (in Hutton, 1993) has shown that the historical past is a rhetorical construct for the present. The style of the historian's inquiry, as well as the quantity of data assembled, determines the way it is rendered in the present in relation to the past (Hutton, 1993: 122). Assmann (1995) draws a distinction between two kinds of memory. There are 'communicative memories', which are verbal, whereby memory is shared and conveyed within a social group over a lifespan; these are unstructured, informal and serve for the short term. In contrast, there is 'cultural memory', which is formal, structured and manifest in written documents, pictures, buildings and sites of commemoration; as such, it remains part of culture for a long time.

From the standpoint of women, however, Assmann's distinction is problematic. On the one hand, the marginalization of women deems them to be outside 'modern' and 'cultural' communities;

outside of history itself. On the other hand, women are political and historical actors who take part in building their communities and social relations, albeit from localized positions. Therefore this study not only explores only how in part memory operates, but also concentrates on how and why these women tell the stories they told, and what these stories might mean in the telling of them.

## Memory as threat

As a consequence of the formation of the State of Israel in 1948, various sites of memory and commemoration have been established that are fully suited to its Zionist nationalist ideologies. Consequently, Palestinian citizens living in the State of Israel have seen their own history and memory transformed into a security threat. Therefore this history and memory is not only forbidden, but subject to systematic destruction, distortion and erasure. Mourning and remembering the events of 1948 that shattered and dispersed their personal and collective lives are silenced in the public space of Israel. Moreover, the state refuses to officially recognize Palestinians as a collective group with a national identity on their homeland. According to Masalha (2003: 165), because official state policy suppresses memories of the Nakba on the grounds that they are perceived as a threat to the Jewishness of the State of Israel, Israeli Palestinian citizens in the State of Israel became 'victimizers': a further threat to Israel's demographic security and ethnic domination.

This perception of Israeli Palestinians as a threat to national security can be demonstrated in two examples. The first is the vivid contemporary debates about commemorating the Nakba conducted by Israeli legislators.[4] On 9 May 2009, for example, the government's Ministerial Committee for Legislation adopted a bill, submitted by Knesset Member Alex Miller (Israel Beiteinu party) and other legislators, which prohibited commemoration of the national independence day of the State of Israel as a day of mourning. A new version of the proposed law replaces a criminal penalty with an extreme economic penalty, whereby the state would cut off funding for organizations

and institutions that commemorate Nakba Day.[5] According to a report in *Kul-alarab* (28 August 2009), Minister of Education Gidion Sa'ar said to the High Follow-up Committee on Arab Education: 'you lost the war, you must accept the consequences in all fields.'[6] According to the Israeli Minister of Education, then, a condition of being a Palestinian in Israel is to accept the outcome of the war of 1948; namely that Palestinians who remained on their homeland are now stateless.

The second example comes from Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, who stated: 'Once a Palestinian state is established, I can come to the Palestinian citizens, whom we call Israeli Arabs, and say to them "you are citizens with equal rights, but the national solution for you is elsewhere".' This statement, reported by Army Radio, was part of an address Minister Livni gave to students at a Tel Aviv high school.[7] According to Livni, who reflects the views of the vast majority of Israeli politicians, Palestinian citizens in Israel may not be regarded as a group with a national identity; nor do they have a right to national aspirations as Israeli citizens. Palestinians with such aspirations must leave their homeland in order to fulfil them.

Palestinians who live outside the State of Israel also work to silence the history and memory of the Nakba to suit their own political agendas. After the signing of the 1993 Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinians, it became apparent that Palestinians in Israel had been excluded from the negotiations. However, they do appear as part of the solution in many political discourses, and the option of an exchange of territories, including their inhabitants, is openly discussed. The Oslo Accords take 1967 as the starting point to resolve the conflict, leaving Palestinians in Israel out of any political agreement, in particular in relation to their dispossession and displacement in 1948.

The problematic location of Palestinians in Israel is exemplified by the absence of any monuments to commemorate 1948. Only in March 1998, many years after these events occurred, did the political leadership of Arab-Palestinian citizens in Israel begin looking for ways to commemorate the Nakba (Sorek, 2008). The first monuments to commemorate another constitutive event, known as Land Day, were located in a cemetery in the town of Sakhnin. Land

Day commemorates an event that occurred on 30 March 1976, when Palestinians went on strike to demonstrate against the confiscation of their land by the Israelis. Later, six Palestinians were shot dead. The placement of the memorial in a cemetery indicates the delegitimization of such sites in the public sphere (even though it is located in an Arab space). It also represents the deep fear Palestinians have in relation to the Israeli authorities, which resulted in the monument being 'buried' in the cemetery.

## Voices from the margins

Palestinian women living in Israel have been entirely left out of the formation of Palestinian national identity, which is based on the historiography, narratives and political discourses of the Palestinian masculine elite. Ordinary Palestinian women from the cities of Lyd and Ramleh represent the weakest sector of the population, both in the broader Palestinian community and in the State of Israel. Their marginalization is complex and multiple: as Palestinians, as women, as elderly people. Furthermore, most of them lack any formal education. The protracted violent conflict between Palestinians and the Israeli state in which they are citizens also situates these women in an interstitial position that compounds their multiple marginality, oppression and invisibility. Living in contested Palestinian-Jewish cities exposes them to these dynamics of confrontation and engagement on a daily basis. Importantly, it is the very marginalization of these women that reveals the value of their experiences. For, as Mohanty (2003: 231) asserts, 'The experiential and analytic anchor in the lives of marginalized communities of women provides the most inclusive paradigm for thinking about social justice. This particularized viewing allows for a more concrete and expansive vision of universal justice.'

If these multi-textured relations of oppression are to be successfully challenged, ordinary women's roles must be documented and incorporated, otherwise 'we will remain silent even as we speak, and paralyzed even as we act' (Warwar, 2002: 118). This strongly supports Mohanty's claim that 'in fact narratives of historical experiences are

crucial to political thinking not because they present an unmediated version of the "truth" but because they can destabilize received truths and locate debate in the complexities and contradictions of historical life' (Mohanty, 2002: 524). Therefore daily life encompasses personal and subjective experiences, as well as public and political activities that are an integral part of not only a new history of women, but also a new history in general (Scott, 1988, 1992). This text goes beyond the primary task of documenting women's stories that have long been excluded. In presenting the stories, I seek to have those who are responsible for oppressing and silencing these voices to acknowledge them and take responsibility for these stories. In so doing, I open an avenue for communication, following Danny Rabinowitz and Khawla Abu-Baker's argument that 'Acknowledgement of Palestinian memories of 1948 is an essential condition for building shared citizenship' (2002: 95).

The memories of women, patiently transmitted from mouth to ear, body to body, hand to hand, were the world's earliest archives (Minh-ha, 1989: 121). Interpreted from this perspective, one of the primary objectives of this study is to create a legitimate space for the voices of these ordinary urban Palestinian women to be heard in the public sphere. The significance of this undertaking is multiple. First, it enables these women to reclaim their subjectivity as historical agents. As bell hooks (1989: 42) insists, women have 'the right to define their own reality, establish their own identities, and name their history'. Second, by transliterating these so-far-ignored oral histories into a written text, this study creates space for the visibility and voices of these women on their homeland, Israel/Palestine, and in the public sphere of their own Palestinian society, thereby better defining their contributions and roles as citizens. Third, documenting these narrative accounts serves to preserve them from oblivion and simultaneously builds 'the identity of the teller and the legacy [s]he will leave in time to come' (Portelli, 1981: 162). Fourth, the transcription of these narratives, which are constituted in a colonial context defined by ongoing violent political conflict, can shed light on similar experiences among indigenous minorities elsewhere in the world.

Fanon pointed out the dangers involved in forcing the language of colonialism on the 'natives'. In *Black Skin, White* Masks (1986), he shows that language is a mechanism of colonial oppression, erasing the natives' memory and history as they internalize their oppression and inferiority. However, Fanon's concept is too unidirectional for the case at hand. Although the Arabic language constituted an act of resistance and of preservation of Palestinian memory and history against the the Jewish state, it also served as a signifier of 'Palestinianness' to Jewish society. Furthermore, the masculine nature of the language preserved the social hierarchy of Palestinian society.

Due to the absence and delegitimization of Palestinian national sites of memory in Israel, these interviews indicate that Palestinian women have created counter-sites of collective memory, in the private sphere, where they politicize and collectivize language, home and the body. In narrating the forbidden stories of historic events, the women I interviewed reflect memory as both a personal and a collective experience. Moreover, the articulation of these forbidden stories serves to resist and subvert the Zionist national narrative, while simultaneously challenging the Palestinian national narrative. These women are, therefore, subjects who play a crucial and valuable role in making, transmitting and commemorating history.

## Note on terminology

I wish to introduce three specific terminological issues that I confronted in the process of doing this research. Each is essential for better understanding the complexity of the ongoing violent political conflict in Palestine/Israel, and it is necessary to explain the terminological choices I have made. Moreover, comment on these linguistic details is pertinent because the use of language is an ideological act that belongs to and conditions an entire system of values in order to reinforce certain attitudes, views and socio-political realities.

My attention to the importance of terminology was first aroused when I was required to delete the term 'Nakba' from my Ph.D. research proposal, a topic I elaborate in Chapter 3.

## Palestinians versus Philistines

When I started writing up this research, the Hebrew editor kept changing the way I wrote the word 'Palestinian' in Hebrew (פִלַסְטִינִים) to 'Philistines' (פְּלִשְׁתִּים), which was followed by a comment about consistency. As a *Ha'aretz*[8] reader, I also noticed that the newspaper used the same spelling, referring to Palestinians as 'Philistines'.[9] More attention to this linguistic detail indicated to me that it is also common practice to use the term 'Philistines' in academic writing, official documents, literature and speech patterns, among others.

The Philistines are historically known as a seafaring people from Crete who invaded Israel/Palestine around the twelfth century BCE. The Arabic word for 'Palestine' is transliterated as 'Falastīn', deriving from the Latin term 'Palaestina', which is the name the Romans gave to the region. The link between the Philistines (פְּלִשְׁתִּים) and the Palestinians (פִלַסְטִינִים) is drawn from Bible stories of Philistines who lived in Philistia. These stories present the Philistines as a cruel, barbaric and brutal enemy of the Israelites, with the latter depicted as the 'people of God'. The most prominent of these biblical stories are Samson's battles against the Philistines and the battle between Goliath, the Philistine giant from Gath, armed with sword, spear and javelin, and David, the young Israelite shepherd, armed with a slingshot and a pouch full of stones. The story ends with David slinging one of his stones at Goliath and killing him, and the Israelites defeating the Philistines.[10]

Both of these stories describe the Philistines as invaders of the land of Israel, foreigners from Egypt, strangers with suspect values and brutal enemies. The analogy between the ancient Philistines of the Bible and contemporary Palestinians is drawn in present-day Israel for three primary ideological reasons. First, referring to Palestinians as 'Philistines' in Hebrew is a linguistic manoeuvre, the intention of which is to claim that Palestinians are foreigners and not indigenous or native on their homeland. As such, they have no legitimate entitlement to the land of Palestine/Israel, in contrast to 'native Israelis'. Second, by creating a link to the Philistines, Israelis essentialize and give a sacred legitimacy to the persecution of the Palestinians as the

ultimate cruel enemy that is a constant threat to the security of the lives of Jews in the State of Israel. Therefore Palestinians as a collective people must be defeated and expelled from land that does not belong to them. Third, this linguistic act aims to elevate Jews to a higher position in the hierarchy of moral values compared to the debased Palestinians/Philistines, who are perceived as having no moral values. In turn, this simultaneously permits them to be dehumanized and justifies the excessive aggression used against Palestinians, which is sanctioned by the State of Israel and the international community.

It is in this manner that secular Zionist ideologists have co-opted Old Testament stories from the Bible to convey contemporary messages in the political conflict between Zionism and Palestinians. What I found striking is that in official British documents, during what is called the 'British Mandate'[11] in Palestine, the Hebrew word 'Philistia' (הניתשלפ) is used. Thus the British established the precedent of referring to Palestine as Philistine, implicitly equating Palestinians with 'Philistines', the cruel enemies of the Jews. Reference to Palestinians as Philistines is also present in academic articles, Israeli television subtitles, and popular forms of writing. Ironically, the introduction to the website Palestine Remembered uses the same spelling in Hebrew characters (הניתשלפ).[12] These examples indicate that there is a hegemonic power at work that conveys an ideological message.

In accordance with the Israeli policy of fragmenting Palestinian families and communities, use of the term 'Philistines' in Israel refers only to those Palestinians who live outside the 1948 border. Palestinians living within these borders are referred to in a variety of different ways. For example, in official state documents they are called 'non-Jewish' or 'minorities' (in the plural form, but not 'minority' in the singular form, which avoids any acknowledgement of Palestinians as a national collective, carrying on the tradition begun with the Balfour declaration when Palestinians were classified according to their religious background). The most widespread term used in Israel and throughout the world is 'Arab Israeli'.

Extensive use of the category 'Arab Israeli' by Israeli institutions, newspapers, Israeli television channels, politicians, academics, other

Arab countries, including Palestinians inside and outside the 1948 borders, as well as by the broader international community, reflects the hegemonic power of Zionist ideology and its securist discourse. The term also serves to confine Palestinian identity in Israel to 'an Arab as one of us', which is a popular slogan in the Jewish-Israeli community. This phrase represents the conditional acceptance of Palestinians in the State of Israel. That is, in order to be an 'Arab Israeli', a Palestinian must detach her- or himself from the Palestinian collective and history, instead annexing her- or himself to Israel, the land and the people. This confined and conditional sense of belonging indicates that Palestinians in Israel are located in a space of eternal interment within the Jewish Israeli state, thus erasing their rights to their homeland as natives and obliterating their identity.

The forced affiliation of Palestinians to Israel, by naming them as Arab Israelis, has connotations of humiliation. It designates Palestinians as Arabs who now belong to Israel–Jacob.[13] This affiliation was meant to detach Palestinians from their entitlement to the land of Palestine in order to become legitimate in the State of Israel. The only acceptable way for Palestinians to live on their own homeland, according to the Zionist nationalist agenda, is by becoming 'Arab Israelis', rather than natives in their homeland as Palestinian people, living as free people.

Instead of 'Arab Israeli' or 'Philistine', I refer to Palestinians as Palestinians throughout this text.

## Mixed cities versus contested cities

The term 'mixed cities' is part of official state discourse and refers to the cities remaining within the 1948 border of Israel. Lyd, Ramleh, Yaffa, Haifa and Akka are all such cities. In 1948, Palestinians were expelled or escaped during the war and were forbidden to return to their homes. After the establishment of the State of Israel, Palestinians and Jews lived in the same cities. In the official state lexicon, the term 'mixed cities' is used to describe 'an urban situation in which Jewish and Arab communities occupy the same urban jurisdiction' (Yacobi, 2002: 171). However, it also reflects the ongoing Judaization

of these cities (Yacobi, 2003; Bashir, 2004). The term 'mixed cities' is misleading: it distorts the realities of life for both Jewish and Palestinian communities. It conveys an idea of sharing a mutual life. It suggests that these cities are integrated and perhaps even harmonious. As such, the term hides the reality of spatial/territorial segregation between these two communities, in particular the long-term ghettoization of the Palestinians. It also conceals the economic and social marginalization of Palestinians, who live in poor, disadvantaged and underdeveloped neighbourhoods, like the area around the train station in Lyd or Jawarish in Ramleh, among others. Thus, the term 'mixed cities' creates a false reality of Palestinians and Jews living in equality, when the majority of Israeli people actually live behind mental and physical walls that keep them apart.

The term 'mixed cities' also has another, converse, meaning. It implies the need to prevent these cities from being mixed. In other words, it suggests the continued need to expel the Palestinian residents from these places in order to create Zionist spaces. Because Palestinians are perceived by the local and national government as a demographic threat to the so-called 'Jewishness' of these mixed cities, the state seeks to Zionize and Judaize these areas. Such efforts highlight the intersectionalty of Palestinian life in the State of Israel, adding to their multiple oppressions and invisibility in a way that indicates that the past is continuously present.

In referring to the cities of Lyd and Ramleh, I instead use the term 'contested cities'.

## Judaization versus Zionization

Many post-colonial and post-Zionist scholars use the term 'Judaization' in referring to the control of Palestinian territory by the State of Israel. But use of this term is also misleading. In fact, Jews lived in Palestine, including in many of its cities, before 1948. However, they did not claim exclusive rights to territory or to those cities; nor did they aim to appropriate the territory or these cities from their Palestinian populations. Hence, in my view, the term 'Zionization' is a more precise and accurate description for what is happening

to Palestinians in general and to Palestinian citizens in the State of Israel in particular. Zionization as a modern Jewish nationalist ideology claims sovereignty and exclusive territorial control of historic Palestine. The term 'Judaization' is also imprecise because many Jews in Israel and abroad are not Zionists and therefore are not claiming exclusive territorial sovereignty over historic Palestine; nor do they agree with the Zionist movement's aggressive actions towards Palestinians. Importantly, not all Zionists are Jews. For example, there are evangelical Christian groups that consider themselves Zionists.

## Overview of the book

Chapter 1 is devoted to the reflexive viewpoint of the researcher and addresses three specific factors that contribute to defining the scope of this work. First, it presents the researcher's family stories, as these provided the initial motivation to conduct this research. Second, it appraises the extent to which her own childhood and life as a woman shaped this research project. Third, it locates these family stories in relation to the prevailing discourse of Palestinian nationalism.

Offering a brief overview of the methodological aspects of the research, Chapter 2 focuses on life story as the principal tool for eliciting information from interviewees. This method is deemed appropriate for three main reasons. First, oral storytelling techniques are especially suitable because the majority of interviewees cannot read or write. Second, the life story methodology is important for blurring the dichotomy between history and memory, and is in itself a project of documentation and commemoration (Trouillot, 1995). As such, the opportunity to tell their life stories contributes to the activation of these women as historical agents. Third, women who belong to marginalized, minority and/or stateless groups face multiple layers of exclusion and silencing that the life story method is designed to overcome. In general, this methodology offers a suitably rich perspective on complex experiences and viewpoints. In particular, life story assumes that the voice emerging in the course of interviews is not that of the interviewee alone, but is composed of diverse forces

working on it and with it, including the voice of the researcher. This chapter also addresses the researcher's role and position with respect to the interviewees and discusses the significance of the research site – the cities of Lyd and Ramleh.

Chapter 3 foregrounds the complex relationship between the researcher and the Israeli academy, which provided the institutional framework for the research. The implications of this story raise questions about the freedom of academic research and the role of academic institutions in producing knowledge. In particular, it details the approval process for this project, paying attention to the researcher's identity, the figures of institutional authority and the research topic itself. The overall purpose of this chapter is to unsettle common generalizations about Palestinians in Israel and instead offer a more nuanced and multivocal view, especially within the context of ongoing political violence.

Exploring the language and terminology used by the interviewees to recount their life stories, Chapter 4 focuses in particular on their experiences of the Nakba. Both the explicit and the implicit terminology used by these women reveal the manner in which they experience the changing realities of their lives, while simultaneously expressing and creating it. As Patricia Collins (1998: xxi) puts it, 'A choice of language transcends mere selection of words – it is inherently a political choice.' The chapter shows how the language of these women, spoken Arabic, is drawn from both the private and the public arenas and daily life, depending on the memories they talk about. Sometimes their words mirror the dominant discourse (albeit in ironic reappropriations) and sometimes their language constitutes a complex site of resistance – in relation to both hegemonic Zionist narratives and the prevailing masculinist discourse of Palestinian nationalism. In this, the terminology of these women offers an alternative discursive perspective for the reconfiguration of political possibilities anew.

Chapter 5 examines the gendered body as a complex and contradictory site of resistance to the colonial Jewish state apparatus and to patriarchal power relations within Palestinian society. It addresses

the means by which these women formulate and represent their experiences in bodily terms, with reference to the female and male body, and interrogates the ways in which the body becomes a site of memory as a result of these representations. Particular attention is given to how societal processes and historical changes are manifest in the female body, specifically in the way women dress. Today, the attire of Palestinian women reveals the internal conflicts and ruptures of Palestinian society as a whole. It simultaneously expresses a twofold act of resistance: against the hegemony of Jewish-Israeli society, and against the worldwide trend that links traditional religious Muslim women's dress to terrorism.

Describing how women historicize and contextualize their sense of home, Chapter 6 looks at these stories from the present-day standpoint of the interviewees and moves back through the history of their lives. In particular, it deals with these women's past and present perceptions of places and the memories these places evoke, with specific attention to how these memories influence and play a part in their current lives, both personally and collectively. For these women, 'home' is an especially complex construct. Laden with contradictions and heavy with symbolism, this is an idea of the home that is at once lost and sometimes regained, but always a place of commemoration; a site of birth and death; a place of fear and lack of safety, as well as security, warmth and a sense of belonging; private and collective. Beyond these multiple meanings, these women also highlight the importance of home as a site of resistance to the Israeli occupation, thus expanding the range of possible meanings that define the term 'home'.

Overall, this is a story about how ordinary Palestinian women who are caught up in complex and changing socio-political realities utilize a range of resources, including their disadvantage and marginalization, to challenge the domination and oppression of both the State of Israel and the Palestinian narrative of nationalism. In this, their experiences have the potential to point in new directions that can reshape and reinvent Israeli–Palestinian relations and the Palestinian society to which they belong.

# ONE

# My Family Stories

> Fix my voice on the machine so that my words come out clear. I am an old person who has experienced many things, and I have much to talk about. I will tell my talk, of the things I have done and the things that my parents and others have done. But don't let the people I live with hear what I say. (Shostak, 1983: 51)

In this chapter I reflect on my personal family stories and their significance in shaping my knowledge and awareness of history, gender and power at the social and political levels. I also show how I became interested in women's life stories, in particular in documenting the active role they play in society and the ways they remember and portray historical events.

The stories that follow – as yet undocumented, continuously ignored and still forbidden in public places – were all told within my family home, thus subverting the official Zionist narrative. Most of these stories, which were collected orally, will not be found in school curricula or published as relevant historical accounts. I retell and analyse the stories I heard, with reference to their significance both in resisting Zionist narratives and in challenging the Palestinian national narrative. I also show how unofficial oral memories, especially but not exclusively women's stories, can illustrate women's agency in constituting society and history.

Situated in the broader context of academic research, an underlying assumption of the life story method is that the voice emerging in the course of interviews is not that of the interviewees alone, but is also intertwined with the voice of the researcher. A section of this discussion is therefore devoted to the reflexive viewpoint of the researcher, including how I position myself in relation to the events described by the interviewees. Through such analysis, it is possible to appraise the extent to which my own childhood and life as a woman shaped my research.

As in many other Palestinian homes, my family home was a site for telling stories related to events in 1948. The stories I heard at home were very different from what I later learned at university. At home, I also learned about the limited space for women's experiences and women's voices. These various constraints and forms of silencing women were not questioned, but were taken for granted in order to ensure the ongoing lack of recognition for women's active contributions to social life and history.

I was born in el Bi'aneh village in Upper Galilee. In my family home, I experienced the history of the Palestinian–Zionist conflict at first hand. We used to sit in our living room in the evenings and discuss issues related to history, society and politics. My father was the primary speaker and storyteller. Sometimes we asked questions and at other times we would just listen. Most of the time, my mother was one of the listeners and did not take part in the storytelling. These stories still shape my life and my political and historical awareness. From childhood, I heard my father lament the loss of Palestine, frequently singing the words, *Ya khsara ya Ezzedeen da'at minak falastin* (Woe to you Ezzedeen, Palestine is lost to you).[1]

From early childhood on, I vividly remember my father's laments, yearning and longing for his beloved Aunt Mona, who was married to his favourite uncle, Hassan. In the wake of events in 1948, both of these relatives, along with other family members, ended up in Ein el Hilweh, a Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon. Aunt Mona was married in a Badal marriage. In Palestinian tradition, this is a marriage based on the exchange of sisters between two men. My grandfather,

Ibrahim, married Hassan's sister, Aisha (my grandmother), and Hassan, Aisha's brother, married my grandfather's sister, Mona. My father often told the story of the wedding, always with an emphasis on my grandmother's boldness and courage. She was married at the age of 13 to my grandfather, who was 40 years old at the time.

My grandmother was from Nahif, a village near el Bi'aneh, at the foot of el Shagur Mount in Western Galilee. On my grandmother's wedding day, the two families arranged to meet in Beer el Sharq, which was the halfway point between their villages. In accordance with Palestinian traditions, every groom takes his bride at such a halfway point. After Hassan took his bride, Mona, Nahif's residents who were attending the ceremony refused to give Aisha to her groom Ibrahim, my grandfather. Consequently, a big fight broke out between the men of the two villages who were at the exchange ceremony. In the end, however, the men from el Bi'aneh succeeded in taking Aisha away on horseback to her groom. As the story goes, while she was on the horse, she urged the rider to hurry up, saying 'Run, run, go faster!' so that the men of Nahif would not be able to catch her and take her back to her family.

Contrary to Palestinian custom, where the bride is supposed to show pain and sorrow upon leaving her family and be on their side if conflict arises, obeying and following the decisions of the men in her paternal family, my grandmother actively made her 'choice' to follow her husband and establish her own family life, despite her family's wishes.

This story has been retold on many occasions, and is known to many members of our extended family. My father told the story with pride, tying it to other bold and courageous acts that my grandmother did. This impression contrasts with the stereotypical Palestinian cultural expectation for women to be bashful and embarrassed by such actions. We used to laugh together, remembering and retelling these stories about my grandmother.

My father was born in el Bi'aneh in 1927. Looking back, I am fascinated by his capacity to tell painful and joyful stories from the past, with equal measures of pride and critique. Eventually, he did

not hesitate to mock and criticize himself, Palestinians as a whole and others. Making fun of his own ignorance, he told us again and again how in 1948 he would aim his French machine gun at Israeli airplanes, imagining that he could shoot them down.[2] His critical perspective was demonstrated most often in the stories he told of when his mother used to send him to the mountains during the revolt against the British in 1936–39. Although he brought them food, he also criticized the revolutionaries because he held them responsible for the death of their physician from Akka. When referring to this incident, my father called the revolutionaries 'sons of death; those who killed Anwar El-Shokairi, the revolutionary physician who treated them' (Kassem, 2000: 95). My father added that the physician was on his way to treat injured fighters, but was killed by other revolutionaries who believed, based on gossip, that he might be a British collaborator. My father likewise used to make a mockery of the Arab Liberation Army, presenting them as traitors and betrayers of the Palestinians.

Another story he often repeated was about al-Birwa in 1948. In his words, *Ijat Faza'ah la el Shabab to alBirwa*. He went on to explain:

> This was the call to young men from all of the surrounding villages at the foot of Shagur mountain – from el Bi'aneh, Dir el Assad and Majdel Krum – to liberate the village of al Birwa from the Zionist Brigades, and we did. The Arab Liberation Army came. They convinced us to leave and assured us that they would stay and protect the village. The next day the Zionist brigade captured al Birwa again and they [the Arab Liberation Army] didn't fight. They didn't come to fight with us. They forced us to leave. They took our ammunition and they humiliated us.

In 1948, al-Birwa was a large village, with a population of 1,330 Muslims and 130 Christians (Khalidi, 1992: 9). Khalidi (1992: 10) claims that the Israeli forces managed to occupy the village on 11 June 1948:

> the clash in the village was between the Hagana and a group of sparsely armed villagers… The Arab Liberation Army suggested

that the villagers join their families in the surrounding villages. It then took control of the village. But the same evening, the Zionist launched a counterattack and the ALA withdrew, allowing the village to be captured a second time.

When my father's generation was called to fight in 1948 against the Zionist invasion of al-Birwa, they used the words *Faza'ah* and *Shabab*. The word *Faza'ha* is commonly used as an emergency call for help in situations of internal community quarrels, mainly between two extended families (Hamolas) or other parties. The word *Shabab* means literally 'young men' – that is, those able to fight. Both terms are popularly used in disputes among Palestinian families. The use of these terms by my father and others of his generation indicates that there were no organized or trained military forces in the village to fight against the invasion of the trained military Jewish Zionist Brigades. It also reflects how unprepared the Palestinians were, especially given the lack of leadership in that region. In contrast to what I learned from my university history professors, who presented the Arab Liberation Army as an enemy fighting the Jewish Zionist Brigades in 1948, my father's stories questioned the loyalty of the ALA in serving Palestinian interests and defending them during 1948 war.

With pride, my father used to tell stories about his participation as an armed combatant in protecting al-Birwa and liberating it from the military attack of the Zionist Brigade. My father's story about al-Birwa becomes more complete, richer and more complex when juxtaposed with the story of Um Sliman el Seid, our neighbour, who was originally from al-Birwa. Telling her story in the same living room in which my father told his stories, Um Sliman recounted how the 1948 war affected her as a mother. I vividly recall her slim little body, tumultuous voice and turbulent body language when she talked about how she escaped, barefoot, from her home in al-Birwa and headed to the village of Shaa'b. Suddenly, halfway through her journey, she realized that she was holding a pillow in her arms that was covered with her child's blanket instead of her oldest son,

Sliman, whom in her haste she had left at home. She hurried back to her house, in spite of all the people begging her not to, jeopardizing her life but successfully rescuing her son.

My father's story of al-Birwa and Um Sliman's story of rescuing her son represent two forms of heroism, which partially portray the Palestinian tragedy. On the battlefield, the ordinary Palestinian men, despite being unprepared, untrained and inadequately equipped to protect their villages in the face of the trained Jewish Zionist Brigade attack, were willing to fight and resist. The ALA betrayal, as depicted in the stories of my father and others, sabotaged the resistance among the Palestinians. Um Sliman's story is a metaphor for Palestinian women willing to take risks, exemplified by her bravery in rescuing her son – a heroic act of motherhood, which presents the huwoman tragedy of the Palestinian people.

In the Palestinian–Zionist conflict, both of these stories are largely silenced. While the heroism of the battlefield is granted relatively more space and is partially documented, the kind of heroism represented in Um Sliman's story is entirely suppressed and silenced by many forces, including Palestinian ones. Oral testimony, told in everyday contexts, allows space for such stories more than official documented history does. Here, I would like to emphasize the importance of both stories as complementary to one another, such that both must be equally documented.

Before the new historians in Israel began to reveal information about the massacres of Palestinians during the 1948 war committed by the Zionist brigades, I had already heard these stories many times in our family home. From an early age, I can remember my father recalling and retelling the story of the occupation of the villages of el Bi'aneh and Dir el Assad. The story was about how his brother, my uncle, was rescued from the Israelis after they invaded the villages in 1948. According to my father, the Israeli army gathered the people of both villages one spring day at Ein el Tihta, the local water spring, asking the people to leave their houses, leaving the doors open. The army then chose four strong men and killed them in front of the villagers, ordering everyone else to go to Lebanon.

My father's story about my uncle refers to the procedure of selecting the four men by the Jewish Zionist Brigade when the village was occupied in 1948. On that day, the soldier had originally pointed in my uncle's direction, but when my uncle proceeded towards the soldier (who had been shouting), he stopped my uncle and pointed at a man behind him, who was shot instead. I grew up knowing that el-Bi'aneh had been occupied in 1948 and that four men were killed by the Jewish Zionist Brigade after surrendering. My father used to retell the story and the names of the four men who were killed. They included a Muslim, Ali Mhimad A'abed, and a Christian, Hanna Ilias Farhoud, both from el-Bi'aneh, and two other men, Ahmad Abdullah Issa Asadi and Subhi Mahmoud Dabah, who both came from the village of Dir el Asad, which was mainly inhabited by two large extended Muslim families, the Asadis and Dabahs (Kassem, 2008: 297–8). Needless to say there is no site of commemoration for the memory of these four men in either of the villages.

At university, I was exposed to new ideas that sharpened my awareness of gender inequality and deepened my conflicted identity as a Palestinian and as a citizen of the State of Israel. At the level of identity, when I presented myself as a Palestinian to my Jewish classmates, they used to say in response, 'Palestinians; such an identity doesn't exist. You are an Arab Israeli.'[3]

At the level of gender, encountering new ideas heightened my awareness of the contradictions within my family, especially differences between how my father treated me as a woman compared to how he treated my mother. Where my mother had only limited opportunities, I was confused about the extent of freedom I was granted – in moving, speaking and doing what I wanted. Consequently, I worked to develop a stronger relationship with my mother, which reached its peak when I became a mother myself. She shared with me her experiences, ideas and opinions on many different topics relevant to our lives as women and as Palestinians. Later, I realized that I had heard most of my mother's stories in the kitchen while we were preparing food for the family, or sometimes over a cup of coffee.

Although my mother used to sit with us and listen to the stories my father told, laughing and mourning as we did, she never contributed any of her personal experiences in the 'public place' of our family living room. The different locations where my parents told their stories have both a concrete and a symbolic meaning. The living room represents the public space of the home, where a much more diverse group of people would visit, including neighbours, extended family members and other guests. In contrast, my mother told her stories in the kitchen, a private place with a much smaller audience of immediate family members.

I think my mother did not tell her stories in 'public' because as a woman she feared being criticized by the men in our family, including my father. She felt insecure and thus reluctant to share her experiences. Instead, she found refuge in the much smaller and more private space of the kitchen. It is important to note that both female and male family members from the younger generation inhabited the space of the kitchen, and heard her stories. Upon my request, they also helped document some of these stories.

At home, the place where these various stories were told is saturated with gendered power relations as these were exercised within the family. It is true that women visitors, like Um Sliman, told their stories in the living room. It is likewise true that stories about my grandmother were also told in the living room. However, the majority of the stories were predominantly told by men and about men.

When reflecting on my experiences with my mother, sometimes flashbacks of memory pop up about how my mother brought certain events from 1948 alive during my adolescence. These flashbacks make me realize something that was not so obvious to me at that time – that my mother contributed to shaping my life and identity, along with my views of history, as much as my father did. Her 'trivial' sentences were equally powerful and significant. For instance, in my early years I did not place much significance on her comments that my own love of roaming through the fields, hills and mountains resembled something similar in her. Later, however, her words 'you are like your mother' began resonating with me as if she was saying

'we both survived the occupation of our land – Palestine. We both love it and you inherit from me the affection for the landscape and love it exactly as I do.'

I remember that during my teenage years I wanted to be more attached to my father and explore more of his world, not my mother's world. I enjoyed being a beloved daughter of my father. I would sit with him and listen to the conversations and discussions that he and his friends and other visitors had, sometimes engaging in social, religious and political discussions with them. Compared to my mother at the same age, I believe I was granted more space to express my opinions and act as I wanted.

Early on summer mornings, I used to go with my mother to the field to pick up summer vegetables – okra, zucchini, cucumber, tomato and ageri. Several times along the way, when we reached a particular boulder or large rock, she would point to it and say, 'Fatma,[4] this is the bullet sign in the rock, when the Jews shot at your father in 1948. He was known as a fast runner and, thank God, the bullets hit the rock instead. When they chased him, they didn't catch him. They wanted him to surrender and give up his rifle.' In this way, my mother conveyed part of my father's story of his experiences in 1948. However, she also provided knowledge about other women and men in her family, and focused on her own experiences as well.

My narrative now shifts to those stories that my mother told me which have deeply influenced me in many different ways.

## The story of Sabalan

> This story is about me, because I am a woman and I am Palestinian. … I am female and I am concerned about a group within a group, Palestinian women, and our right to life, to art, to land, to speak. (Kanaaneh, 1995: 125)

My mother was born on 9 October 1936 in the village of Sabalan in the northern part of Palestine, very close to the Lebanese border. The village is named after the holy prophet Sabalan. 'It stood on a

high mountain top and overlooked the predominantly Druze village of Hurfaysh. The village, which surrounded the tomb of one Nabi (prophet) Sabalan, had a population of 100. The residents cultivated figs and olives, [and] its houses were clustered closely together' (Khalidi, 1992: 489). My mother used to say, 'Sabalan has all goods [*khirha fihaa*]; it has grapes, figs olives and fertile land.'

From early childhood until my adolescence, I vividly remember our visits to my grandparents in Hurfaysh. I also remember our journey to the mountain to visit Sabalan. The sacred feeling and divine sense of the place infused my body when I was walking on the rocky road towards the peak of the mountain. The road was lined by two rows of huge oak trees that had multicoloured pieces of cloth hanging from their branches. My youngest aunt used to accompany us. She explained that if we tied a piece of cloth to one of the branches and made a wish, it would come true because the trees were sacred. I only learned later in my life that Sabalan was my mother's home until 1948.

There is no valid historical information about who Sabalan actually was. Yizhaq Ben Zvi (1953) identifies Sabalan with Zebulun, one of Jacob's sons. The Druze regard Sabalan as one of their religious founders and a holy prophet (Falah, 2003). In 1948, the village of Sabalan was destroyed and the Druze in Israel took control of the holy site, which is called Maqam el-Nabi Sabalan.[5] Each year on 10 September the Druze visit Sabalan for prayer and celebration. In his book *The Druze in the Middle East*, Salman Falah (2003: 120), a Druze writer, states that Sabalan is part of Hurfaysh: 'In the village [Hurfaysh] is located the Sacred Maqam of el Nabi Sabalan.' However, Nabi Sabalan's sacred Maqam is located in the village of Sabalan. In describing the holy place of Maqam el Nabi Sabalan as a neighbourhood of Hurfaysh, Falah is distorting the history of the place and erases the history of the village of Sabalan, my mother's village, which was destroyed in 1948. Hurfaysh is a neighbouring village, where my mother's family found refuge when the residents of Sabalan were expelled when the village was occupied in 1948. Falah's writing is not only erasing the history of the village Sabalan,

but also is generating false knowledge and history in accordance with the State of Israel's Zionist agenda.

Today, the reconstruction of Maqam el–Nabi Sabalan has covered up all of the old stones that are a testimony of the life of a whole community before 1948. The reconstruction is building a new reality, hiding with new stones what the State of Israel and its Druze alliance cannot erase or demolish. Currently, only two of the original old stone buildings, along with the cemetery, remain as living evidence that tells the story of the Palestinian village of Sabalan. For many years, my mother used to reply to the question 'Where are you from?' with 'I am from Sabalan', as a way to commemorate Sabalan and its people. Again, only later in my life did I understand what it meant for my mother and other family members to utter such a 'trivial' and straightforward sentence.

In May 1997, when I was driving my mother to visit my uncle in Hurfaysh, she asked if we could visit Sabalan, too. While we were there, I asked if she could find her pre-1948 home. She pointed in the direction of her home, saying, 'See if you still see a fig tree with three trunks coming up from the roots. We opened our door, and the fig tree stood in front of our door.'

When we entered the Maqam, a picture of Sheikh Ali Faris, a Druze sheikh from Hurfaysh, was hanging on the wall. I noticed my mother suddenly rushing toward the picture, trying to pull it off the wall. I could not understand what she said, so I caught her hand, restrained her and warned her that such an action would cause us trouble. According to my mother, Sabalan is her family's holy Wali, a good person who did sacred and holy deeds. According to Muslim belief, a picture of a person is prohibited (*haram*) in a sacred place. However, I think that by trying to take the picture off the wall, my mother was actively resisting the transformation of her family's sacred place and reclaiming it as her right. She was also rejecting the presence and authority of the Druze, who were allies of the victorious Zionists in 1948 and rebelling against their control of Sabalan. Whether her gesture was conscious or unconscious, I also think that its symbolic meaning transferred responsibility to me to remember

and continue to struggle for recognition of what happened to the people of Sabalan.

Two stories portray the life of Sabalan before 1948. Each had a powerful effect on the shaping of my identity, both as a woman and as a Palestinian. The first story is one that my mother told me about what happened when her unwed aunt became pregnant. After the birth of the child at home, the neighbours became aware of the situation and one of them confronted my grandfather. My grandfather did not believe the accusation, so the neighbour suggested that my grandfather check his sister's breast to see if she was lactating. When he found out that she was, he threatened to kill his sister. According to Palestinian codes of honour, a woman in her position (an unwed mother) should be killed by a family member. However, the mother of my grandfather, Badir, was a strong woman and would not allow my grandfather to approach his sister. She protected her daughter. Later, my great-grandmother arranged a marriage for her daughter. In 1948, my mother said that her aunt brought her family to Sabalan, where she sought refuge when the Zionist Brigade attacked Akka and Kuwaykat.[6] When the Israelis expelled the people of Sabalan, she became a refugee in Lebanon.

In contrast to what is known in patriarchal culture, where women are silent about issues of honour, or are part of the mechanism of punishing the victim, Badir played an active role, demonstrating strong determination in defending and protecting her daughter's life. She also protected her son from committing a crime. Her attitude in subverting and contradicting the masculine norm, exemplified by her actions in relation to such a sensitive issue as honour, demonstrates how women were willing to jeopardize themselves and act for the sake of another life. In terms of the Palestinian cultural code, Badir's courageous actions in protecting her daughter risked her status and perhaps even her life.

The story of my mother's aunt sheds light on life in a small village. It problematizes the question of honour killing in Palestinian society. It also highlights the active role of women in relation to sensitive issues like protecting family honour. Honour killing still takes place,

but the practice of determining the fate of those who violate what is known as family honour is not essentialist or static. On the contrary, it operates differently in different places, according to social status and class, political and many other related contexts.

When I asked my mother about the fate of the newborn, her response was that she did not know. Although I failed to elicit any information about what happened to the baby, my assumption is that a crime was committed in order to save the life of my mother's aunt. My inquiry regarding the fate of the baby, and Badir's role in relation to the child, was met with silence; no information was forthcoming. However, the central point of this story, according to my understanding, is that patriarchal cruelty posed her an unbearable dilemma: to choose between two lives, that of her daughter and that of the newborn. This dilemma was shaped by the historical, cultural and geographical context. At the time when these events transpired, Palestinian social and cultural mores sanctioned honour killings as necessary to uphold morality and ensure family honour. Additionally, because of the remote location of this small village in the mountains, the actions Badir could undertake in her private sphere were few, limiting her options in protecting her daughter. Stories such as these, which demonstrate the often excruciating situations constructed for women by patriarchy,[7] are frequently silenced by Palestinian society as they do not want to air their dirty laundry in public (or private).

The second story is about my mother's birth in 1936, during the Palestinian revolt against Imperial British Rule. As she explained:

> El-Isbah came to the Mukhtar [the village chief]. The revolutionaries used to come to eat at the house of my grandfather, Mahmod Saada,[8] who was the Mukhtar of Sabalan. After they finished eating el-Isbah said, 'We will withdraw'. 'No, wait, the Mukhtar's daughter-in-law is in labour, we will wait to congratulate the newborn.' When I was born, the hosts said to el-Isbah, 'The Mukhtar's daughter-in-law delivered, she gave birth to a baby girl.' He said, 'I wish she had never given birth' [*ya rittha ma khalafat*] and they left.

My mother continued the story, saying: 'The same day, they [el-Isbah and his followers] climbed to Khirbit Rakhason, between Hurfaysh and Sabalan, where the English struck him down from the air with airplanes, exploded the cave and killed him and his mare. His hideout cave was nearby. We call it el-Isbah's cave.'

During the revolt against the British in 1936–39, all of the village and city Mukhtars were obliged to feed the revolutionaries, whether or not they wanted to. Abdullah el-Isbah, from the village of al Ja'una, was the revolutionary leader of the whole of the Upper Galilee region. He was killed in the Al Jarmaq battle on 4 February 1938, when the revolutionaries clashed with the English (Kabha and Sirhan, 2009: 578–9). Another version of the story appears in Part III of the *Palestinian Encyclopedia*, reporting that el-Isbah was killed in a battle with the British in Al Jarma, in April 1938 (1984: 175). Abdel-Hakim Samara (2009: 48–9) argued that on 27 April, el-Isbah was killed in a clash with British forces in a fierce battle involving mounted artillery and British aircraft, but says that it was near 'Khirbet Ramadon' between Kamaneh and Sabalan. My mother insists that el-Isbah was attacked by the British in Khirbit Rakhason, because she heard it several times from different family members. When I mentioned these different versions of events to my mother, she replied: 'That's what my mother told me. I wasn't big. But he probably was injured and did not die as a result of the [English] air strike.'

Against documented evidence, I think my mother insisted that el-Isbah died on the day of her birth as a way of 'punishing' him for his attitude towards her coming into the world. The preference for boys over girls reflects the chauvinistic attitude of the revolutionaries, which likewise mirrors the broader patriarchal norms in Palestinian society. My mother's story also reveals the limitations of the Palestinian revolt against British imperialism. Although the revolutionaries sought liberation from an external tyrannical power, they simultaneously ignored the oppressive power relations within Palestinian society, particularly concerning women's equality. Like many other national movements, the Palestinian struggle does not adequately recognize the need for women's emancipation. Instead, the

male elites of the Palestinian nationalist movement have delayed this and many other crucial social issues until after the emancipation of the nation is achieved. However, the struggle for Palestinian liberation must also be a struggle against all forms of oppression and domination – imperialism, capitalism, racism and patriarchy. By focusing only on national liberation, the Palestinian struggle is reductionist. It consumes the energy of the masses in order to establish a state where the guarantee of liberation at its heart, based on human rights and citizenship, is doubtful.

## Nationalism is not enough

Historically, national struggles have sought liberation in order to broaden mass access to resources and enable power-sharing. Yet, it is well established that women's share of power and resources as a result of a nationalist victory is slim and they must continue their struggle for liberation. I strongly agree with Chandra Mohanty (2002, 2003) that women suffer from overlapping forms of oppression. Therefore we need an anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist and contextualized feminist project to expose and make visible the various overlapping forms of subjugation. Those who desire and seek freedom, dignity and liberation must be aware that in a neo-globalized and neo-colonized era the forms of oppression are diverse. Moreover, they are often disguised by the ideological constructions of chauvinist male elites, which seek to sustain and expand their privilege in the name of national liberation, leaving women and other oppressed groups behind once 'liberation' has been achieved. This is not to say that imperialist power should not be struggled against. Rather, it is to argue that while imperialist power (like British Rule in Palestine and in many other colonial states) can collapse and be dismantled, other forms of oppression nonetheless can remain powerful at home, in both private and collective senses. Therefore women's emancipation must be an integral part of any struggle against oppressive power. It should not be relegated to the future, because what we do in the present dictates what the future will be.

One more story from my mother illustrates the cruelty of Imperial Britain, particularly in oppressing Palestine's struggle for liberation in 1936–39. This is about a mother, Mihisneh, from Sa'sa,[9] and her son, Riddaa Naif Fao'r, as my mother explains:

> One night when Riddaa, Mihisneh's son, was on his way back from Dayr al Qasi,[10] his wife's village, to Sabalan, British soldiers captured him. They caught him with a gun and sharp knife in his possession. They interrogated him, demanding to know which village he was from, what he did for a living and who his family was. After Mihisneh's son provided the soldiers with the requested information, they escorted him to his home in Sabalan to verify his statements. When they arrived at his home, the soldiers directly asked his parents if they recognized the man in front of them [their son]. 'No, we do not know him', they responded. His parents denied having any knowledge of him. Mihisneh's son yelled at his mother saying, 'Let her [his wife] come out with the child [his newborn son].' As the British took aim at him he screamed at his mother, asking her to take care of his newborn son; at that moment he was gunned down in front of his parents, in their home.

I was deeply moved by this story, especially after I became a mother myself. I repeatedly asked my mother if what this story describes could really have happened. I was puzzled at how parents, in particular a mother, could refuse to recognize their own son, who was in perilous danger before their own eyes.

To this day, my mother consistently replies that the British used to kill men apprehended as revolutionaries, ruin their family's crops, loot their homes, destroy their food resources and demolish their homes. In disbelief, I protested, 'What are you saying, Mom?' However, Julie Peteet (1991) validates my mother's interpretation of these events, arguing that when the British discovered the power and importance of the private sphere while suppressing the Palestinian revolt, they began to invade homes, ruin crops and destroy oil and wheat. British imperialist rule greatly influenced Palestinians' personal and collective lives. The extent of these oppressive experiences is evident in Riddaa's parents' tragic dilemma – should they

acknowledge that he was their son in front of the soldiers? Because Riddaa had been caught with a gun in his possession, they realized he would be killed regardless. They chose not to confirm his identity in an attempt to save their home and their crops, as well as other possessions, from destruction.

## The Zionist occupation and destruction of Sabalan

The Israelis occupied Sabalan on 30 October 1948 (Khalidi, 1992: 490). My mother was 12 years old. A few months before this, she was in Ghabbatiyya, working with her parents on the land of the Effendis from Safad. Ghabbatiyya was a 'village that stood on a rocky hill between the peaks of Mount al-Jarmaq (1,208 m) and mount 'Adathir (1,009 m), the two highest mountains in Palestine' (Khalidi, 1992: 490). My mother recalled:

> We worked for the Effendis from Safad. We cultivated the land. Safad was a big, bustling city. I remember once I was sick with typhoid and my father took me on the donkey to the hospital there to get treatment. So in 1948 we stayed in Ghabbatiyya. Sa'asa was close to Ghabbatiyya. My father cleaned a cave for us there, and we slept in the cave for more than a month. We were very afraid to sleep in our home in Sabalan. People were afraid because the Hagana Jews had assaulted Sa'asa. They attacked it at night when the people were asleep and destroyed many homes, right on top of the heads of its inhabitants while they were asleep. People died while they were asleep and did not get up. The Yasins' daughter-in-law was newly married and newly pregnant; she died with her fetus in her womb and her husband while they were asleep. The Hagana Jews came from Safad by mules to the northern part of Sa'asa. When the people were asleep, they mined the homes and attacked the people at night, killing them while asleep. My father said that we won't sleep in our home, so for more than a month we slept in the cave in Ghabbatyya and didn't go to sleep at home.

What most caught my attention in this story is my mother's use of the word 'Hagana'. Although she speaks no Hebrew, she nonetheless spontaneously pronounced this word, indicating how deep and constitutive an experience this was for her as an adolescent.

My mother's story is probably related to the massacres that were committed on 15 February 1948 in Sa'asa village. According to the official history of the Hagana, Commander Moshe Kelman ordered soldiers to blow up twenty homes and kill the greatest number of fighters possible (Khalidi, 1992: 491–2; Morris, 1987). In this case, home became the opposite of what it conventionally means for most people: a place of safety and security. Instead, for many people in Sa'asa, home was a target for attack; a burial place for the dead.

My mother also remembers how the Israeli soldiers occupied Sabalan:

> When the Jews came in, Hussin Limmhimad tore a white coverlet into pieces… He tied it and hung it on a stick, meaning we are *msaalmin* [non-fighters]. Tawfiq Khalifeh from Safad came and said, 'Surrender and no one will harm you.' Then the Jews [soldiers] said, 'We are hungry and we want to eat.' We gathered the hens; the hens were very old and it took time until they were cooked. After they [the Jews] ate, they gathered the children and women in front of el Maqam Nabi Sabalan and said, 'You see, you all will die'… Then they said, 'You all now have to go after Qawuqji.'[11] All? I did not know if he was in Lebanon or Syria. But they said, 'You all have to go to Qawuqji.'
>
> Poor Ahmad al Zahwi, he was from Kuwaykat. They came to Sabalan when the Jews attacked Kuwaykat and Akka. In front of us, they [Jews] broke his hand. A soldier was hitting him with the butt of his rifle and another soldier was kicking him hard with his boots… My father was one of those whom they selected. They took him inside the Maqam with the others. I put Walid on one hip and wrapped some possessions in cloth to carry on my head. My mother carried things, too, and we left the village along with everyone else. When I was walking, I kept turning my head to look back all the time, searching for some sign of my father. After several hours, I saw men coming towards us. I sat down, waiting to see if my father was among them. When they arrived, I saw my father and they started to tell how the Jewish soldiers had tried to kill them, but their bullets would not come out of the guns. They [the soldiers] were threatened by a large cow.

Every family member from the same generation with whom I spoke believed the myth of the cow attacking the soldiers, making sure

their bullets would not fire. They attributed this unusual event to Sabalan, the Holy Prophet, who protected them and saved their lives. The people of Sabalan invented this mythical tale of heroism to explain and make sense of having survived in horrifying circumstances. They were unable to face and cope with their new life conditions, which left them displaced or turned them into refugees. In addition to Sabalan's historic and religious significance, Maqam el Nabi Sabalan is a memorial site commemorating the historic dispossession and expulsion of the people of Sabalan from their village. It is also a site that commemorates the rescued lives of my grandfather and the other men who were with him.

After being expelled from Sabalan, my grandmother decided to find a shelter with her friend Nadaa. As my mother recalls:

> We went to Nadaa. She was a Druze widow from the El'azarni family in Hurfaysh. My mother and Nadaa were like sisters. Nadaa was raising her children alone. Nadaa had a daughter my age, Zmurud. I do not know if she is still alive. We stayed there a few months then later moved to Abu Nasib's house. He was one of the village leaders from Shanan. We stayed there until we bought our home and moved in. My father stayed in the mountains for almost three months. Only my mother and my sister, Atiff, knew his hiding place. They brought him food. When they [the Israelis] started counting the Palestinians, they [her mother with the help of Druze friends] made him registration forms. Then he came to Hurfaysh.

My grandmother's family, her husband's family and the rest of the village residents from Suhmata, like most of the residents in Sabalan, were expelled to Lebanon in October 1948.[12] However, my grandmother refused to leave. She found refuge in Hurfaysh and her husband hid in the mountains. My grandmother believed that the Israeli soldiers eventually would leave Sabalan and then they could return to their homes. In fact, the Israeli forces did leave, but they destroyed Sabalan and forbade its residents to return.

Nonetheless, my grandmother was determined to remain in her new home in Hurfaysh, albeit as a refugee from Sabalan.[13] In this and

other actions, she exercised her sense of agency in taking control of her life. She risked her life by hiding her husband in the mountains and secretly bringing him food. She also found the courage to get registration forms for her husband from a Druze leader when the Israeli authorities did a census of the remaining Palestinians in the area. In contrast, the other part of my mother's family went to Lebanon and settled in the Ein El Helweh refugee camp. My mother's sister Shahineh and her husband's family went to Rashideeh refugee camp in southern Lebanon, where they still live to this day.

My first remembered encounter with the Zionist–Palestinian conflict is from when I was 7 years old. In December 1965 I also learned my mother's story for the first time. A stranger came to our home and a few minutes later I heard my mother crying. This distressing sound still echoes in my head. I remember she disappeared from home for several days and came back dressed head to toe in black clothes. Walid, the same little brother that my mother tied to her hip when Israeli forces occupied Sabalan and expelled the village residents from their homes, had killed his elder brother, my uncle, Salih.

This traumatic story mostly has been silenced in my family. I used to ask many questions, but my mother would say she did not know anything. Nonetheless, a short version of the story is known within the family. It goes like this. Walid, then 17 years old, accused his brother Salih, who was in his late thirties, of collaborating with the Israeli intelligence agency Mossad. Walid warned Salih to stop. When he did not comply with this request, Walid accompanied Salih to work, where he was guarding orchards. Salih asked Walid to clean his gun. According to the story, Walid shot Salih by mistake. When he realized that his elder brother was dead, Walid fled to Lebanon, where he tried to join the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The Lebanese authorities caught, interrogated and jailed him, then later deported him and handed him over to the Israeli authorities. In his statement to the Lebanese authorities, he said that he killed his brother because he collaborated with Mossad. Once back in Israel, he went on trial and received a life sentence.

After his release from jail sixteen years later, I questioned my uncle Walid on a number of different occasions. However, I failed to get any concrete information from him about whether he deliberately killed his brother or did it by mistake. I also wanted to know if he was convicted of murder or manslaughter. This incident still causes my family a lot of pain and shame. My mother lives with shame because one of her younger brothers killed her older brother. She also lives with the humiliation of her older brother having been accused of collaborating with the oppressors – those who expelled him and his family from their village and destroyed their homes, thus turning them into refugees in their own homeland and abroad.

## Conclusion

The historical events that took place in Palestine in 1948 are essential constitutive elements in my own life and in my family life. Women's experiences of and stories about these events are silenced in two crucial ways: (1) because they are women living in a patriarchal society; and (2) because they are Palestinians living in Israel. It has been forbidden by the institutional Israeli apparatuses to discuss publicly or commemorate the collective Palestinian history of the events of 1948; Palestinian men are also silenced alongside Palestinian women. Instead, we tell these stories at home so that younger generations will know and remember them. Because these stories and others like them are largely undocumented, without the important tradition of oral storytelling they would otherwise be forgotten.

Despite women's rich life experiences and stories being banished on the basis of gender difference, I came to realize that they contributed just as much as men's in forming and shaping perceptions of Palestinian life. Far from worthless, then, it is these women's stories that I discuss and document in this book. Importantly, this serves to create equal space for these silenced voices – not as complementary to men's stories, but as worthwhile and deserving of visibility in their own right.

The stories reveal a convergence of contradictions and paradoxes: the dilemma of Riddaa's parents in trying to save their home at the cost of their son's life; the inherent injustice of Palestinian revolutionaries fighting for freedom, yet not welcoming a newborn baby girl, as in my mother's birth story; and the story of Badir, who saved her daughter's life by risking her own, but probably also committed infanticide in the process. All these stories, along with others, reveal women's agency, courage, heroism, dilemmas and difficult choices. Above all, these stories demonstrate that these women stand steadfast in their attitudes, beliefs and values, thus demonstrating the strength and as-yet untapped potential of their contributions to social and political life.

These stories also show how vital it is to explore history, society and politics not only from the perspective of elites, but from that of ordinary women (and men). Such perspectives contain a wealth of experience that is essential for better understanding and improving the everyday lives of Palestinians – women and men alike. Crucially, these stories reveal women to be active agents in constituting social relations throughout different historical periods. At the same time, these stories also help define the mechanisms of oppression that are used by dominating forces within Palestinian society. Documenting these stories therefore better enables Palestinian society as a whole to decide what to keep and what to let go of in relation to creating the future. For these stories express concrete realities in time and place that provide the foundations for rebuilding Palestinian life anew.

# TWO

# Life Story: Methodological Aspects

> When Nan finished telling me her story, I was filled with conflicting emotions. I was happy for her because she felt she'd achieved something. It meant so much to be able to talk and to be believed. (Morgan, 1988: 351)

It meant a lot to those elderly Palestinian women from Lyd and Ramleh who witnessed the Nakba in 1948 to be listened to, to have their experiences considered important, and to have their stories documented. Using the life story methodological tool was valuable for eliciting information, based on oral testimony. Among other things, this method subverts chauvinist archival texts and documentation, from which women are mostly absent. I also sought to document the experiences of these women in order to validate women as a reliable source of social and historical knowledge. The knowledge these women possess contributes to a clearer and more complete understanding of their subjective experiences, from their complexly situated position – as women, as elderly, as virtually illiterate and as citizens in the State of Israel who are narrators of historical events. In order to elicit information about the experiences of these 'ordinary' urban women, the life story methodology is most suitable for providing a clearer understanding of the forces that these women resist, challenge and comply with in their social and state political

contexts. It was apparent during the data collection process that 'Women's personal narratives … illuminate the significance of the intersection of individual life and historical moment; they address the importance of the frameworks of meaning through which women orient themselves in the world' (Personal Narrative Group, 1989: 22–3). The following chapter presents the methodological aspects that reveal the juxtaposition of the social and cultural context of elderly Palestinian women in relation to a female Palestinian researcher. It also discusses the location where these interviews took place – the contested cities of Lyd and Ramleh – because they are relevant in terms of shaping both the form and the content in which these women's life stories emerge.

I start with the socio-historical and socio-political background of the cities from which the interviewees originate.

## Lyd and Ramleh: Palestinian cities

In writing the pre-1948 history of Palestine and the Palestinians, most scholarly work constitutes Palestinian society as peasantry (Nashif, 2009). This ignores the fact that 30 to 35 per cent of this population were city dwellers. It also overlooks the historical context of the urbanization process that was going on throughout the Middle East, including Palestine. Historically, most academic writing (including texts authored by Palestinian writers) has focused on remembering destroyed Palestinian villages, while paying less attention to the destruction of Palestinian cities within the 1948 borders. For example, in his book *All That Remains*, Walid Khalidi (1992) commemorates the depopulation and destruction of villages in Palestine in the wake of the establishment of the State of Israel, but does not mention the cities that were deserted, deeming them forgettable.

The destiny of each of the Palestinian cities within the borders of Israel in 1948 was different. The cities of Safad Tabaria, Besan, Beer el Sabih, Isdud and al-Majdal were depopulated and cleansed of their Palestinian residents.

In contested cities, like Yaffa, Haifa, Akka, Lyd and Ramleh, only a handful of their pre-1948 residents remained, whether in these cities or other places within the borders of Israel, dispossessed and displaced. In addition, a few displaced Palestinians from other villages and towns that had been destroyed came to live in these cities. The cities of Nazareth and Shefaa'm kept their Palestinian residents, as well as absorbing other internally dispossessed and displaced Palestinians.

The cities of Lyd and Ramleh are located in the central part of Palestine/Israel, on the coastal plain close to the metropolis of Tel Aviv. Lyd has a history dating back to the fifteenth century BCE, when the Pharaoh Thutmos III, commander of the Egyptian forces, occupied the city and named it 'Raten'. During the Roman Empire, the city had its own coin. In 636 CE, Muslims took control of the city by agreement with the Byzantine Empire (Munayyir, 1997). Ramleh was founded by the Umayyed Caliph Sulayman Ibn Abd al-Malik in the eighteenth century and was the capital city of the Military District of Palestine (*Jund Filastin*). Both cities started to develop in the late Ottoman era, with the first railway line to Lyd constructed in 1892. When the British occupied the cities in 1917 they constructed the railway station, enlarged the railway track and established an airport in Lyd. In 1920 the British moved the regional capital from Ramleh to Lyd.[1]

According to the website Palestine Remembered and data from the British Statistical Bureau, in 1947 the populations of Lyd and Ramleh were 18,250 and 16,380 respectively.[2] In 1950 the Israeli Army Statistics Bureau reported that the remaining Arab populations of Lyd and Ramleh were only 1,050 and 400 respectively. The expulsion of the inhabitants and the refugees camped in and around Lyd and Ramleh was documented at between 50,000 and 60,000 people. Historian Nur Masalha cites Benny Morris, who reports that in the Dani Operation of July 1948, when the cities were occupied, head of operations Yitzhak Rabin ordered that the inhabitants of both cities should be expelled quickly without attention to age (Masalha, 2003: 29). According to geographer and planner Haim Yacobi (2004: 57),

'In the Dani operation 250 Palestinians were killed and about 20,000 inhabitants escaped or were forced by the Israeli army to leave the city. However the need for specific labor, such as the city railway workers in Lod, was the main reason for allowing 1,030 Palestinians to remain in the city.'[3] Palestinian inhabitants of both cities were ghettoized. As Yacobi (2004: 57) explains, 'The Israeli Military Administration gathered the remaining Palestinians in a surrounded enclosure, marked by a wire fence.' In both cities, the military confinement was ended in July 1949 (Yacobi, 2003: 77).

Today, of the 67,500 inhabitants in Lyd 16,800 are Palestinians. And in Ramleh of the 65,500 inhabitants 15,650 are Palestinians (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2008). Most of these Palestinians live in segregated districts and suffer from poverty, a deteriorating education system, and high rates of unemployment, violence and drug-taking.

## Women in the cities and marginalization

Ordinary Palestinian women from cities such as Lyd and Ramleh represent the weakest segment of the Palestinian population. They have been repeatedly marginalized: as women, as Palestinians, as elderly and as formally uneducated. The life in these contested cities since 1948 has exposed them to intensive daily confrontation with Jewish Israeli society, sharpening their marginality. The ongoing, protracted and violent clash between Palestinians factions, to which they belong, and the state in which they are citizens situates them at an intersection that only adds to their oppression and invisibility. At this intersection, past events, especially those of 1948, have a continued impact on their present daily lives.

I interviewed thirty-seven women (and six men) living in Lyd and Ramleh between 2002 and 2004 using the life story as a methodological tool to collect data. On average, an interview lasted between two and four hours. Following Bertaux (1981), I primarily used a 'snowball technique' to reach the women in my interview sample as they were difficult for me to access.[4] I requested a contact that was already known to me for recommendations of potential interview

candidates who fitted the criteria that I had determined. The two main criteria were: a minimum age of 65; and women currently residing in Lyd and Ramleh who were original inhabitants of these cities or who came to live there from other villages or towns as a result of events in 1948.

This book is based on the analysis of twenty interviews. Ten of the life stories belong to women who were original residents of Lyd and Ramleh, where they have continued to live since 1948. Another ten of the life stories belonged to a group of women who were uprooted from Yaffa, al-Majdal, Isdud, al-Mukhayzin, Summil, Wadi Hunayn, Kafr A'na and Zakariyya and found refuge in Lyd and Ramleh, where they still live.[5] Three of the women I interviewed had had up to four years of formal schooling, while the rest had not attended school at all.

During the data collection, I assured all of the interviewees that their identities would remain anonymous if they so wished. However, some of the women agreed to use their real names, which I note in relevant parts of the text. Otherwise, I have used pseudonyms.

## Text and context

Sandra Harding (1991: 126) argues that women are objects of 'otherness' and that knowledge about women's lives and experiences is at best partial; therefore 'research starting from their lives can be made to yield up clearer and more nearly complete visions of social reality than are available only from the perspective of men's side'. Therefore it becomes especially important 'to give voice to women who have been left out of mainstream research models and to recognize women's life stories as knowledge… Listening to the experiences of the 'others' leads to a more complete understanding of knowledge (Hesse-Biber, 2007: 12). Since the majority of the Palestinian women in the selected age range are mostly illiterate, 'Knowledge about women's life and experiences had to be culled from oral data' (Motzafi-Haller, 2000: 80). Ordinary Palestinian women's life stories manifest the many ways they survive and cope with the traumatic

experience from 1948 onward – how they resist the multilayered power dynamics, and how sometimes they comply with them on both personal and political levels.

During the data collection, I found that the women I interviewed have endured multiple forms of oppression and face multilayered devices intended to silence them and hide their experiences. As such, there is virtually no knowledge of ordinary Palestinian women living in cities like Lyd and Ramleh in Israel. The unknown and invisible knowledge of Palestinian women's experiences is silenced by the colonial state apparatus that negates their right to their home cities. It is also silenced by different forms of Palestinian patriarchy, in which Palestinian men and women cooperate. Adding to these silencing mechanisms is their elderly age and lack of formal education. This situation makes the life story method, as an oral tool, ideal for culling their subjective knowledge. It also reinforces the status of these women as reliable informants, in particular about sensitive historical topics, such as 1948.

In order to gain access to these informants, I approached a female student from Ramleh who had participated in a course titled 'Life Stories as Problem-Solving', which I taught with Professor Dan Bar-On at Ben-Gurion University in 2000–01. In this course, Palestinian students and Jewish Israeli students met together and told their life stories. I told the student from Ramleh about my interest in doing research on elderly Palestinian women's life stories and asked her to help me find women who might like to be interviewed. With a smile, she asked, 'Why do you look for heartaches? Don't you have enough subjects to investigate? Besides, really, tell me, are you looking for trouble?'

Nonetheless, the student gave me the name and contact details of Ablah, whom she said was over 70 years old and had 'real stories'. These 'real stories' were about Ablah's knowledge about events and experiences in 1948. When I telephoned Ablah I told her how I obtained her contact details and the purpose of my call. Her response to my enquiry was: 'It's very hard to tell you the story of my life. I sometimes can't tell it to myself. What you're asking for is not easy.

I'll talk to others but you should know that they won't tell you the truth. The truth is not easy to tell.' Ablah's inability to face her life story conceals her inability to talk in a public space. However, she got back to me with a handful of names and contact details of women and men from both Lyd and Ramleh, saying that she had spoken to them and they were willing to talk, and she strongly recommended that I interview all of them.

The young student who wanted to avoid heartache and Ablah, who confined her life story to silence, reflect the intricate position of Palestinian citizens in Israel. Both women conceive of their knowledge and of the life stories of old women as dangerous knowledge, because they relate to 1948 and might cause us, as Palestinian citizens in Israel, trouble. Therefore, out of fear of oppression, they consider it better to keep their knowledge in the domestic sphere at home and to remain silent in public. Ablah's statement, 'I sometimes can't tell it to myself', reflects the profound fear that she still continues to experience and the traumatic crisis she continues to live because of that knowledge. As Haim Chazan and Daniel Monterescu (2005: 199) argue, 'The category of elderly is crucial in terms of understanding the interrelations between biographical memory, collective memory and history, and to understand the attitude of the tellers toward the national narrative and the state.' Ablah is aware of her position as a Palestinian who worked in the Israeli education system and chose to keep her voice silent or at least to confine her life story to the domestic domain.

Ablah's reaction was not an exception. I reached a few other women who refused to talk. For example, I spoke with an elderly educated woman who had worked as a headmistress. She was over 80 years old and refused to tell her life story, saying, 'What is there to tell, about the huge extortion that happened to us. I'll give a clue if you understand: we used to say Yaffa–Tel Aviv, today we say Tel Aviv–Yaffa.' She also unsuccessfully tried to prevent her sister-in-law from telling her story. She attended her sister-in-law's interview and repeatedly silenced her on many topics, while in other cases she participated in the storytelling. Another lost opportunity was

when I reached a Lebanese woman whom I thought could provide a unique perspective. She was married to a man from Lyd during the 1930s. Before being interviewed, she requested that I speak with her daughter. The daughter, a college lecturer in her forties, strongly objected to the interview, saying, 'My mother is not a Palestinian. She is Lebanese.' All of my efforts to convince her that her mother fitted the criteria I used for choosing the interviewees (age and residence in Lyd in 1948) failed. I assume the educated daughter sought to silence her mother's story because she feared it would harm her position as lecturer in an Israeli college.

Several experiences I had reveal the different ways that men sought to control women's life stories and prevent them from being interviewed. One case I encountered after a woman had already agreed to be interviewed. During one of the interviews, Um Aziz's[6] mobile phone rang while she was in the midst of telling me how her two sons were killed when they were in their twenties. She was crying bitterly and could not answer the phone. Several minutes later her older son arrived and started shouting at me. He asked me to stop the tape recorder immediately and leave, while continuing to scream, saying that I was coming to open wounds that have not yet healed: 'You are hurting my mother, you are hurting her, go away.' His mother made him a promise not to talk anymore and I turned off the tape recorder. After a few minutes I left and did not return.

In a different case, I encountered a woman who thought that I was a social worker. Her son, who attended the interview, clarified the purpose of the interview, saying: 'Mom, she wants to hear the stories like those you used to tell us from the old days. Tell her these stories.' It was clear that the woman had talked at home about what happened in 1948. In contrast to the previous example, this son urged his mother to share some of the stories he had heard from her. By his intervention, he also contributed to the form and content of his mother's life story.

Another form of silencing women that I faced during the data collection was when the snowball technique was ineffective. I used

to stop in shops in Palestinian neighbourhoods and ask for help finding women I could interview. In all of these instances, the shop owners gave me the names of men, saying I could talk to them first and then talk to their wives. This reveals the view of these people, who were mostly men, that the independent voice of a woman is not perceived as deserving of academic inquiry. Alternately, being aware of the cultural codes of the society, they suggest a way to subvert these codes – first interviewing the men and then later the women. I suspect that my initial interpretation is more accurate.

Following the instructions of these shopkeepers, I managed to interview two couples. The first was Um Fathi[7] and her husband. When I asked Um Fathi to tell her life story, she said: 'I don't have a life story. I don't know how to talk like my husband. I only want to tell you the story of when we got lost.' In 1948, she was about 12 years old and her brother was about 8 years old. They were from Yaffa, but moved to Ramleh during the war. When the Israelis expelled the Palestinians from Ramleh, on the road Um Fathi and her brother became separated from their family and were lost in wheat fields for a week. They slept in the fields until they were found and expelled to Khan Younis. For Um Fathi, to have a life story means to talk, like her husband talked, about public activities (her husband was a member of the Communist Party). Otherwise she does not consider herself to have a life story to tell. However, it is interesting that the story she first chose to tell is one that significantly shaped her life due to the trauma of getting lost as a child.

Listening to her husband's life story and hearing him elaborate upon his prominent and very public activities in the Communist Party served to silence Um Fathi because the society she lives in does not regard her work and activities, which mainly occur in the domestic sphere, to have the same level of importance as her husband's 'public' activities. That Um Fathi lives in a society which values what men do more than what women do is exemplified in her hesitation in telling her own story, particularly in her opening remarks: 'I don't have a life story … like my husband.' However, by telling the story of her own experiences she is taking the opportunity to reclaim the

importance of her activities in the domestic sphere. Such activities are all the more valuable because of the devastation of family and community life in the whole of Palestinian society, a situation that has not yet been resolved.

The second couple I interviewed was Ayesha and her husband from Isdud. After I finished interviewing her husband, I asked Ayesha[8] to tell her life story. In contrast to the first couple, where the husband left us alone, the second husband stayed, intervening in and interrupting his wife's story many times. I decided to leave and come back to her later. When I returned, she repeated what she said the first time: 'I am telling you that this is the same. We have the same story.' I focused on her and repeated that I was interested in her life story. Ayesha repeated that 'My life story is his life story. We grew up together, in the same home. He is my cousin and we grew up in the same home.' When Aysheh finally started to tell her own life story, she focused on her experiences of fleeing to Gaza in 1948, coming back to Ramleh and raising her children in the near total absence of her husband. He was persecuted by the Israeli authorities due to his activities as a communist and was busy with Communist Party activities, which he described in his life story.

Interestingly, when both of these married women told their own stories, their husbands were not the main narrative focus. Rather, the main themes they raised were their experiences of dealing with daily routine and re-establishing their family life. Nonetheless, the interaction between these women and their husbands reveals the control that men tend to have over women in Palestinian society. However, in telling their own story and focusing on their own experiences these women in fact are reclaiming their sense of independent agency and revaluing the worth of their domestic activities. If we compare these married women to those who never married and the widowed women I interviewed, it was evident that single women demonstrate more freedom and control over their lives than married women do.

Whether by choice or coercion, the voices of those women who refused to be interviewed were silenced by at least two ruthless

forces: the Israeli colonial state apparatus and patriarchal apparatus of gendered power relations. In addition, these women do not have access to the means to publish their life experiences. Hutton (1993: 113) describes this mechanism of silence as 'the power of publicity to determine which voices will be heard in the public forum'. Thus a convergence of factors – age, lack of education, Palestinian identity within the context of Israeli citizenship – combine to ensure that these voices will not be heard in the public sphere.

Another form of silencing and oppression is illustrated by Raiefeh's[9] story. She points out the erasure of women from the written text when protesting the absence of her sister's contribution in the book Ispir Munayyer wrote about the efforts of the people of Lyd in defending their city.[10] Raiefeh said: 'My sister was a nurse and she worked with him, non-stop day and night in 1948. And poor one, no one mentioned that [her work]. He talked only about himself as the hero.' Raiefeh's story about her sister, Marit Karker, who studied to be a nurse in Egypt, demonstrates the oppression faced by Palestinian women – in this case by a Palestinian man, himself oppressed by the Israelis, who acts as an oppressor of his work colleague who is a Palestinian woman. By not documenting her efforts in defending the city, while documenting his own, he devalues what she did, not because of the value of the work but due to the fact that she is a woman. Munayyer deems her forgettable, erasing her and the contribution she made from history and memory, while simultaneously commemorating himself and his contribution.

As indicated above, women also took part in silencing other women's stories. However, the greatest forces of silence were sons, husbands and brothers. At the same time, I also encountered a few cases when men encouraged women to talk and other cases when they were not involved in a woman's decision to talk or not. In contrast, the six men that I interviewed made the decision to talk on their own and I did not encounter any intervention from anyone else in this choice. In the end, thirty-seven women dared to speak out.

## A story of her own

The oral arts and storytelling capacities differed from woman to woman. Some were more eloquent and articulate than others. Some were also freer to talk and made sure I documented them, while others spoke only minimally and hesitantly. Edna Lumsky–Feder (1994) claims that life story is influence by the narrator's capacity for articulation, openness, courage, reflection and fitness of memory. The stage of life during which a woman tells her life story affects how she tells her story, and where she places emphasis. It is also shaped by social, cultural and political contexts. All of these characteristics affect the form and content of the life story (Lumsky-Feder, 1994). In what follows, I show how these factors shaped the way in which women remember and tell their life stories, as well as the content they describe.

When I asked the women to tell me their life story, I frequently encountered expressions of confusion and embarrassment. Laughter, smiles and facial expressions were followed by statements of wonder, such as 'The story of my life? Whom would that interest?' 'Why is my life story important?' 'For what purposes do you want to hear my life story?' 'Who will be interested in my life story?' Later on in the interview process, these women overcame their initial puzzlement and raised different sorts of questions, such as: 'How many pages will you write?' 'What do you mean by life story?' 'Where do I start?' 'What do you want to hear?' 'What exactly do you want me to talk to you about?' The initial embarrassment of these women and their wondering why their life story is important demonstrates that they fail to recognize the importance of their experiences and the significance of themselves as sources of knowledge. This lack of recognition stems from their subjugated positions in the patriarchal order of Palestinian society. Their surprise only increased when I told them that I was doing research at university level and that the knowledge they provided me with would be documented in that context.

Similar confusion arose when I asked the interviewees about their age. At the time I collected the data, I estimate that the ages of these women ranged from 67 to 88. In fact, most of the interviewees did

not know the exact day of their birth. When I asked Um Nasri[11] how old she was, she proudly responded that a few days before she had celebrated her eightieth birthday with her family. But when I asked Salma[12] her age, she responded by saying, 'I don't know when I was born. But I remember that there was a big earthquake; according to my mom, I was then 2 years old.' Knowing that the earthquake happened in 1927, I assumed Salma was born in 1925. Fatma from Zakaria, whom I estimated to be over 80 years old, responded to the same question, saying: 'I was still in my mother's uterus when my father died. I was born five months later. My father died when my mother was still pregnant with me, but when the Jews came in I was a mother with three children.' Another way of identifying the women's age was through comments such as 'I was in fourth grade when the Jews came in.' To avoid embarrassment I refrained from asking for exact birth dates and was satisfied with the information they provided that allowed them to be included in the interview sample.

These forms of remembering their birth dates were the same regardless of whether a woman originated in a village or a city. These women were unaware of their exact ages because they belong to an oral and traditional culture. The women's advanced age sometimes contributed to their confusion, with a few insisting that I was a social worker. It was not always easy to convince them otherwise.

Those women who thought that I came from the welfare office began to tell their life story by discussing their health problems – that they had leg pain, could not walk, experienced shortness of breath or suffered from diabetes. In the last case, the woman asked: 'How could I look for a cure?' One woman even explained: 'I need a bed to sleep in and have no money.' She then went on to ask if I could help with this matter. After describing her health problems, Um Adnan[13] summarized: 'The doctors recommend that I go to Sarafand Hospital. I don't want to go to Sarafand. I don't understand Hebrew and I don't hear well.' Sarafand is the name of two Palestinian villages that have been deserted since 1948. The Israeli government hospital that is nearby is called Assaf Ha-Rofe. By referring to the hospital by the name of the deserted Sarafand villages, Um Adnan makes

the past present, remembering it in her daily life, and transmits her knowledge to the next generation.

## Creating the text

At the theoretical level, the life story method is considered to be an interaction solely between the narrator and the researcher (Rosenthal, 1993; Lieblich et al., 1998). Many scholars also draw attention to the active role of the researcher in shaping the story, as Sangster (2000: 92) points out: 'We must also acknowledge our own influence on the shape of the interview.' However, in this case study it was impossible to conduct the interviews between me and the narrator privately. As Abu-Lughod (1993: 15) remarks, 'A story is always situated; it has both a teller and an audience.' In this case, the audience was the woman's family.

During most of the interviews, family members of different ages were present. Some of them intervened, added, revealed, completed or asked the interviewee to elaborate certain topics or tell new information about them. As previously indicated, the active involvement of family members sometimes resulted in the narrator being controlled or silenced. When one interviewee talked about her father who was killed and wanted to elaborate the incident, her brother, who was also there, silenced her. Another woman wanted to talk about the life of a well-known woman in Lyd, called the Hajjeh.[14] However, her husband silenced her by saying, 'Oosh [Be silent], they will hear you. They are our neighbours.' When I asked her great-granddaughter about this same figure, she panicked and asked: 'How do you know about her? What do you know about her? Who told you about her?' She refused to offer any information about her. It is evident, then, that those family members who participated in the interviews helped shape and form each of the women's life stories.

### The researcher's role

Lieblich (2003) argues that the researcher, whether knowingly or not, influences the story. The questions the researcher poses and

her active listening take part in forming the life story. I initially opened the interview by saying: 'Tell me your life story.' I listened to the women's stories without interrupting them until they finished expressing their experiences. When they stopped narrating, whether during the interview or by the end of it, I would follow up on their stories, write my comments and ask further details on specific topics. For instance, 'You said that your husband was injured; can you give more details about it?' Since I was interested in historical events, I asked them to elaborate on these themes in particular.

Another aspect that contributed to the form of the life story was the interviewees' degree of interest in me. In the middle of telling their stories, for example, they would stop and ask me questions about myself, such as: 'You said that you live in Beer Sheva. Are you a Bedouin?' or 'Where do you send your children to school?', 'Do you have Arabic schools in Beer Sheva?', 'What language do your children speak?', 'Do they know how to read and write in Arabic?', and so on. My answers led the women I interviewed to talk about similar themes from their own experiences.

## The recording issue

Three women refused to be recorded, all of whom had retired from their work in the formal Israeli educational system. In the end, I did not interview them because recording was a necessary condition of the interview process to ensure accuracy. It was additionally important because of my position as a Palestinian woman doing research on this specific topic in an Israeli academy. Some of the women I interviewed were reluctant to be recorded, although in the end they did tell their life story.

The following dialogue is an example of the negotiations that occurred over the recording issue:

> Fatma: 'While you tell your life story, I want to record you.'
>
> Um Ismael:[15] 'Why, why are you recording my daughter?'
>
> Fatma: 'Because I am writing. I told you I am working on my Ph.D. I am studying at the university and listening to and recording women's life stories.'

Um Ismael: 'Just [for research]?'

Fatma: 'Yes, I am doing research and I am recording women when they tell me their life stories.'

Um Ismael: 'What life story?'

Fatma: 'Do you not want to tell me your life story?'

Um Ismael: 'Why mention my life story?' [laughing]

Fatma: 'Why mention it?' [laughing]

Um Ismael: 'May God bless you, what can I tell you?'

Fatma: 'What you want to tell me.'

The tape recorder was present in the mind of most of the interviewees, both those who wanted to be recorded and those who were reluctant. On 16 November 2003, I was invited by Raiefeh and her husband to lunch on the occasion of Saint George's festival, or what they called the Festival of the City of Lyd [Eid Lyd].[16] For the family, this was a big occasion to meet with extended family members from within the borders of 1948 and the borders occupied in 1967. I went to their home and started to talk about the celebration of Eid Lyd. But during our conversation about family issues, Raiefeh very firmly requested that I turn off the tape recorder so that we could talk. By that time, we had talked for more than an hour. Her request indicates that she was always aware that she was being recorded, so she weighed her words accordingly. As such, her story was partially shaped by the act of recording. When she wanted to talk more freely, she got annoyed by the restrictions she felt were imposed by the tape recorder and asked me to turn it off. Another woman noted that the tape recorder I used was similar to those used by Shaback, the Israeli internal security intelligence. She went on to ask where I had purchased the tape recorder, for how much, and could she purchase one like it or could I buy one for her.

In contrast, other interviewees were eager to have their life stories recorded and documented. For instance, when I asked Hanieh[17] from al-Majdal to tell her life story, she said: 'I'm not from here. I am originally from al-Majdal, Majdal-Askalan. I am from there. Is this recording?' When I responded that it was, Hanieh responded:

> Very good… Originally I am from al-Majdal and then after the war of '48, the last city was… [unfinished and silence] al-Majdal was the last city that fell in Palestine. Nowadays you can say 'ceasefire'. We migrated and walked by feet, swear to God, to Gaza. We migrated, ran away, migrated, planes, war, to where we walked! [We walked] by foot from al-Majdal to Gaza by foot.

At a different stage during the interview, Haliemeh[18] el Naqib started to talk about her brother, claiming he was poisoned in their vineyard and hinting that the state was responsible. Then she stopped and again asked if I was recording to be sure that the story was being documented. The third time she asked this question was when she was telling a story about the destruction of her grandfather's home in the old city of Lyd in the early 1960s by local authorities. Haliemeh asserted that those who destroyed her grandfather's home took gold that they found: 'While the tractor was demolishing, the gold started to fall on his head [tractor driver] and all was taken.'

Acknowledging the importance of documenting her stories, Haliemeh also reminded her brother, Abd el Majid, about a conversation they had about being two of the oldest people in Lyd. In conjunction with this, she also spoke about her fear that the information they have about life in Lyd before and during the events of 1948 would die with them and younger generations would not know about Lyd. 'Are you recording?' she asked yet again. Her effort to make clear that she wanted to be recorded also reveals what she wanted to be documented. She further remarked that sometimes she thinks of recording her stories to keep them for her grandchildren and asked if I know where she could purchase a tape recorder.

There is no doubt that the tape recorder played just as active a role in forming the life stories of these women as the researcher and other family members did, as well as the storytellers themselves. Although recording was a condition of the interview, mainly aimed at protecting my academic work, it also serves a broader purpose: it rescues the stories of these Palestinian women who witnessed the Nakba in Israel from oblivion and allows them to enter the public domain.

The question of meaning is vital to the storyteller and the researcher (Gubrium and Holstein, 2002: 135). However, it is also vital to all those who attended the interview and are actively involved in shaping these stories. The life story is personal, yet anchored in social contexts, culture and political circumstances. The ongoing violent political conflict in Palestine/Israel was present during the data collection and influenced the research. The lived reality of the conflict was expressed and reflected in women's private lives, and this experience thus shaped the content of their life story. Some of the women I approached asked me with laughter, others more seriously and directly: 'Are you with us or against us [*Inti mana walla Alina*]? Are you with us or with them? How do we know?'

Some of the women refused to be interviewed shortly after a suicide bombing in Israel or an Israeli assault on Palestinians had occurred. Later I went back to them and they told their story. During one interview, a woman burst into tears about what was happening in the refugee camp in Jenin in April 2002. Phrases such as 'days repeat themselves', 'Look, we do not need to tell our stories, only say what is happening to the Palestinians', 'the poor people of Gaza' and 'see the suffering of Rafah's people or Khan-Younis's people', were frequently uttered. For the interviewees, these statements linked what happened in 1948 to contemporary events taking place in the territories occupied since 1967. In fact, most of the interviewees have relatives who became refugees in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank after 1948. The connection of the past to the present is an inherent part of their lives and is intimately exemplified in their family story interactions and relations.

In 1967, family ties that had been broken apart by the war in 1948 were renewed. Many Palestinian families reconnected through marriage ties that maintain their extended family and community relations. These ties blur the physical borders that separate those within the 1948 border from those in the occupied territory from 1967.

These broader family ties were present in different ways in the stories these women told. Um Nasri from Ramleh, for instance, was

lamenting the absence of her oldest daughter, whom she had not seen for a long time, and said with tears in her eyes: 'My older daughter is married to a relative. They used to live here [in Ramleh] but they moved to live with the family in Gaza. Since the Intifada, I haven't seen her. No one has been able to go, nor could they come to us.' Um Dieb[19] from Kafr A'na, who lived in Lyd, offers another example. When I interviewed her on 13 October 2003, Israel had attacked the Rafah refugee camps, killing Palestinians and destroying houses. She repeatedly said: 'How poor my sister is, with the Israelis now attacking them in Rafah.' With sorrow and remorse infused with feelings of guilt, Um Dieb told me that her sister was angry with her, explaining:

> My sister in Rafah is disappointed with me because she asked for the hand of my daughter in marriage to her son and we refused. I don't want my daughter to go and live in a refugee camp there, I wish she understood. Because of the new law, her son couldn't come here [to Lyd], so she is angry with me. She gave me her daughter [*a'atatni bintha*] for my older son and they live near to me. They married before the law and now she feels betrayed since I am not giving my daughter to her son [*ma ahtithash biniti*].

Um Dieb refers to the Nationality and Entry into Israel Law (Temporary Order), passed by the Knesset on 31 July 2003, which bars Palestinians from the 1967 occupied territories from obtaining any residency status or citizenship in Israel through marriage to an Israeli citizen.[20] The law affects many Palestinian women and men who are already married. One time I visited Da'seh,[21] an interviewee from Lyd, but she was in Amman. When she came back, I spoke to her and she said, 'I went with my daughter to Amman. She is married to a Palestinian relative from the Gaza Strip and he was forced to leave his wife and son. For more than two years he hadn't see his son, so we went to Amman to allow the father to see his son.' During my first visit, Da'seh told me that her daughter and grandson live with her in her home in Lyd. However, her daughter's husband was living in Gaza and was banned by law from returning to Lyd. The daughter

did not want to move to Gaza, so the family is separated, living apart from one another.

Like Um Dieb's family, thousands of other Palestinian families have been affected by this law. Most people with Israeli citizenship refuse to accompany their spouses to the occupied territories from 1967, and their husbands or wives are not allowed to remain within the 1948 borders of Israel. The State of Israel has justified the law on the grounds of security. However, based on the life stories I heard, the Nationality and Entry into Israel Law (Temporary Order) is an example of how the legal system in Israel is recruited to fragment the land of Palestine and Palestinians. Preventing the formation of family ties through marriage also prevents Palestinians from having ties to their home cities from 1948. Consequently, they are forced to forget these cities, along with their right of return. The law is also a device designed to continue shattering and fragmenting Palestinian families and communities. Although many Palestinians with Israeli citizenship seek to remain within the 1948 borders for reasons of greater economic benefit, their refusal to leave is also a political statement: they want to stay in their home cities.

The forcible forgetting and erasure that the Israelis are trying to impose through the legal system and other means evokes powerful memories for Palestinians, reminding them that events in 1948, as well as the long-lasting consequences of these events, are still unresolved and unacknowledged. These factors feed into the ongoing conflict today and continue to influence the daily lives of the women who told me their life stories. Having no option to forget, instead they must remember.

### The researcher's view

In my quest to do this research, I found it obligatory to position myself explicitly as a subject of the research, along with the interviewees. A researcher's perspective requires a self-critical attitude in relation to how her own preconceptions affect the research (Lather, 1991: 67). As I stated in Chapter 1, my personal and family life were the major driving force behind my choice to undertake this research. However,

I never paid attention to the difference between the languages I use and the language used by other family members in relation to 1948. It was during my interaction with the women I interviewed that I started to pay closer attention to this issue, in particular the terms and phrases they used in association with 1948.

The first term that drew my attention to these linguistic differences was the word 'Nakba'. I found that the women from Lyd and Ramleh did not use this term to describe 1948, although I had adopted it. The term 'Nakba' is part of the intellectual, masculinist discourse of Palestinian nationalism. The second linguistic difference relates to the term 'refugee'. While I referred to all of the interviewees as refugees, in contrast they never used this term to describe themselves. Only then did I reflect upon my mother's life story and realize that she too never referred to herself as a refugee. Unlike the interviewees, I do not use the word 'migration' to describe the Palestinian expulsion from their cities, villages and land in 1948; nor do I use the word 'infiltrator' to refer to those Palestinians who tried to return to their homes.

I am aware of the differences in age, class, education, life experience and so on which distinguish me from the women and men I interviewed. As such, I appreciate the relevance of the argument made by Patricia Hill Collins (1990: 225), who asserts that 'depending on the context, an individual may be an oppressor, a member of an oppressed group, or simultaneously oppressor and oppressed'. I am mindful that the voices of these predominantly illiterate ordinary Palestinian women could easily be silenced by the differences that define my own position as a Palestinian woman. I also recognize that the voice of the researcher writing about these women's life stories is likewise silenced by the practices of exclusion and de-legitimization. However differently, both sides of this relationship (interviewees and researcher) nonetheless struggle to make their voices heard in a place where their right to speak is constantly undermined. Educated Palestinians who are also citizens in Israel are largely absent from the Israeli academy. Palestinian women researchers who focus on Palestinian historiography have found no place for their scholarly

work in Israeli academic institutions. By conducting this research in the Israeli academy, then, I am attempting to break the silence enforced on Palestinian women, both academic and non-academic, who are members of the Palestinian collective and citizens in the State of Israel.

I am also aware of Gayatri Spivak's observation (1994: 82–3) that the subaltern woman in colonial situations is doubly effaced, 'both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency where the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the contest of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is ever more deeply in the shadow.' Being mindful of our different positioning and power relations as Palestinian women, living through the protracted violent political conflict between the Palestinian collective, to which these women belong, and the State of Israel, in which they are unwanted citizens, multiplies their marginality. I therefore do not pretend to represent these women whose interpretations of historical events may be similar and/or different to mine. Rather, so far as is possible, I seek to create a legitimate place for these subjugated and repressed voices, a place in which their language can emerge intertwined with my own, demanding recognition, acknowledgement and responsibility as women and as Palestinians in the State of Israel, from the State of Israel, the Zionist movement and the international community.

## Conclusion

At the methodological level, the opportunity to hear an individual woman's life story is not only artificial, but almost impossible. The production of women's life stories emerges within their cultural, social and political contexts – the socio-political location of Palestinian women in Lyd and Ramleh, their place of origin, gender, class, nationality and age all converge to shape the features of their stories.

In the process of creating the oral text, the life stories of the women I interviewed are shaped by a range of different elements that combine to shape those stories – the active involvement of their

families, the tape recorder, the researcher, historical and contemporary events, and the interviewee's position as a Palestinian in Israel. In the writing process, however, it is only the researcher who selects the quotations and interprets them. This raises critical questions. Do these 'ordinary' women actually have their own voices and their own stories? As a feminist researcher, I aim not to reproduce gendered power relations in Palestinian society, but rather to dismantle these structures.

## THREE

# The Researcher's Story

In this chapter, I describe and analyse the approval process for my Ph.D. research proposal, upon which this book is based. This story is important for shedding light on both the research topic per se and the researcher's complex positioning in a set of power relationships defined by the Israeli academic system. This research project was designed to generate knowledge about the experiences of Palestinian women who lived through the war in 1948 that led to the founding of the State of Israel. These eyewitness accounts were collected and documented in written form by me, at the time a Palestinian doctoral candidate at Ben-Gurion University. The overall objective of my research was to make the voices of these women heard, rendering them visible in the public sphere of academia in Israel. Until now, these voices have been excluded from academic consideration.

In the complicated intersection of being a woman, a Palestinian, a citizen of the State of Israel and an academic researcher, my intention here is to focus on the question of academic freedom. I take a look at this problematic from within the context of the faculty of social sciences, where my research was based, and from the broader perspective of university politics as this relates to state ideology and national politics. In particular, I examine in detail how the approval process for my proposed research was an attempt to

subjugate both the research itself and the researcher via a Zionist political agenda.

Matthew Finkin and Robert Post (2009: 60), authors of the book *For the Common Good*, explain the importance of academic freedom, which they argue 'is necessary to produce new knowledge'. In my view, one of the primary objectives of academic freedom and the new knowledge it can produce is to strive towards a clearer and better understanding of the social phenomena that can result in attitudinal changes. The value of academic freedom becomes especially important when research aims to bring silenced and oppressed voices to the centre of attention in order to break down socio-political taboos. The work presented in this book it entirely concerned with the voices of Palestinian women who have suffered from multiple social exclusions and political marginalization since 1948. This is due to factors within their own Palestinian society, as well as the ongoing violent political conflict that defines Palestinian and Jewish Israeli relations within the State of Israel – a state that actively negates the rights of its Palestinian citizens to their homeland. The findings of the research, combined with my own experiences as a doctoral candidate at Ben-Gurion University, demonstrate that the war of 1948 remains at the core of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict.

## The approval process

On 5 February 2003 I submitted the first version of my research proposal, which was entitled 'Between Private and Collective Memory: The Case of Palestinian Women from Lyd and Ramleh'. Following university regulations this proposal was approved by my supervisor, Dr Lev Grinberg, and by the chair of the Doctoral Committee in the Department of Behavioral Science at Ben-Gurion University. After this initial phase of approval, my proposal was then sent to the Kreitman School of Advanced Graduate Studies, which was at that time headed by Professor Yigal Ronen. According to the regulations of the Kreitman School, the 'Research Program, which will serve as the basis for

the Candidacy Examination, is given to the Examiners by the Office before the Candidacy Examination' (5.3.2). Afterwards,

> The Candidacy Examination, which is held about one month after the Research Program is submitted, is meant to test the Candidate's approach to the topic and his/her adequate grounding in the research area and the relevant literature, and to measure his/her skills and suitability for such doctoral research. The length of this examination, how it is given and its composition, entirely or partially orally, are all to be predetermined by the Examiners. (5.3.3, Kreitman School Webpage, Ben-Gurion University website).[1]

Three months after submitting my Ph.D. research proposal (which had already been approved by my department), it became clear that the rules and regulations governing doctoral work at Ben-Gurion University would not apply to me. At this time, my supervisor informed me that there had been a long debate between the Department of Behavioral Science and Professor Ronen about my research proposal. He also told me that the rector of the university had become involved in this discussion. My supervisor added that Professor Ronen was very determined not to form a professional committee to examine my research proposal, thus breaching the regulations presented above. Given that Professor Ronen is an engineer by academic training, the grounds for challenging my research proposal could not be considered academic.

First, I will clarify the meaning of the conflict between the approval granted to my research proposal by my supervisor, and indeed my department, and the rejection practice of Professor Ronen, which reveals the structural power relations between departments within the University.

Based on the scholarly professional standards of the Department of Behavioral Science, Professor Ronen violated the value of academic freedom (and therefore the production of new knowledge). In apparently rejecting the decision to approve my proposal, he also undermined established university procedures. By ignoring these standards and the specialized academic expertise represented in my department, Professor Ronen subjected the entire department and its

staff to his own political agenda. He obviously attempted to impose this political agenda on me, too. His act of censorship constitutes a multilayered abuse of power intent on control and subordination.

Consequent to Professor Ronen's efforts to obstruct my research, my supervisor and I discussed the best way forward. Our shared objective was to allow me to conduct and write up my research without provoking further obstacles. My supervisor, Dr Grinberg, advised me to meet with Professor Ronen in person. I took this advice and made an appointment with him in May 2003.

While I waited for Professor Ronen, he opened his office door and asked, 'Are you Fatma?' 'Yes' I responded. He stared at me, invited me in and immediately said, 'I am so offended that an Israeli citizen refers to our Independence Day as the Nakba.' Professor Ronen's opening comment typifies the political stance of a Jewish Israeli who is raised and socialized according to Zionist narratives. Upon entering his office, I asked permission to document our conversation and took notes on our discussion.

During our meeting, Professor Ronen raised four main objections to my research proposal, and asked me to remove or alter the material accordingly. The first was the term 'Nakba' (or Catastrophe), which I had used to define the purpose of my research: 'This study focuses on the biographical memory of Palestinian women, from the cities Lod and Ramla, who are the first generation of the Nakba in the State of Israel (Kassem, 2003: 3). Professor Ronen repeated that he 'could not accept that an Israeli citizen refer to our Independence Day as the Nakba'. I responded by explaining, 'My research is about Palestinian women, from their standpoint.' He replied, 'But they are Israeli citizens.' I again argued, 'But they experienced 1948 differently from the Jewish Israelis, didn't they?' Regardless of my counter-arguments, he was very persistent in requesting that I change the word 'Nakba'. Determined not to give up the word 'Nakba' altogether, I suggested that I could use the term '1948' instead. However, I insisted that it would be essential to use the term 'Nakba' in some places in the text if the women I interviewed used it in their life stories. Professor Ronen accepted my compromise.

Censoring the use of the word 'Nakba' and demanding that I remove it from my research proposal is a political act that is deeply informed by the ongoing violent political conflict in Palestine/Israel. For Professor Ronen, the Palestinian women who witnessed the Nakba are citizens in the State of Israel, which is correct. However, for a Jewish Israeli holding an official academic position to insist that I use the term 'Independence Day' instead of the term 'Nakba' is a politically motivated imposition that is, moreover, burdened with unequal power relations. In doing so, he asserts his own ideology and political position while simultaneously ignoring the different meaning 1948 has for Palestinians – regardless of their status as citizens in the State of Israel. Professor Ronen therefore used his position of academic authority to enforce and substantiate a Zionist narrative while simultaneously delegitimizing and erasing Palestinian narratives. He sought to produce knowledge from his powerful academic position and control the production of knowledge by eroding academic freedom in order to contain this knowledge within a dominant Zionist narrative. In effect, this manoeuvre likewise serves to condemn as-yet untold Palestinian narratives to perpetual silence, and hence forgetfulness, within Israeli society.

Professor Ronen's political perspective indicates a broader insistence that Palestinian citizens in the State of Israel be conditioned to detach themselves from their own history and memory; to forget the Nakba and instead use his preferred term 'our independence day'. By using the inclusive pronoun 'our', he reflects blindness towards Palestinians and what they think and feel about what happened to them in 1948. His demand that I erase the word 'Nakba' from my research proposal indicates further that he is taking sides with the official and ideological state attitude and its discourse against an approach that values academic freedom in research and thought (despite his position of authority in an Israeli university). Moreover, by demanding the exclusion of the word 'Nakba', Professor Ronen reproduces in the Israeli academy the same denial of responsibility exhibited at the official state level in Israeli society for what happened to the Palestinians in 1948, especially those who became Israeli citizens.

The second issue Professor Ronen raised was posed as a question: 'Why are you using the term 'Hebraizing' for the names of cities, neighbourhoods and villages after 1948?'[2] I responded by explaining that this relates to a conflict in the late nineteenth century (before 1948), when the names of places were pronounced in a slightly different way and the new Hebrew names given to most cities were pronounced in a way that more resembled Arabic pronunciation. He then read aloud a sentence from my research proposal:

> Some of the names [of the cities] are slightly Hebraized, for instance, Akka–Akko, Safad–Zfat, Ramleh–Ramla and Lyd–Lod. In addition, Jewish settlements established on the ruins of villages were named with very slight Hebraization of the previous names like: Safurieh–Zipori, Berim–Beram. (Kassem, 2003: 14)

Professor Ronen replied that these names go 'back to their Jewish origins'. I asked if all place names have Jewish origins, commenting that I did not know this 'fact', given that so many groups ruled the region, from the prehistoric period to the present, and that they gave different names to places during these different eras. I further explained that my research focused on the history that a select group of women had themselves witnessed or heard about – that is, more recent history of the area and not remote history. With some irritation, he nonetheless firmly asked me to change the term 'Hebraizing' and instead write that the place names referred back to their Jewish origins. The alternative, he said, was that I should entirely erase any sentences that referenced this particular theme. By stating that he denies the right of the Palestinians to their homeland, he is essentializing the right to the land of Palestine/Israel as exclusive to the Jewish people.

In doing so, Professor Ronen sought to locate my research in relation to an assumption tailored to Zionist ideology, which co-opted the premiss that Jewish people have an exclusive historical and religious right to Palestinian territory. This differs markedly from Jewish biblical history, which indicates that many different people lived in Palestine/Israel and that Jewish sovereignty over the Land of Israel is

not ultimate or compulsory. At the academic level, Professor Ronen sought to impose a structure for the production of knowledge that is confined to a specific ideology he endorses. All other possibilities were to be eliminated from the text. This knowledge was contained and represented by frameworks of power, domination and hegemony which were given the status of a scientific truth (Said, 1978). In other words, this is to create what Foucault (1980) calls a 'regime of truth'. At the political level, this implies that Palestinians are not native to the land, but rather must accept that they negate their own historical entitlement to the land of Palestine and accept Zionist ideology that claims that Palestinians are people who are outside the land, the state and history. Consequently, Palestinian citizens in Israel are expected to deny their own entitlement to their homeland.

The primary assumption behind Professor Ronen's demand that I use the phrases 'back to its Jewish origins' and 'war of independence' is that, as the indigenous population, Jewish Israelis righteously liberated the land from Palestinians, who are not indigenous to this territory. In this, Professor Ronen adopts the official position of the State of Israel, which fails to acknowledge and take responsibility for the expulsion of Palestinians in 1948. Unlike any other colonial state, Israel is the only one that asserts its entitlement to the land based on historical originality and reference to a transcendental power (God) in order to negate the rights of Palestinian natives. Professor Ronen's insistence on using terms that go 'back to their Jewish origins', instead of the term 'Hebraizing', is also an example of his co-opting of Jewish religious beliefs to serve a secular Zionist ideological agenda. Despite the inherent assertion of Zionist ideology in a phrase like 'return to Jewish origins', he could not escape the reality of the Arabic presence, which is what made 'return' a necessity.

From Professor Ronen's perspective, the state, national identity and Jewish religious belief are tightly linked together. Thus the native Palestinian population, which is outside the Jewish religion, is also outside national identity and consequently not to be regarded as equal citizens of the state. At best, Palestinians are second-class citizens.

Professor Ronen's third demand was that I eliminate the phrase 'first generation since the Nakba' (Kassem, 2003: 16, 18). He emphasized during our meeting that this expression was incorrect. When I asked why, he simply said, 'It is a reference to the Holocaust.' In Holocaust studies, the terms 'first generation', 'second generation' and more recently 'third generation' are common expressions. By insisting that I not refer to subsequent generations of Palestinians in relation to the Nakba, Professor Ronen made an exclusive claim on this phraseology, restricting its relevance to the Holocaust. This has a twofold effect. On the one hand, it yet again seeks to silence me. On the other, it suggests that Jews were the only group of people to suffer as a result of the Holocaust; as such, no one else is entitled to use similar references. This is to claim the status of eternal victimhood.

When I was a child, my father repeatedly spoke about the suffering of European Jews in empathetic terms, emphasizing the horror and atrocities they faced during the Nazi regime. He used to say, 'Poor Jews saw horror from the Germans… The cruelty of Nazi terror made them forget about the milk that they suckled from their mothers.' The phrase 'forget the milk they suckled from their mothers' is an Arabic proverb depicting a personal trauma so intense that it makes the person forget the basics of his or her physical and/or emotional sense of security. The milk they suckled from their mothers is a metaphor for the provision of these securities. He also made other, more critical comments, protesting that 'what the Jews experienced from the Nazis took the passion from their hearts'. I grew up hearing these kinds of statements and we occasionally talked about the Holocaust at home.

Later, as a student at school, I studied the history of the Holocaust. In high school, I did a matriculation exam on the subject. As a high school history teacher for fifteen years, I taught my Palestinian students about the Holocaust, which I had further studied at university during my teacher training. In Israel, the Holocaust is an obligatory subject. I learned even more about the Holocaust from many years of experience in dialogue groups between Jews and Palestinians,

at both local and international levels. Throughout my life, I have acquired a deep awareness of the Holocaust from a variety of different perspectives, ranging from the academic to the emotional, to the political. It is clear to me that the Palestinian–Israeli conflict has been influenced directly and indirectly by the Holocaust.

The Holocaust issue is still very much alive in Israel. However, a misleading political discourse prevails among the Israeli public, linking the establishment of Israel as a Zionist state directly to the Holocaust. Four decades earlier, in the late nineteenth century, the Zionist movement was engaged in establishing Jewish colonies and buying land in Palestine. Because the Holocaust is a highly sensitive issue, I did not wish to get involved in such a discussion with Professor Ronen. In particular, I wanted to avoid any accusations from him of anti-Semitism. Nor did I want to be accused of drawing an analogy between the Zionist regime and the Nazi regime. My fear at that moment was paralysing. I kept silent and nodded my head, signalling agreement to delete the phrase. The influence of, and the use and abuse of the Holocaust, in the context of Palestinian–Zionist conflict is ever present. However, it does not receive the academic attention it merits.

Professor Ronen's fourth demand was that I eliminate the following sentence from my research proposal: 'The premiss is that individual life stories and the experiences they convey enable one to learn about the culture, the society, the economic and politics of the era that these stories witness and describe' (Kassem, 2003: 17). Reading this sentence aloud, he then asked, 'Why do you think this is important?' I responded by saying,

> We learn from the past, don't we? The study is about women's life stories from the vantage point of these women, thus the research enables us to learn how private and collective gendered memory intersects. My hypothesis is that they probably will describe their life within the social, economic, political and historical context of life in the cities and the villages where they lived. That way we could learn about life in these locations.

Again he firmly said that I must delete this sentence from my proposal if I wanted it to be approved. With this, it was clear to me that he was determined to erase the history and memory of Palestinian women, in particular the culture and society, economics and politics of their cities before 1948, as narrated and written by a Palestinian woman researcher. Clearly, Professor Ronen was using his position of authority to prevent me from generating knowledge about the experiences of these women, thus rendering Palestinian history in these locations forgotten, unrecorded and undocumented.

Professor Ronen did not forget to remind me again that if I wanted to continue doing my research, I would have to make these requested changes. Otherwise he would convene an internal committee to re-evaluate my research proposal.

Towards the end of the meeting, when I was heading for the door, Professor Ronen said, 'I want you to know that I am left wing politically. It is important for me that you know that this is about academic standards and not politics.' Under the guise of scientific truth, seen from his axiomatically Zionist position, Professor Ronen questioned my competence as an academic researcher. Listening to his demands was a humiliating experience, at both an academic and a personal level. I think that he gave me permission to document the meeting via writing notes because he thought that I would submissively write down what he asked me to change, so as to make the corrections in complete compliance with his political indoctrination. At the meeting, I felt that he was telling me, 'I am the sovereign heir and you must comply with my sovereignty, otherwise you will not be able to do research.'

After our meeting, I received six copies of my first research proposal in my student mailbox with instructions to make the 'corrections' he had requested. The letter indicates that 'following your conversation with the school's dean, your research proposal is returned to you'. To my surprise, among these documents I found a letter addressed to the office of Ben-Gurion University's legal adviser, Paul Roisman, with an official date stamp indicating that he had received the letter on 23 March 2003.

The letter stated, 'Following your conversation with Professor Ronen, attached is Ms Kassem's research proposal for your legal opinion.' When I saw this letter, I reacted with shock and fear. I hid it from my husband, who works in the Health Department at the university and was at that time at a decisive moment in the final process of securing a tenure-track position. I worried that he might lose this position because I was perceived as a 'troublemaker'. If he lost this opportunity, we would lose the primary source of our family income.

I was haunted by the question as to why a research proposal such as mine required a legal opinion. I am not a criminal. I was not proposing to do research on the nuclear weapons programme in Dimona. Instead, I merely wanted to document the life stories of Palestinian women who had lived through events in 1948. I wondered why Professor Ronen had located me in such a suspicious and criminal position.

Knowing that the rector, along with other high-ranking officials in the university (some of whom knew me personally), were involved in this process only deepened my fear. In particular, I was greatly concerned about those with whom I had friendly relationships. Generally, these relationships – however friendly – are based on a tacit agreement to avoid talking about events related to 1948 and its aftermath. I have never asked my Jewish friends and colleagues about their family experiences of this time period, nor have I voluntarily offered them insight into my family history. Thus I felt guilt mixed with moral remorse at having 'betrayed' my Jewish friends and colleagues by not revealing to them my 'true Palestinian face'. In other words, I knew that in order to be accepted I must detach myself from my Palestinian national identity and accept the exclusive rights of the Jewish people over their forefathers' land, In short, I must deny my own right to my homeland.

To continue writing about Palestinian women's life stories and revealing the truths that this research uncovered, my research simultaneously unveiled my own political attitude, which did not make life at the university any easier. Knowing that academic monitoring

organizations were established and very actively watching what researchers study, write and say only increased my fears.[3]

One of my research proposals that I received via mail was highlighted with yellow marker. In addition to the four themes discussed above, a few other parts of the text were highlighted. The marked words, sentences and paragraphs were identical to the themes discussed in the meeting with Professor Ronen. For example, the following sentences were highlighted: 'The research investigates the experiences of women before, during and after the Nakba, and how these experiences express, shape and constitute both these individual women and collective Palestinian memory' and 'The aim of this research is to make the silenced and forgotten voices of Palestinian women heard and visible' (Kassem, 2003: 18). I can understand that Professor Ronen might have political anxiety over such a sentence, but by academic standards what I actually intended to do was transform the oral life history of Palestinian women into a written document. Since Hebrew is the language of Ben-Gurion University, I wrote my doctoral dissertation in Hebrew. Even if I had been permitted to write this text in Arabic, most of the women I interviewed would not have been able to read it because they only had up to four formal years of schooling or they were illiterate. However, writing in Hebrew at Ben-Gurion University, I sought to generate knowledge about Palestinian women and make their voices legitimate and visible in order to factor their perspectives and experiences into efforts for social and political change in Israeli society, as this could impact on both Jewish Israelis and Palestinians.

Another sentence in my research proposal that was not discussed in the meeting, but highlighted in yellow, was: 'The women's role and the actions of those who stayed in their homeland without a state after their experiences of the national trauma have not received academic attention' (Kassem, 2003: 3). This is similar to his insistence that I use the term 'our independence day' instead of the term 'Nakba', whereby he questioned the right of the Palestinian women to their homeland. In particular, Professor Ronen appeared to be annoyed by the use of the terms 'national trauma' and 'their homeland'.

He also highlighted the following sentence: 'The state of Israel and its apparatus give legitimacy, control and mastery of information to constitute and form a Eurocentric–Zionist collective memory that suits the historical actuality moulded after the 1948 war. In parallel, it tried obsessively to erase Palestinian memory materially and spiritually' (Kassem, 2003: 14). Later he marked the sentence: 'This research challenges the patriarchal regime with all its apparatuses and institutions' (Kassem, 2003: 18).

My query is why Professor Ronen did not pose any academic questions around these issues. Instead, he tried to prevent any chance of generating knowledge that might challenge Zionist axioms, the state regime and how its formation influenced Palestinian life. He insistently and consistently reminded me where I lived – under his sovereignty and subordinated to Zionist state structures and ideologies, the university being one of these apparatuses of power. His fear of the new knowledge that my research might generate is exemplified by another sentence that he highlighted: 'This demonstrates that the total erasure of the collective Palestinian memory from either Jewish or Palestinian consciousness is impossible' (Kassem, 2003: 15).

Under the guise of defending academic standards and truths (despite asking me no questions to this effect), Professor Ronen insisted that the practice of producing knowledge that is constituted through research at the university must be done from the starting point of Zionist ideology as a primary axiom. In doing so, he tried to enforce a system of ideas that largely remains unchallenged and therefore unchanged.

Since new knowledge may lead to new attitudes, Professor Ronen tried to prevent such a topic from being investigated by a Palestinian researcher. Importantly, however, these same topics have been and continue to be researched by Jewish Israeli sociologists, historians and others. The question is why a Palestinian doctoral candidate researching Palestinian women's construction of historical events in an Israeli academy has faced such difficulties. This relates to the power/knowledge axis that creates 'regimes of truth' and the way these regimes reproduce and discipline subjects into dominant modes of thinking and acting (Foucault, 1980).

Based on my experiences and observations, most of the Jewish Israeli social scientists who undertake research on similar topics are perceived as 'objective' and 'scientific' at both local and international levels, even when they criticize Zionist axioms. This perception is due to the 'fact' that they are seen as part of the Western world and thus granted academic integrity. As Westerners, most Jewish Israeli researchers have 'flexible positional superiority' (Said, 1978). In contrast, a researcher from the Orient does not have such credibility. The flexible positional superiority of Jewish Israeli researchers allows them to sustain and maintain their domination as part of the victorious Eurocentric Israeli academy. A Palestinian researcher dealing with the same topics is perceived locally and globally as being 'subjective' and accordingly stigmatized with this label (although, more recently, this has ceased to be a 'bad' word in the social sciences), but also as 'emotional', and charged with 'promoting propaganda and not research', and so on. When a Palestinian researcher is a woman, her 'orientalizing' is multilayered – as a woman, as a Palestinian and as a non-Western academic.

Jewish Israeli historian Ilan Pappe (1999: 211) writes of Palestinian historians:

> After years of being branded as mere propaganda, major Palestinian claims were proved to be acceptable on the basis of professional historical research. On the other hand, there was something disturbing and annoying in these claims becoming valid only after Israeli Jews made them, as if the Palestinian historians were suspect of non-professionalism.

Although my research is not within the discipline of history, Pappe's claim is also valid for most of the social sciences. A female Palestinian researcher's reliability, especially when investigating sensitive topics such as those of 1948, is doubly questioned.

At the academic level, I did not expect Professor Ronen, a natural scientist in the field of nuclear engineering, to question the reliability of elderly Palestinian women as informants or to overtly question the method of the research. Professor Ronen may value archival data, but I circumvented this type of data by collecting information from these

women directly. I also spoke with them in Arabic, which Professor Ronen does not know. In such a situation, he may have felt as if he had 'lost his upper hand' (Said, 1978) relative to a Palestinian researcher. Feeling a loss of control, he tried to regain it by imposing changes in terminology and threatening me with the university legal adviser. In sending me the letter with the returned proposal, Professor Ronen imposed a form of thought terror on me, trying to intimidate me as a young Palestinian researcher in order to enforce a production of knowledge that was in keeping with his political agenda.

From his position of power – as dean of the Kreitman School, part of the sovereign Zionist state, equipped with the transcendental power of God, claiming unquestionable exclusive entitlement to the land, as well as historical precedence and the Jewish trauma of the Holocaust – Professor Ronen set out to force me to use a specific language defined by his terms for my research. Consequently, my own choice of language would be erased. From his position of power, he insisted on a production of knowledge better suited to his own political and ideological agenda. In the end, according to Professor Ronen, the production of knowledge is not oriented to greater understanding. Rather, it is geared towards substantiating Zionist rhetoric and discourse.

This experience has influenced my academic writing as a researcher. In particular, Professor Ronen, in his efforts to silence and censor my words, only sharpened my awareness of the importance of language. Alongside this, I also learned to strategically censor and silence my own voice in order to subvert this power relation so as to give voice to the words of the Palestinian women I interviewed and bring their knowledge to the public.

Following my meeting with Professor Ronen, I submitted my research proposal with the some of the required changes, though not all of them. The changes I made failed to satisfy him and my second proposal was rejected and returned to me. During this time, my supervisor informed me that a new dean would soon be appointed to the Kreitman School and advised me to wait until he took up the post. Following my supervisor's advice, I made minor changes to my original research proposal and resubmitted it. A few weeks later,

the new dean convened an examination committee to consider my proposal. I subsequently learned that the committee's report included a letter condemning Professor Ronen's procedures and behaviour with respect to my research. Also I learned from my supervisor that the rector considered Professor Ronen to have been acting without a mandate. In compliance with the academic standards and procedures in place at Ben-Gurion University, my research proposal was accepted with only minor changes.

Before ending this story, I wish to acknowledge that I received empathy and support from both my supervisors. Nonetheless, I remain puzzled by the ambiguities of my experience. On the one hand, Professor Ronen created a number of obstacles for me. On the other, I received valuable support from my advisers and the examination committee. The question I would like to pose is this: why do Palestinian researchers in the Israeli academy who seek to investigate topics similar to those undertaken by their Jewish Israeli colleagues face the possibility of experiences like mine? To avoid yet another experience of oppression similar to that which I experienced with Professor Ronen, I consciously decided to exclude this story from my doctoral dissertation when I submitted it for evaluation. I wanted my Ph.D. work to be judged fairly and I wanted to establish my academic life as a researcher within the Israeli academy. Actually, I found myself doing exactly what Palestinian women from Lyd and Ramleh did: they made a commitment to self-enforced silence as a result of their disastrous experiences in 1948 in order to survive and rebuild their families and homes; I consciously imposed a partial silence on my own words in order to make these voices heard in public.

## Conclusion

Today there is an obsessive concern with the Nakba both at the political level and in the public sphere in Israel. For instance, Israel's Beiteinu Knesset party proposed a law known as the 'Nakba Bill' banning the use and commemoration of the term.[4] On 10 January 2010 a cabinet-level legislative committee discussed the proposed

law, which also requires MKs to take a loyalty oath, declaring their support for Israel as a Jewish, Zionist and democratic state. I shall not discuss the inherent contradictions between the terms 'Jewish', 'Zionism' and 'democracy', but rather focus my attention on the parliamentary and legislative initiatives targeted at Israeli Palestinians as part of an ongoing deprivation of their concrete and symbolic entitlement to their homeland, harming their rights at all levels.

Addressing disputes about use of the term 'Nakba' in the Israeli school curriculum and textbooks for both Palestinian and Jewish Israeli students, Education Minister Gideon Saar said to a *Guardian* reporter: 'The objective of the education system is not to deny the legitimacy of our state, nor promote extremism among Arab-Israelis' (Black, 2009). Saar's statement exemplifies the relevance of 1948 as one of the core issues of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. His statement also represents the most recent denial of responsibility for Israeli aggression towards Palestinians since 1948, thereby enhancing the idea of an exclusive Jewish right to the land of Palestine/Israel as natives claiming their forefathers' land. These incidents are part of the lived experiences of 1948, which haunt Jewish Israeli politicians and the greater public with a ghostly form of knowledge.

At the academic level, various disciplines have dealt with the Nakba. However, the vast proportion of the material and research has been undertaken by Jewish Israel researchers, historians, sociologists and anthropologists, among others. Most Palestinians who have done research on this topic have found themselves outside the Israeli academy, and consequently outside the state. The historian Nur Masalha and the sociologist Nahla Abdo are primary examples. Furthermore, some Israeli scholars have used terms such as 'Zionism' and 'Hebraization', particularly in relation to Palestinian geography (Benvenisti, 2000). Why, then, is use of such terms problematized when a Palestinian researcher employs them? This indicates that the freedom of research by a Jewish scholar in the social sciences is much wider in comparison to that of a Palestinian colleague. This is due to the Jewish Israeli researcher's position as part of a dominant collective in the Zionist state democracy, culture and ideology.

In contrast, since 1948 Palestinians in Israel have belonged to a defeated collective. In the State of Israel, moreover, they are categorized as 'Arab Israelis', a title that reflects their subservience to the Zionist state. Accordingly, their freedom of research is subjugated to a Zionist state agenda. When a Jewish Israeli scholar makes a critique of Zionist history, contemporary state policy or ideology, s/he is practising the freedom of research as evidence of Israeli democracy. However, a Palestinian researcher who addresses similar topics is accused of being a traitor or anti-Semite, among many other labels. When a 'liberal' Jewish Israeli scholar presents findings that testify to the atrocities committed by the Jewish Zionist Brigades in 1948 – like Benny Morris, Tom Segev or Meron Benvenisti – their work is treated as reliable academic scholarship, even brave and courageous. But when the same findings are presented by a Palestinian scholar, they are treated as suspicious, biased and emotional.

Based on my personal experience, I also have discovered that the voices of Palestinian women scholars are less valued than their male counterparts. This reflects hierarchical and gendered power relations within Palestinian society. Academic settings therefore reflect structural power relations that are defined in relation to the colonized and the colonizer. Those in power continue to weaken the voices from the margins, thus reproducing structured power relations. There is, then, additional significance in documenting Palestinian women's life stories by a Palestinian woman researcher.

Academic freedom in researching such sensitive topics as 1948 is necessary to enable the production of knowledge that can help foster greater understanding about the ongoing conflict. There is no doubt that the experiences of 1948 play a constitutive role which continues to dramatically influence Palestinian and Jewish Israeli lives today, albeit in entirely different ways. These experiences are therefore of fundamental importance to the collective past, present and future of both peoples. Academic freedom related to research on this topic is necessary for enhancing existing knowledge and generating new knowledge that is of value both in the Israeli academy and in society as a whole.

# FOUR

# Language

> What is missing in your tale, Aunty, is that I must learn a language with which I can 'speak'. A language with which I can find my family 'self'. Language too has its dark nooks and crannies. I am now searching for those spaces in your tale and in everything around me. (Rhoda Kanaaneh 1995: 134–5)

This chapter explores the terminology and colloquial language used by ordinary Palestinian women from Lyd and Ramleh as they narrated historic events. I show how they used particular words to establish realms of personal and collective memory, resisting the delegitimization of their history as Palestinians in a Zionist state and challenging the absence of women from Palestinian national history. Paying close attention to women's choice of terminology helps map the significance of events in their lives. Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis (1991: 44) asserts that 'language is an invisible force that shapes oral texts and gives meaning to historical events. It is the primary vehicle through which past experiences are recalled and interpreted. Attention to language, its variation and categorical forms, enriches narrative text analysis beyond strictly linguistic concerns.' We are born into the structure of language and use it to generate meaning. We cannot produce meaning unrelated to language because our ability to experience ourselves is impossible without language; it is

the tool that defines the boundary between the things we can think of and those we cannot think of (Hall, 1996).

As this chapter deals with narrative, and because language is constructed within the masculine realm, women have continuously found themselves positioned outside of language, and yet they are nonetheless 'responsible for preserving culture' (Lakoff, 1975: 55). In narrating unresolved past events that directly shape their present lives, the language of these older Palestinian women and their descriptions of historic events reflect the contours of both private and public spheres. As Spivak (2007: 9) argues,

> [Language] works as a negotiation of the public and the private … it is historical, it has a history before our births that will continue after our death. Therefore it is impersonal and 'public' in its grandeur. Yet … we learn this shared public thing, this mother-tongue, as if it is made by ourselves, our very ownmost thing.

In this negotiation between the private and public, the women I interviewed constitute a political mirror of their realities and their terminology edifies their roles as active agents who make history.

Patricia Hill Collins (1998: xxi) notes that 'A choice of language transcends the mere selection of words – it is inherently a political choice.' Thus, not only does language negotiate the public and the private, it is itself an indispensable negotiating tool. My central argument in this discussion is that the terminology the interviewees used with regard to the historical events they witnessed or heard about constitutes a site of commemoration and resistance. Their language is complex and does not give rise to monolithic thinking. On the one hand, their terminology resists against Zionist terminology and historiography. But, on the other, it likewise challenges Palestinian nationalist terminology. The language of these women also maintains the gender, social and political power relations in which they are caught, but simultaneously challenges and undermines these relations. Finally, their use of language as an alternative site for memory and commemoration indicates that these women are active agents in creating Palestinian history in the face of its delegitimization within the Zionist state.

## Before entering Lyd and Ramleh

When I began my research, I first telephoned Um Mhimad,[1] a woman from Lyd. I started the conversation by greeting her in Arabic. Um Mhimad answered in fluent Arabic, leaving no doubt in my mind as to which language I should use during the interview. I followed a similar procedure with all the other interviewees, addressing them in Arabic, which is also my own mother tongue. All of the women told their life stories in Arabic.

Once we had set a time and place for our meeting, I asked Um Mhimad for directions. As I did not understand her explanation and was afraid of getting lost, I asked for her exact address. 'I live on Salah al-Din Street', she said, and immediately laughed and corrected herself: 'No, I didn't mean to say "Salah al-Din Street". No one will know where that is. They call it "Herzl Street" today.'

This replacement of the name 'Salah al-Din' (although not an Arab, he is nonetheless a figure in Islamic history who symbolizes Arab, Palestinian and Muslim territory) by that of 'Herzl', a figure from Jewish Zionist history, is indicative of the ongoing Zionization of Palestinian/Arab territory, where renaming streets has been a facet of the victorious Zionist ideology since 1948. Both names are masculine and therefore illustrate how commemoration reproduces and shapes 'human' history in the form of male domination. At the same time, in Um Mhimad's context, use of the name 'Salah al-Din' indicates that she is resisting the erasure of Palestinian history as this is represented in the name of her street. It symbolizes resistance to and counter-memory against Zionist renaming that denies her heritage, which she refuses to forget. Her recollection of this Arab street name expresses her desire for recognition and legitimacy for collective Palestinian history and memory.

## On the gates to the cities

A large road sign welcomes visitors approaching the entrance to the cities of Lyd and Ramleh. Their names are written in three languages:

Hebrew, Arabic and English. What drew my attention was the name of the city of Lyd, which is written with Arabic script, but using the Hebrew spelling, 'Lod' (לוד) and not the Arabic spelling 'el-Lyd' (اللد). Replacement of the name 'Lyd' with the name 'Lod' is an example of how language 'does not just reflect reality, but acts on it, configuring it and shaping it to accord with a given ideology' (Suleiman, 1999: 11). This new naming of of Lyd as 'Lod' aims to substantiate the transformation that happened in 1948, whereby the Arab Palestinian name of the city was rendered subordinate to the Hebrew–Zionist name, thus suiting the political reality created after 1948. Palestinian inhabitants of Lyd pronounce the name of the city in its Arabic form, while Jewish inhabitants pronounce it in its Hebrew spelling.

Similarly, the name of the city of Ramleh (its Arabic spelling) appears on the road sign in both Arabic and Hebrew as 'Ramla', which is its Hebrew spelling. In contrast to the dual Hebrew and Arabic pronunciation of the name 'Lyd', however, the Hebraized form of the name of the city 'Ramleh' has not been assimilated in the language of the city's inhabitants. That is, both Palestinian and Jewish residents pronounce the name of the city in its Arabic form, Ramleh.

This failure to assimilate the Hebrew name of Ramleh has been discussed in public. The mayor of Ramleh, Yoel Lavie, perceives the continued Arabic pronunciation of the name of this city as a problem that must be resolved. In an article by Miron Rappaport (16 June 2006) in the newspaper *Ha'aretz*, Mayor Lavie reflected on the problems with assimilating the Hebrew name 'Ramla' and proposed to change the name of the city to a Hebrew name, like Kiryat Dan, or Neveh Dan. To justify his proposition, Mayor Lavie argued that

> The root of the word 'Ramleh' means sand… This name does not mean anything to the 12,000 immigrants from the former Soviet Union and the 5,000 Ethiopians living in the city. It also means nothing to the large population of Ashkenazi Jews in this city. The name has no value, no uniqueness.

Mayor Lavie did not mention the interests of the 14,600 Palestinian inhabitants of the city in his statement.

Jamal Salameh[2] and Buthaina Dabita,[3] Palestinian residents of Ramleh, replied that 'Lavie wants to change the name only to delete the Arab past and present of Ramla.' In particular, Dabita claims, 'The name change proves that Lavie feels he has not finished the occupation of Ramleh yet.' Dabita's statement reflects how deeply events in 1948 are still felt in the present, both by himself and by the Mayor. Dabita defies the mayor, claiming that 'He intends to conceal and erase both the memory and the presence of the Palestinians from Ramleh. However that most likely will not happen. The Arab presence will continue to exist, along with the Arab pronunciation of the name of the city of Ramleh' (*Ha'aretz*, 16 June 2006).

Whether in their Hebrew or Arabic versions, the names of the cities of Ramleh/Ramla and el-Lyd/Lod make both Arab-Palestinians and Hebrew-Jewish Israelis present and visible. In contrast, the new names for Ramleh offered by Mayor Lavie (i.e. Kiryat Dan or Neveh Dan) attempt not only to erase Arab-Palestinian history and memory in the city, but also to delegitimize and ignore the interests of its Palestinian inhabitants, as well as deny their rights and entitlement to their home city. The only partially successful Hebraization of the name of Lyd (only Jewish residents refer to the city as such) and its complete failure in Ramleh mirror the limits of the hegemonic Zionist ideology at work in the State of Israel.

Language reflects these power relations of domination. On the one hand, it functions as a device for recollecting and preserving Palestinian identity, but on the other it constitutes a site for struggle and resistance. This struggle takes place within the realm of language and is fraught with symbolic historical meanings. Within this context, as their life stories indicate, all of of the women I interviewed sought a legitimate place in this history and recognition of their contribution to it.

## Bashful beginnings

Each life story selects, from an unlimited array, those events and moments that the narrator believes to be significant, sometimes arranging these in a coherent order and at other times not. The opening

of each story is highly significant – an existential political statement. When I approached Um Omar,[4] telling her about my research and that I would like to hear her life story, her first words were, 'How many pages will you write?'

> Fatma: 'I will write as much as you tell me.' [laughter]
>
> Um Omar: 'To tell you what? Tell me about what [you want me talk about] and I will tell you.'
>
> Fatma: 'It is about whatever you want to say. About what you want to tell me.'

When I asked Salma to tell the story of her life, she smiled and, like Um Omar, answered, 'The story of my life? Who would that interest?' 'Me', I said. 'What do you want to hear about, exactly?' she asked. 'What you want to tell me about', I replied. She looked at me and asked, 'Do you want me to tell you about the time when we migrated?' 'Whatever you want', I answered.

Similar negotiations took place with the overwhelming majority of interviewees. Despite their initial reluctance and disbelief that anyone would want to hear their life stories, once they began to speak the evidence was there that these women were active agents in creating their own lives, rebuilding their communities and making Palestinian history.

## I'm originally from here

Once these initial negotiations were completed, most of the women immediately began to speak about where they were from. As Um Omar typically explains:

> What to tell you! I am a daughter of the country [*bint el balad*] here in this country, not a migrant from another country or something. I am from this country [*min ahl el balad*]. We had property and plantations of olives and a machine for the soap and an olive press machine [*measarat ziet*] for oil, servants and don't ask! All of a sudden everything changed, the world turned upside down. My mom was sick before they [Israelis] came in… so she went to be cured. The situation was one big mess here. You know for about four or five months, life was a mess here. She was so ill, so she went to get medication. We stayed with my father. My father used to go and visit her when the roads were closed.

The statements 'I'm originally from here' and 'By origin, we are from here' were said in the opening remarks of nearly all of these women, who began their life stories by defining themselves as original residents of Lyd and Ramleh (or not, as the case may be). By identifying themselves this way, these women sought to remember the Palestinian cities that they lived in before 1948 and where they continue to live today.

When the interviewees say 'I'm from here', 'I am *bint el balad*' (literally, 'daughter of the city' or 'local girl') or 'We are *ahl el balad*' ('local people') they are asserting their right to the city and claiming entitlement to it. By emphasizing the words 'from here' they express their sense of belonging to Lyd or Ramleh, despite the Zionist forces that conquered these cities in 1948, which thus renders their claims contested. 'I'm from here. We're not immigrants' is a phrase used by many of the original residents of Lyd and Ramleh to mark the distinction between the Palestinian city and the Jewish community, as well as the social boundaries within the Palestinian communities in these cities – that is, the native daughters of these cities, in contrast to other Palestinian groups that came to live there after 1948. In other words, these women emphasize their local origins in order to distinguish themselves from the 'newcomers' (both Jewish and Palestinian), to create a separate social group for themselves.

## I'm originally not from here

Those women I interviewed who came from villages or cities other than Lyd or Ramleh often began their life stories much as Fatmeh Abed el Hadi from Zakariyya[5] does:

> Swear to God my daughter, we, we are not from Ramleh by origin. We are from Zakariyya. If you hear of Zakariyya, and we were living there, not as we are nowadays, we were planting and harvesting and cultivating … on our lands. I was young, ignorant. I was married when I was young, 13½ years old and we were working on our land and living the best life. Having land and olives. Having everything, plantations, and having everything…
>
> We came here to Ramleh like that [shows an empty hand] and then, my dear, when Israel took us I had four children, two boys and two girls, and we came here to Israel. This was at the beginning of the occupation. And we came here, when Israel took us, we fled the village. You can stay in the mountains for two or three months. Then we went back to the village…
>
> The miscreants [*wlad el haram*] wouldn't leave us alone. They began to come and shoot at us from the mountains. We were hiding from them in the orchards and vineyards until they went. Then people [from the village] complained [to Jewish neighbours]. We were a small group – ten to twenty families who stayed. We surrendered [*salamna*]. They [people from the village] complained to the Jewish neighbours. 'My dears', they told them [the Jews], 'we are here and they [other Jews] frighten us and we have small children so… You should find a solution for us or you guard the village or take us somewhere else'.
>
> At first they took us to al-Majdal and later they said, 'You're going to Lyd or Ramleh' … There are people who went to the Arabs, saying, 'We are here, we came here to Ramleh' and turn to… [didn't finish]. We left everything. We came here empty handed. They didn't let us take anything.

A prevalent way of beginning their life stories, this type of opening statement represents the interviewees' perception of historic events in a way that emphasizes their place of origin, which is defined in relation to a time period before 1948. Recalling their village or city of origin is a way to remember and not forget that combines time (1948) and place

(of origin). In turn, this is how these women commemorate their place of origin and transmit it to the next generation.

The village 'was conquered on 23 October 1948, most of the inhabitants having temporarily fled to nearby hills' (Morris, 2004: 521). As Fatmeh Abed el Hadi witnessed, the people of Zakariyya came back to the village. However, the Israelis expelled them again. They were finally evacuated in 1950; some were evicted to Lyd and Ramleh, but 'the majority ended up in the Deheishe Refugee Camp near Bethlehem' (Morris, 2004: 521).

Fatmeh Abed el Hadi describes the humiliation of this event by saying 'the Israelis threw them [Zakariyya's people] to the Arabs' and were prohibited from returning to their village. A few of those who remained in the village, like her family, were intimidated by Jewish Israeli neighbouring settlements, which Fatmeh Abed el Hadi talks about ('they were shooting at us at night') and as a result were later evacuated. Many of the other women I interviewed told similar stories, particularly those who came from villages, clearly stating: 'Our Jewish neighbours, from the Kubanieh [kibbutz], they were shooting at us.'

Despite the many years that women from neighbouring villages and towns have been living in Lyd and Ramleh, they continue to use the words 'I'm not from here', which reflect the feelings of strangeness and alienation that these women still experience despite the considerable amount of time that has passed since they were uprooted from their original homes and arrived in their 'new' place. As Hillel Cohen (2000: 28) points out in his study of internal refugees, 'The majority of the refugees still feel like strangers or refugees in the places which absorbed them.' The fact that these women define themselves by means of a negation ('I'm not from here') indicates that they have not yet been fully assimilated in their 'new' locations.

The emphasis these women put on their places of origin combined territory and time in terms that are closely bound up with 1948. As such, what happened in 1948 signals a crucial constitutive event in their lives. Both of the opening lines 'I am originally from here' and 'I am not originally from here' are political statements that reflect the way the contemporary lives of these women is shaped by the past.

The ongoing prohibition against the repatriation of Palestinian residents to the villages and towns of their origin, along with the continuous contestation over Lyd and Ramleh, also shapes the opening statements of their life stories, which emphasize their feelings of entitlement to live in their places of origin.

The opening statement 'I'm originally not from here' is especially political in the sense that the women who said this had been expelled from, or forced to flee in search of safety, their places of origin because of the war in 1948. Moreover, they were deprived of the right to return to their original homes. This reality, created in the wake of 1948, is still alive in the present. The continued feelings of strangeness in relation to their lives in Lyd and Ramleh also serve to sharpen their yearning for the past. In particular, the villages and cities of their origins often were described as more secure and comfortable than their current home (e.g. use of the verbs 'planting', 'harvesting' and 'cultivating' their lands).

The opening statements of the life stories told by the women I interviewed clearly demonstrate how their lives shape and are shaped by the past and present, as these are lived historical events. 'I am from here' and 'I am not from here' are deployed in a situation of ongoing violent political conflict, where the *watan*, homeland, their cities and villages of origin are constantly contested and their right to their homeland is negated and delegitimized. In contrast to the findings of Alice Baker (1998: 5), in her research on the oral histories of Moroccan women, that 'the key event in a women's life history is marriage', for these Palestinian women their life stories indicate that 1948 was the most important constitutive event in their life.

## The Jews entered and took us

My homeland is not a travelling bag.
Nor am I a passing traveller.
It is I who am the lover
And the land is my beloved.

Mahmoud Darwish, 'Diary of a Palestinian Wound' (1996: 347)

The national Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish describes his homeland in terms of a geo-female body that is beloved. A prevailing description, this image of Palestine is evident in the modern national narrative that constitutes the *watan*, or homeland, 'imagined as the outlines of a female body: A body to love and be devoted to, to possess and protect, to kill and die for' (Najmabadi, 1997: 445).

When part of Palestine was occupied in 1948 and the State of Israel established, in August of that same year Qustantin Zurayk published a book entitled *Ma'naa Nakbat Falastin*.[6] Referring to the lost land of Palestine as having been raped by Zionist forces (*Falastin el Mug'tasabah*), he illustrates short- and long-term strategic plans for its liberation. Palestinians, researchers, politicians, intellectuals, authors and poets also use the concept of Nakba (Catastrophe), which has became one of the most widely known and fundamentally constitutive concepts of collective Palestinian national awareness, including for both men and women in Israel (Ghanim, 2004). For example, as Palestinian author Salman Natur (1985: 49) writes, 'I belong to the generation born one year after the Nakba.' By identifying himself this way Natur (1995: 16) marks the identity of Palestinians relative to the Nakba: those born before it, those born during it, and those born after it.

In stark contrast, a conspicuous element in the narratives of the women I interviewed is the absence of the word 'Nakba'. Only three of the thirty-seven women I interviewed mentioned the word; all were political activists in the Communist Party. Instead, the women commonly used the phrases 'when the Jews came in' [*laman dakhal elya-hud liblad*] or 'when Israel took us' [*laman ijat Israel wakhdatna*]. While the men I interviewed also rarely used the term 'Nakba', their language nonetheless diverged from the expressions of the women. Leaning in the direction of formal terms borrowed from public political discourse in Palestinian society, most of the men used phrases like 'when the Israelis occupied' or 'the days of the Jewish conquest'.

Although the hegemony of Zionist discourse, which seeks to silence use of the term 'Nakba', offers a partial explanation for its absence in the narratives of the interviewees, more productive possibilities emerge with respect to focusing on the phrases they

do use.[7] Salma's narrative is a typical example of how the women I interviewed referred to 1948, which she brings up in the opening statement of her life story:

> I want to tell you that I am from Lyd, from here originally and by origin we are from here. We are from Lyd. Then I got married and we migrated. We migrated to Amman. At first to Ramallah, then from Ramallah to Amman. At first, I had four kids here [in Lyd], two girls and two boys. One girl and both boys died here before we were out [*t'lia'ana*], which means before we migrated [*hajarna'a*]. Then we migrated and I was pregnant with a girl too… We were here at the hospital, washing for the injured ones in the hospital when the Jews entered [*dakhalo*]. We were washing for the casualties and then we were staying in our houses. In the hospital that is next to the big mosque, the big one there, next to the house of el Memi. My husband was there and I was sitting there, me and the Christian women from the town, here in Lyd. So I and the Christians were washing, which means we were washing the casualties and changing them and washing their cloths.
>
> A Palestinian came and said, 'Come on, come on, go out!' The Jews came in [*dakhalo*] and expelled us right away. They got us out right away. I did not have time to say anything to him [her husband]. I did not see him. They [the casualties] were on the second floor and we were under that washing… At the beginning of Israel there was a war. When the war happened, the Jews entered. The Jews took us [*dakhal el yahud wakhaduna*]. They started to hit the cars with cannons. He [her husband] got injured and his cousin died … they took him to the hospital. They expelled the people. I was with him in the hospital and he told me go with them, with the people that the Jews had expelled. They did not let anyone stay here in town. They just allowed the elderly to stay here, like me [today]. The ones that could not walk, they [the Jews] allowed them to stay and they [the Jews] expelled all of the other people. We went out [*t'liana'a*]. The people were not recognizing each other because they were so many and they were pushing each other… People couldn't even recognize their own brother or son. Like that, were the people. What can I tell you? Like the snake or something. Many, many people from all over the country [*Liblad*] were expelled. The Jews expelled the whole country. *Yalla yalla to Abdallah to Abdallah, yalla!* We did not have anything – no clothes and

> not even bread for the kids; my daughter in my hand, and without any piece of bread. We did not have anything. We went out like that. If anyone had a thing, they [the Jews] were taking it from him. Jewellery money, they were taking it.

Salma continues:

> And they were piling valuable things on bed sheets at the road junction here outside of the city and if anyone had anything, they were taking it and putting it on the white bed sheet. They [women soldiers] were searching the women and the men were searching the men and putting all they have, whatever they had, they were putting it and not taking anything with them. The Jews, they finished all of the … [unfinished sentence]. They did not leave anything with us. They did not leave half bread for a child. They did not allow [*makhalosh*] water for a child. They were expelling the people to the mountains, barefoot and tired. We were so miserable, you can say. God what can I tell you? What we saw in our days… We were fasting the first day. It was the third day of Ramadan. My cousin died on the way and the aunt of my husband died on the way and his cousin and his cousin, too, died on the way. When they were walking, they were old men; they couldn't keep up so they died on the migration. It is so hard, hard, hard, so hard, life. The life at first, means, first of the migration, yah, yah, yah, one [a man] had nothing to eat, had no water. We were thirsty, when we were walking, and just wanted some water to keep going; there wasn't…

Joan Wallach Scott argues that 'we construct history through the language we use, just as we do the society in which we live' (Hutton, 1993: 121). This is apparent in the language patterns of the women I interviewed. In particular, they used the terms 'Jews' and 'Israelis' interchangeably when speaking about Jewish Israeli citizens or the State of Israel. They also use the words 'I' and 'we' interchangeably, which represents their understanding that their personal experience has an inescapable collective dimension. Perhaps of greatest interest are the phrases they use to describe the occupation of their cities and villages in 1948 – phrases like the ones Salma used above. I interpret the meaning of these references, paying particular attention to statements such as 'when the Jews entered', 'when Israel came in', 'when

the Jews took us' and 'when Israel entered and took us'. I also focus on the meaning of the words 'we migrated' and 'migration'.

In Arabic, the word 'enter' (*dakhala*) is commonly used in public political discourse to denote a militant meaning related to conquering. In the specific context of Palestinian discourse, it signifies the military occupation of land and territory. By saying 'Israel/Jews entered' (*dakhalat Israel*), the women I interviewed refer to the militant Jewish Zionist Brigades and their forceful occupation of their cities and villages in 1948. Portrayed in Palestinian discourses about politics and art, the homeland (*watan*) is a beloved female body, but it is also a territory that has been invaded by Jewish Zionist Brigades and in need of liberation.[8]

In the social and cultural contexts of Palestinian life (which are also unavoidably political), the term 'entered' (*dakhala*), 'came in' or 'took us', is commonly used to describe the penetration of a woman's body by a man, especially on their wedding night. In accordance with Palestinian social norms, for example, it is customary to say in spoken Arabic: 'The bridegroom entered [*dakhala*] the bride and the bridegroom took the bride [*akhad'ha*].' The choice of words these women use to describe 1948 is shaped by the norms and values of everyday Palestinian social and cultural life, in particular those words related to the description of 'normal' sexual relationships between men and women in Palestinian society.

As a result of taboos about speaking of sex in Palestinian society, a woman often encounters the forceful penetration of her body during the first sexual act without being adequately prepared for or told about intercourse. This limited knowledge on the wedding night was certainly the case for the generation of women I interviewed. Patriarchal societies, like Palestinian society, tolerate men having sexual knowledge, and even experience, before marriage, but not women. Their sexual behaviour is not on trial, whereas women were required to be virgins, which was verified on the wedding night. On the wedding night, the first penetration was carried out with the knowledge of the bride's family, which gave the husband their approval for the act by 'keeping a low profile'. Thus, secrecy and a conspiracy of silence legitimized the sexual act between women and men.

In my reading, when they describe Israeli 'entry' into the cities or villages in 1948 the choice of language used by the women I interviewed is linked to the penetration of the female body. As such, this language is highly symbolic. As the man pierces the most intimate part of a woman's body, for example, so too Israeli forces pierced the most private parts of Palestinian lives – their very homes; their land. As a woman is inadequately prepared for the sexual act on her wedding night, so too were Palestinians exposed and unready for the violent and forcible penetration of Israeli forces into their cities and villages. In the same way that the bride faces a conspiracy of silence on her wedding night (part and parcel of legitimizing the sexual act in Palestinian culture), so too the Jewish Zionist Brigades occupied Palestinian territory under the secret cloak of legitimacy given by the broader Arab 'family' (i.e. some of the Arab states) and under the patronage of the international community, all of whom knew what was going to happen.[9] This interpretation is reinforced by the verb phrase 'took us', which indicates that 'something' has been given over – in this case Palestine.

Women and men born into patriarchal language and growing up within its boundaries draw on it to describe their experiences, whether these are personal or political. Hence the strong parallels that can be drawn between the two, such that for the women I interviewed Palestine is embodied as the sexualized image of a woman who has been given over by her family to her husband, who subsequently 'takes her', or 'enters her'. Although the men I interviewed do not use this sexually charged language to describe their experiences of 1948, they nonetheless buy into the broader nationalist narrative images of Palestine as a beloved female body.

## Healing wounds

The absence of 'Nakba' from the women's words could be interpreted as a success of Zionism in silencing the Palestinian national terminology. However, I argue that the women's choice of words is a resistence to Zionist ideology that demands exclusivity and

essentializes Jewish right to the land of Palestine. At the same time it challenges the nature of the national narrative as a masculine elitist one that subjugates marginal groups within the nation, including women. Women's description in bodily expressions offers a different interpretation to what occurred in the past, opening a path to a better future.

Despite her initial lack of knowledge about the sexual act, as well as the pain and injury of that first penetration, the bride is expected to overcome these experiences and establish a respected subject position from which to grow a new family life. This is represented in the broader experience of the interviewees. All of those who were married, for example, stated that 'we raised the children and married them off' (*Rabina liwlad, wjwaznahum*). They also used other phrases like their children 'establish a home' (*Banina beit*) or 'everyone opened a home' (*Wkol wahad fatah beit*). These phrases have special meaning given that they are also used in conjunction with phrases like 'we were the only family who stayed here and now there are many of us' and 'I am the only one who remained in the country [the city] and my children built their homes around me.' The language used by these women indicates that they perceive themselves as capable of action, choice and control in their lives, despite the ongoing trauma of the Israeli abuse as a result of the occupation in 1948. As in their married life experiences, they described how they managed to overcome the ruin, destruction, loss and insecurity of events related to 1948, when their families and communities were ripped apart and dispersed. In the wake of these experiences, they worked to rehabilitate their lives, rebuild their homes, raise families, and re-establish their communities in Lyd and Ramleh.

Nonetheless, their use of sexual metaphors reflects the gender-related balance of power in Palestinian society, revealing the difficulties in challenging these structural relations, as well as reproducing them. This is nowhere more evident than in the narratives that define Palestinian nationalist identity. Interestingly, these patterns of gender inequality are also reflected in Zionist nationalist narratives. At the same time, however, the way that these women use the verb

'to enter' contains the possibility of both subverting gender relations within Palestinian society and transforming the broader political situation that defines their lives. As Najmabadi (1997: 442) points out,

> Modern nations have often been explicitly imagined through familial metaphors. In particular, the construction of the national community as a brotherhood (a fraternity) has pointed both to the centrality of male bonding in the production of nationalist sentiment and to the exclusion of women from the social contract.

Spivak makes a similar claim that the national project has been imagined by men and has been designed as a masculine construct. Patriarchal hierarchies have become the foundation of the nation as much as the foundation of both gender and sexuality (1992, 2007). Both Palestinian and Zionist constructions of national identity follow these patterns.

Palestinian national narratives, such as those that represent the land of Palestine as a beloved geo-female body, also portray Palestine as a country that was raped by Israeli invaders in 1948. Joseph Massad (1995) argues that the Palestinian nationalist movement has signified the conquest of Palestine as a rape; by so doing they disqualify women and subordinate them to young male Palestinian nationalist liberators. However, what happened to Palestine and the Palestinians in 1948 was not an isolated event. Rather, it was the beginning of a forceful abusive relationship that has continued, with many subsequent acts of violence and dispossession. Through various mechanisms of oppression, aggression and humiliation, the Israeli state continuously persecutes the Palestinian people. In contemporary nationalist discourses, the response to this violation appears as a masculine impulse to protect and liberate Palestine. Similarly, Zionist narratives also constitute a nationalist identity defined in terms of male ownership of the land – Jews are the forefathers of the land of Israel, or Jacob.[10] This ignores the right of Jewish women as the foremothers of the land. Also construed as a beloved geo-female body, Israel too must be rescued and liberated from its occupiers.

In both of these narratives, women are subordinated to the construction of the land of Palestine/Israel that is feminized and therefore in need of liberators, defenders and protectors. From entirely opposed perspectives, these narratives about Palestine/Israel as the geo-female body indicate that this continues to be a contested land – one that must be fought for and liberated by male protectors. These are, therefore, narratives that constitute nationalism on the basis of very strong 'male bonding' on both sides, whether as an imagined community (Anderson, 1991) or as men who share the same culture (Gellner, 1983).

Although they do so from different positions in the overall configuration of power relations between these two groups, both of these masculine and intellectualized national narratives fail to recognize one another's collective right to live in Palestine/Israel. However, whether they like it or not the fate of both nations is linked to the same territory. It is true that 'Israel tries to separate the bride from her dowry, to force a relationship on the bride, and to illegally appropriate her dowry out of wedlock' (Grinberg, 2009: 106). However, cohesive and abusive 'wedlock' happened, because both peoples have linked their destiny to the same land. True the 'bride' (Palestinians) has not been asked about the entrance of the 'groom' (Zionist-Israelis) into her 'body' (Palestinian homeland). It does not matter if it is within a cohesive marriage or a divorce, both people know today that they must share the 'bride's dowry' – the land of Palestine/Israel. Potentially they have a chance to deconstruct the abusive patriarchal private family structure and the national one and create an option that is based on equal access to resources and the right to develop huwoman resources in order to constitute a new social and political contract.

From the secular Zionist perspective that co-opts the transcendental promise of the land of Palestine to the Jewish people in order to legitimize its historical right and precedence in claiming exclusivity, this nationalist narrative negates the rights of Palestinians to their homeland. In referring to 1948 as a war of independence, then, Zionists assume that Palestinians are the occupiers of the Jewish

homeland. This negation is one of the core reasons for the ongoing bitter conflict and the primary obstacle for reaching any type of settlement between the parties.

Anne McClintock (1993: 61) observes, 'all nations depend on powerful constructions of gender'. Following the geo-feminine concept of territory in these two nationalist discourses, female identity consequently is constructed in terms of an ongoing need for protection and possession by men. This construction of female identity is subject to male domination, whether the geo-body/territory is liberated or not. As such, potential liberation of the land offers no corresponding hope for the liberation of women within the context of either of these masculine nationalist narratives. For women, then, these are doubly dangerous discourses. Not only do they maintain gender inequalities, but they keep the societies to which women also belong in perpetual conflict.

In addition to their obvious gender biases and structured inequalities, neither of these national narratives accurately portrays the experiences of 1948 and beyond. This poses additional limits to their value. For instance, the word 'Nakba' mostly applies to a situation drawn from Arab history. Typically, it represents total defeat where overcoming catastrophe is practically impossible.[11] However, it is evident that, despite defeat and weakness, Palestinians are nonetheless capable of ongoing struggle and resistance aimed at overcoming what happened to them in 1948. Due to new political realities, they also cannot ignore the existence of the Israelis in Palestine/Israel.

In relation to the Jewish–Israeli nationalist narrative, it is likewise incorrect to refer to events in 1948 as a 'war of liberation'. Palestine was not occupied by Palestinians. Rather, they are native inhabitants living in their homeland. Therefore, the Zionist claim of exclusive right to this territory is unfounded. Moreover, this claim is not a Jewish one, but a tenet of messianic Judaism that Zionism successfully co-opts for its own ends.

In contrast to these masculinist narratives of national identity, the choice of words on the part of the ordinary women I interviewed offers an inherently different perspective, but one that is no less

political. Arguably, their views are also closer to the realities that have been established since 1948 than to either of these nationalist narratives. To say 'Israel entered and took us' metaphorically mixes private and public discourse to productive effect. On the one hand, this reveals the power relations between Israel and Palestine such that the latter (i.e. those who were 'entered') becomes the feminized other – unprepared for a Zionist penetration. Correlating to this, the State of Israel becomes the masculinized aggressor.[12]

From another perspective, this phrase also links Jewish Israelis and Palestinians in an abusive familial relationship. This perspective is opposed to that masculine ideal of political fraternity which keeps each side of the conflict separated in their own worlds and ignores women's rights. For example, the 'entry of the Israelis' metaphorically resembles Palestinian women's experiences of domestic violence, whereby men engage in violence because they are seen as physically able to do so and such behaviour is supported by patriarchal social norms and values. The ongoing violent aggression of the State of Israel against Palestinians since 1948 is rooted in a similar logic: they do it because they are able to do so, due to their superior military capacity and because this behaviour is implicitly or explicitly supported by the international community, where the negation of Palestinian rights has become the political norm. This pattern is reinforced further by the silence of most Arab countries in the face of continued Israeli aggression.

On the other hand, this mixture of public and private discourse simultaneously carries with it the potential to resolve the bitter conflict and liberate both parties. It also holds out the hope for radically reorganizing Palestinian social life, particularly gender relations. Herein lies the real innovation and subversive potential of this choice of words. Unlike the masculine narratives of Palestinian and Israeli nationalist identities, phrases like 'Israel entered and took us' marry the destiny of Palestinians and Jewish Israelis in the shared land of Palestine/Israel. As such, the mutually beloved land of Palestine/Israel contains an opportunity for constituting a new form of family relations between these two 'partners'. However, given past

history, the possibility of forming this partnership has two preconditions. First, the violence must end; that is, there must be an end to Zionist and Israeli violence towards Palestinians. Second, the State of Israel must recognize, acknowledge and take responsibility for their aggressive actions since 1948. The fulfilment of these preconditions has the potential to create a new atmosphere for negotiation, built on mutuality and trust, aiming at establishing a new relationship, which would not be based on patriarchal values or grounded in a nationalist identity based on duality – aggressor–victim, master–slave or ruler–ruled. Rather, this relationship would be grounded in mutual recognition, committed to forging a new social and political contract based on equal rights and the equitable distribution of land and resources for the common good of its people – women and men alike.

By using the verb 'to enter' (instead of the term 'Nakba') to describe their experiences of 1948, these women indicate that they are not ignoring the Israeli side of the conflict equation. On the contrary, they acknowledge that both Palestinian and Israeli interests (however different) are inextricably bound together. This recognition is crucial. Moreover, as with their family lives, the experiences of these women further suggest that it is in fact possible to recover from the ongoing traumatic events that began in 1948. Despite the apparent stalemate of the political situation in Palestine/Israel and the deep crisis this has created in Palestinian society in particular, there are opportunities for resourceful creative action and reconstruction. In this, the possibility of new social and political models, along with new norms and values that replace patriarchal legacies in the home, at the social level and in nationalist political discourse, can emerge.

## We migrated

In her study of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, Diana Allen (2007: 253) discovered that they 'actively resisted using the term Nakba because they feared that it lent permanency to their situation'. Conversely, reluctance to use this term indicates that these refugees

assumed that their exile would be temporary. Whether consciously or not, absence of the word 'Nakba' from the narratives of the women I interviewed conveys a similar sense of temporality in relation to what happened in 1948, which is enhanced by their use of the verb 'to migrate'.

Salman Natur (1987: 16) writes that in recalling the events of 1948, Palestinian women use the verb 'to migrate', describing this period in Palestinian history and in their own lives as 'the time of migration'. Like Salma, all of the women I interviewed used similar phrases – 'we migrated', 'they migrated', 'we went out' or 'they went out'. Such words consistently and repeatedly appeared in all of the interviewees' stories. All of these women also used the plural – 'we', rather than 'I' – followed by the word 'migrated', reflecting their understanding that this was a collective experience.

Emphasis on the terms 'migration' or 'migrate' to describe events in 1948 does not necessarily constitute a denial of their expulsion. Rather, it creates an alternative expression that denotes resistance. It also positions these Palestinian women as active agents with the capacity to choose and control their own lives despite the Zionist forces of penetration and invasion. To migrate was to act based on the hope of being able to return home at some point. The capacity for agency at work in choosing to migrate is borne out in the following statement by Um Nasri:

> Some woman came to us and said, 'There are cars in Ramleh, and they want anyone who wants to migrate, go and leave [*yitlah*].' All the people migrated, my son Yusuf was a month old, still in my arms [when the city was occupied] … The army came [to our home] and said 'Yallah, get out, yallah, go to Abdallah [King of Jordan]'. My mother picked up the boy and said [to the soldier], '*Khawaja*, little baby.'[13]

While use of the verb 'to migrate' creates an additional stratum of meaning in the language of these women, it likewise does not deny nationalist political language. For example, the phrase 'we migrated' is also accompanied in the interviewees' accounts by the words 'they

expelled us', 'we fled' or 'they attacked us'. The use of these words confirms that force was used against them, compelling them to migrate. In turn, this indicates that the scope of freedom in relation to their exercise of agency was limited. Nonetheless phrases like 'We had to save the children and to preserve our own lives' demonstrate that migration was a choice defined in relation to active agency and responsibility. Migration was a rational decision (or calculation) made to save the lives of the children and whole families, in the face of asymmetric power relations and the danger that they encountered during the events of 1948.

According to Edward Said (2004: 126), 'Migration, unlike being a refugee, entails a greater element of choice, which is reflected, for example, in the move to another country.' In the case of the Palestinian women I interviewed, they did not migrate to other countries, but in many cases moved within the borders of historical Palestine and inside the newly formed State of Israel. The drafting of the new borders by the Israelis fragmented the Palestinian population, forcing some of them to become refugees and positioning Palestinians living in Israel in a coercive liminal situation in their own homeland. During the war in 1948, the women I interviewed described experiences of direct expulsion, escaping because of fear and moving to seek refuge for the family. All of these circumstances were described in the parlance of these women as 'we migrated'. Use of the plural 'we' expresses the collective experience and use of the term 'migrated' indicates an element of choice. Use of the term 'migrated' also coveys the idea that they conceived of their situation as merely temporary. The word 'migration' corresponds, albeit indirectly, to the *hijra* of Islamic history, which reflects a temporary relocation due to the urgency of a situation and the need for safety. Inherent in this concept is an eventual return to the place from which they were 'forced' to migrate.[14]

The term 'migration' also reflects resistance and resilience rather than melancholy and self-pity. Accordingly, use of the verb form 'we migrated' expresses the perception of choice and control, as well the feeling that Palestinians are still capable of action. Despite their

expulsion, their loss is not total, which is reflected in the choice they make to migrate. As the life stories of these women indicate, they continue to be an active and dynamic part of the struggle to retain their property and the right to their homeland (*al-bilad*).

## Speaking about the 'infiltrator'

We, too, boarded the trucks
We, too, were accompanied
By the flash of lightning in the olive night and the barking
of dogs
At the moon passing over the church tower
But we were not weighted down by fear, because our childhood
Did not come with us
We merely repeated the refrain:
We will soon return, in just a moment more, to our homes.

Mahmoud Darwish (2000: 17)

In portraying the events of 1948, the life stories of the women I interviewed describe a complex situation overshadowed by mortal danger. At times, they speak of direct expulsion. At others, they say they were fleeing for their lives. 'We fled', Hanieh says, describing how she carried her daughter on her bosom on her way to Gaza, running for her life to escape the aerial attacks, along with the other residents of the city of al-Majdal. In a state of war, people leave dangerous and hazardous places in the rational interest of preserving their safety. When calm returns, they go back to their homes and attempt to resume their lives.

In the newly formed State of Israel, this was not the case. Those Palestinians who sought to return were instead called 'infiltrators'.[15] This term was widely publicized, appearing in official Israeli media and textbooks, as well as in radio broadcasts. When used by the conquering security forces of the State of Israel, this terminology connoted criminality, such that those Palestinians who tried to return home were deemed criminals and law-breakers. In short, they were defined as a threat to the security of the state and its Jewish

population. Consequently, they were prevented from returning to their own homes.

The word 'infiltrator', *mutasalil* (متسلل) in Arabic, is used frequently in the life stories of nearly all the women I interviewed. Although they have adopted the use of this word from the Israeli press, their use of it conveys distinct and often opposing meanings. The widespread use of the term illustrates an entirely different picture from that of its use in official contexts. For example, as Alice[16] from Ramleh explains:

> I have a brother that nobody knows about. [He was] 20 years old… There were infiltrators. He came as an infiltrator from Gaza to Ramleh, here. He came with someone from Beit Ninu, whose name was Khalil or Ibrahim, I don't remember. They [Israelis] caught them and sent them to prison. My uncle, God bless his memory, and the priest saw them. We to this day don't know anything about them; we don't know to this day. The ones from Beit Ninu, none of them is left here, all of them migrated.

Alice's brother, Jerius, was forced out of Gaza in 1948, and subsequently arrested for trying to return home. Alice points an accusing finger at the newly formed State of Israel, which she believes is responsible for her brother's disappearance. In Alice's life story, she describes a close relationship between her family and different high-ranking authorities, like Glob Pasha, which is evidenced when she talks about how her daughter-in-law travelled to Amman to seek help in finding Jerius. When she returned, she crossed the border in the company of an Iranian diplomat; despite these apparent connections with high-ranking officials, Alice's family was never able to ascertain the fate of her brother. The sorrow and memories resulting from Jerius's disappearance haunt the family to this day. They were not informed about the fate of their son, and out of fear they did not dare ask the authorities for information. Their reflects the continued insecurity felt by Palestinian citizens as a result of the events of 1948.

Most of those who had fled the violence in 1948 were ordinary people; when the war was over, they were killed when they tried to return home. In fact, between 1948 and 1956 the State of Israel adopted a policy of firing freely on returnees, with the intent to kill

(Morris, 1987). Salma concisely sums this up: 'There were infiltrators who came to take their belongings from their homes. The Jews would shoot them and put them to death. Hunt them down and kill them.' Salma's use of the phrase 'hunt them down' reflects the intensity and cruelty of the Israeli Border Patrol troops in their treatment of those who sought to return. It also indicates that the Israelis dehumanized Palestinians, killing them as if they were hunted animals. Describing how the problem of infiltrators preoccupied the security forces, and the practices that were used against them, Rubic Rosenthal (2002: 183) quotes from statements put before the court at the trial of Ofer, the commander of the massacre operation in Kafr Qassem: 'That is a man who, throughout the years … spent time waiting in ambush for Arab infiltrators. At the time, they used to mow them all down.'

Those rare instances when a so-called infiltrator managed to evade the border patrols and return home were celebrated as great success stories. For example, Raiefeh describes in animated terms how her brother returned home: 'My brother, Samwil, whom I told you about … infiltrated and came back from Amman. He came through the orange groves.' Raiefeh went on to illustrate proudly her brother's journey, when he went from Ramallah to Amman and then came back to his home town of Lyd alive. While the term 'infiltrator' has a negative connotation – Palestinians are turned into victims who are forced to sneak to their homes, risking their lives and often getting killed in the process, it also represents a form of subjectivity defined in relation to a capacity for action and resistance. Even if they failed, all of those who tried to return home were taking control of their lives. As such, this is a version of agency that expresses bravery and courage.

Although the interviewees adopted the Israeli word 'infiltrator', their testimonies indicate that they give it an entirely different meaning. This is infiltration not as criminality but as liberation. By using the same term and giving it the opposite meaning, these women are subverting the Zionist use of this term and showing up the limits of its hegemonic power. While Zionist ideology successfully imposes the term 'infiltrator' on its Palestinian users, it cannot fully succeed

in controlling the way people use it, nor the meanings they give it in different contexts.

As Trinh Minh-Ha (1989) claims, language, with all of its ambivalence and limitation, can be used to reflect reality but also to distort, disturb and destroy it. She argues that the positioning of the user of language, rather than the words themselves, is what determines the meaning of the words. 'When we call ourselves "natives",' she says, 'terming us the "natives" focuses on our innate qualities and our belonging to a particular place by birth; terming them the "natives", on their being born inferior and "non-Europeans"' (Minh-Ha 1989: 52). According to Zionist narratives, Palestinians in Israel are not natives, but rather are conceived of as foreigners, which is why Palestinians who left their homes in 1948 were referred to as 'infiltrators' and prevented from returning. Zionist discourse portrays Palestinians as the 'enemy', marking them as terrorists whose return to their own homes poses a threat to the safety and security of the State of Israel and the Jewish population as a whole.

Perhaps most significantly, then, by patrolling the borders to prevent Palestinians from returning home – whether they had voluntarily fled in search of safety or had been forcibly expelled – the State of Israel is itself responsible for creating the Palestinian refugee problem in the first place.

## Again we all are from here

Here we shall stay
As though we were twenty [sixty] impossibilities
In Lyd, Ramleh and Galilee
Here we shall stay
Here we have past, present and future
In Lyd, Ramleh and Galilee
Here we shall stay

'Here We Shall Stay', Tawfiq Zayyad[17] (1997: 265–6)

As is already clear, in the opening statements of their life stories, all of the women I interviewed remarked on their places of origin, either

claiming they were originally from Lyd or Ramleh or distancing themselves from their current place of residence with the words 'I am not originally from here.' The latter instead identified their places of origin by referring to the villages and cities from which they were uprooted in 1948. These statements reflect each woman's need to retain her identity and sense of belonging to her place of origin. These are acts of remembering, not of forgetting.

Regardless of their claims, all of the interviewees described themselves as dispossessed and displaced in the wake of 1948. Interestingly, however, none of them used the term 'refugee'. Rather, they used words oriented to an idea of 'no return'. As Um Usif[18] from Ramleh explains, 'We did not come back to our house… We were living far away from the house that we had lived in, far away – when you go by Rehovot, it's on the way to Ramleh.' All of the women spoke at length and in great detail about what happened to the homes they had lived in prior to 1948, which were either demolished or became the property of Amidar, a state company originally set up for the settlement of new Jewish immigrants (see also Chapter 6).

Um Dieb, originally from Kafr 'Ana, describes the circumstances in which she and her family became displaced residents in Lyd:

> When we migrated from our village, there was a ceasefire. That's what I remember, and my mother used to say it, and that's why we remember it too. We left our village, Kafr 'Ana, and we lived in a village at the entrance to Lyd. Not just us, maybe twelve families. We stayed there until the ceasefire ended… A plane came and fired with guns, here in Lyd, at the entrance to Lyd. Everyone left their homes; they ran away, no one stayed in Lyd. When we were expelled from Lyd, the people who lived there had already left a long time before, had gone to the road. There was a road at the entrance to Lyd that went to the Arabs in the mountains… My father knew the country there. There are difficult roads and like that, so he left us here on the outskirts of Lyd. There was a vineyard here, so he left us here.
>
> He did not agree to go to Abdallah [the King of Jordan]. We stayed until the winter began. When the winter came, the Jewish soldiers came. They said to my father, 'Yallah, take your children

> and go to Abdallah.' My father didn't agree. He told the soldiers, 'No, you can shoot me and my children. I'm staying here and I'm not going.' [Soldiers] 'Go, go.' 'Never' [the father]. He grabbed us like this, in a heap, and he told them, 'Shoot me and my wife and my children, but to Abdallah I'm not going. There are snakes and scorpions there. Where will I leave my children?'
>
> We were seven families in that vineyard. When they [the soldiers] saw he was insisting and didn't want to leave… they told him, 'OK, go back to Lyd, to the city, and find for yourself a house or something.' We went back and all the families in the vineyard went back. And we went on living in Lyd and we stayed. And that's it. That's what I remember. That's our life.

Um Dieb has remained in that house ever since. By recalling the story of her father's insistence on remaining in Lyd (even to the point of jeopardizing the whole family) Um Dieb highlights both the individual and the collective persistence and steadfast (*sumud*) commitment to the right of Palestinians to stay in their homeland. Although it was not the same private home that they left during the war in 1948, this act of historical remembrance on the part of Um Dieb points to the symbolic home (Palestine) that was and continues to be contested by the establishment of the State of Israel.

The term 'internal refugee' typically refers to Palestinians like Um Dieb and her family who found refuge and remained within the 1948 borders of Israel. According to the Association for the Defense of the Rights of the Internally Displaced Persons in Israel, the internal refugee population composes 25 per cent of Palestinians living in Israel and 5 per cent of the overall population of Palestinian refugees.[19] In other words, this means that there are approximately 250,000 Palestinians who are displaced within Israel.[20]

The striking absence of the term 'refugee' from the interviewees' language may be interpreted on several dimensions. First, the term 'refugee' carries with it a connotation of shame, want, neediness and humiliation. Second, due to these women's position as citizens in Israel, they are silenced regarding their right of return to their homes and claim on their property. In comparison, the Palestinian refugees outside the borders of 1948 are among the most outspoken in their

struggle for the right of return. Any claim by the displaced Palestinians to their property or to return to their own original homes is perceived as illegitimate by the Jewish state. Accordingly, the non-existence of the concept of internal refugees in discourse within Israel indicates that the Palestinian refugees have been denied the rights to their homes and property, and have even been denied any recognition of the loss they experienced upon the establishment of the Jewish state. This denial is maintained by both sides: the State of Israel and the Palestinian National Authority have excluded the Palestinians from any political negotiation since the Madrid Conference and the Oslo Accords.

In my reading, the absence of the word 'refugee' from women's accounts, and their choice of words 'We are from here', represent a political statement. Despite the fact that they were expelled and/or fled their homes and subsequently were denied the right of return to those homes, these women focus on their success stories (however limited these may be). That is, they conceive of themselves as having succeeded in their goal of remaining in their native homeland against all odds – that territory where 'the Jews came in to them'. Simply by continuing to live in Palestine, these women are contesting the Zionist claim on this territory as exclusively Jewish. In particular, they are contesting the Zionist claim on this territory as an exclusively Jewish state. Whereas Zionism negates the right of return for Palestinians, these women problematize Zionist assertions of the exclusive right of return for Jews. Moreover, they direct this challenge to exclusive Jewish sovereignty over this territory from the position of citizenship. As with citizens in any modern democratic state, these women have the right to share sovereignty. They also have the right to equal access to resources, including their lost property.

For reasons of urgency and survival, women of the first generation of the Nakba refrain from using the words 'refugee' or 'displaced'. This tendency mirrors the Palestinian political reality in Lyd and Ramleh, where these women live, which have become mostly Jewish. Like everyone in the State of Israel, these women are also marked as citizens shadowed by a protracted violent political conflict. They demonstrate their capacity for survival, as well as their need and

desire to rebuild their homes and families within their homeland, which was entered by Jews. Therefore they remain silent in order to go on living whatever lives are possible after having experienced the dispersion of their communities and the loss of their homes and property, which have become Zionized by a variety of different means, including the Absentee Property Law.[21]

Raising their voices as refugees in the State of Israel would be interpreted as a subversive intra-social threat to Zionist sovereignty, which is profoundly challenged by the issue of Palestinian refugees, both inside and outside its borders. The refugee question is one of the thorniest problems in the history of the conflict. These women choose to remain silent lest they be accused of seeking the 'right of return'. Such a claim would be perceived as undermining the security and existence of the State of Israel, which was established to realize the right of return of the Jewish people to their homeland, Palestine. The right of return of Palestinians to their homeland is consequently not recognized, even at the private individual level.

Their silence therefore signifies a desire to retain a degree of control over their lives. As such, it may be seen in terms of an active agency that enables them to stay in their current homes, which remain within the boundaries of Palestine, their homeland. Although citizens in the State of Israel, these women also live in Palestine. The past and present trauma related to events in 1948 still continues to shape their lives. Their silence represents a certain historical moment because it enables them to remain in Palestine, despite the fact that their homeland was entered by Jews.[22]

## Expressing agency: verbs

In describing their experiences of 1948, shortly after the war had ended, the interviewees used sentences full of passive verbs. I frequently heard sentences such as 'the Jews entered and took us' or 'they took us'. Later, in describing the expulsion, they said: 'the Jews loaded us on to the trucks', 'they dropped us off' (*el-Yahud Hamalona wkabona*), 'left us nothing', 'put us on trucks and threw us out', 'threw them to

the Arabs', 'left us' and so on. Such expressions signify passivity and an almost total lack of control over their lives. These passive constructions reflect their intense emotional experiences, which are saturated with feelings of humiliation, hopelessness, loss, misery, worry, anger and sorrow. All of these verbs were used in plural form, which indicates that theirs was a collective experience. The use of passive constructions also indicates an objectification of the self, as Illana Rosen (2003: 43) claims in her book about survivors of World War II, *Sister in Sorrow*: 'The narrator as she introduced herself so far, is quite passive and things are happening around her so that she herself has almost no leeway… She does not work much, doesn't initiate anything, and nearly never directs emotions towards events and people surrounding her… Verbs such as "took us" are an example of the reductionist human being.'

At times, the interviewees also used silence to convey their sense of wreckage. This passivity in the face of their shattered and smashed lives and communities, at the specific historical moment, is nonetheless an act of agency oriented to make these experiences less painful and at the same time to mock the 'victorious' moral values of the Israelis, whom they hold responsible for the continuous suffering of Palestinians since 1948.

These descriptions of 1948 were often followed by an immediate comparison with the era of British rule. In this context, the women I interviewed used active and lively plural verbs, such as 'we lived in our country', 'we worked the land', 'we harvested', 'we went to the fields and the orchards', 'we sowed the grain', 'we picked', 'we drew water from the wells', 'we washed', 'we cooked and cleaned', and so on. By using these active verbs, they described themselves as subjects having a certain degree of control over their lives, property and possessions. The relative independence and safety in their lives in the villages and cities prior to 1948 was sharply contrasted with what happened in 1948, when their sense of safety and security at all levels in their lives and communities was destroyed.

What stood out especially in the interviewees' language was that the use of passive verbs began to disappear once they began describing what happened after the 'end' of the events related to 1948. They

again started to use active verbs and revitalize the land. They sowed, planted, harvested and picked olives even at the risk of being accused of 'stealing from our land', 'stealing from our olives trees', which was often followed by laughter at the irony of their situation. They described themselves as making the land bloom again and turning it back into a source of life. Although the women I interviewed indicated that they are no longer landowners, but instead lease the land from the Jews who have taken it over, they describe how reality forced them to take on the responsibility to continue their lives and those of their families.

Other verbs that arose during the interviews, like 'sewed', 'weaved' and 'knitted', as well as statements such as 'I worked in a sewing factory', offer evidence for the expansion of employment opportunities for these women. Alongside this, such verbs likewise point to the reduced possibilities to work the land that was expropriated from them after 1948. Instead, these women were occupied in different lines of work which served as a source of income to sustain their families. As Um Omar from Lyd explains:

> I was working day and night, believe me. By the way, I was working and bringing in more than he did [husband]. I was sewing and doing, and he… [doesn't finish the sentence], staying up until two [hours] after midnight. He sleeps and I sew on the machine… I'm telling you, I would get up from the sewing machine to do [weave] wool… Sewing the wool I learned [on my own]. I bought a machine for the wool and they came to instruct me from the company. I did work for people. By God, he would bring 300 lira a month, but I used to get 500 lira a week.[23] Every week, he would come with me to buy wool and to help me, I'm not denying. He would go down to Tel Aviv with me. We would go down to buy the wool and he rolled it for me on the door and joined it together. What can I tell you? I used to buy for my children the best clothes, the best suits, the best there was in the Mashbir.[24] We would go down to Tel Aviv. Only there we used to buy for them.

Um Omar continues to describe the work that she had to do in order to sustain the family and maintain the house:

> I would put together the day at night, believe me.[25] I scrubbed the walls of the rooms, and washed the windows and the mattresses… And bathed the children and washed their clothes. I wouldn't go to sleep until I had washed the laundry and put it up on the line… And all the time with the machine, and laundering and cooking and doing everything, and kneading dough. We weren't like today, buying bread and everything. Every day I kneaded dough. I prepared dough day after day, every other day, and cooking and doing. Now I'm saying, I worked inside and outside. Where is this all gone? Where is this strength that was?

The women I interviewed described themselves as working ceaselessly, whether in agricultural jobs or sewing, knitting, weaving and embroidering. They did all this in addition to the routine housework that they performed with the help of other women in the family – cooking, cleaning, laundering, baking bread and taking care of the children. They did all this in order to restore and sustain the family after the collapse of the social and economic frameworks that had existed until 1948. They also took on roles and jobs formerly performed by men, such as loading produce. These new roles often challenged the traditional limits of women's social functions, but without causing cracks in the walls dividing the public and private realms. These new roles and their economic contribution did somewhat advance the status of women in the home, in relation to male family members of the household, but it did not bring about a significant change in their status as women in society.

Part of their sense of achievement was expressed in one of the most dominant phrases these women repeatedly used: 'We raised the children and married them off.' Cases where the interviewees had unmarried daughters or sons were spoken about with sadness and were explained as stemming from bad luck. In the words of the interviewees, 'to open a house' is also a phrase with special meaning given the circumstances of their lives. In 1948 their former private homes had been destroyed, along with their communities. Therefore re-establishing a private house and creating a family was actually a step towards re-establishing and renewing their communities. The

nuclear family became a core element in rebuilding Palestinian community life.

In general, the use of different verbs can be recognized as a capacity for agency, particularly as this refers to the sense of reviving their lives after 1948. In this, the interviewees undergo a transformation in their status from object to subject. What stood out especially from both groups of the interviewees' descriptions is that they talked about working in the fields and the spaces that they moved in with a nostalgic yearning that suggests work had a liberating element for these women. Although women continued to work and even doubled their responsibilities after 1948, unfortunately their efforts have not been recognized as important by the established Palestinian patriarchy. Therefore women claim acknowledgement from the masculine patriarchal Palestinian society – recognition of their efforts as valuable in rebuilding, sustaining and maintaining the family and community. They ask Palestinian society for their innate rights, born as equals, of which they have been deprived.

The way in which these women describe their experiences before, during and after the events of 1948 demonstrates how language records and preserves not only the events themselves, but also the feelings and emotions of the interviewees and thus the significance they give to this event in their lives.

## The days of the English

All of the interviewees referred to the era of British rule in Palestine as the 'English era' or the 'days of the English' when they recalled their memories of this time. They also described the era of the Ottoman Empire the 'time of the Turks'. These are everyday colloquial expressions used by ordinary people to describe their experiences of power in daily life. These lay terms differ from the official intellectual references in the literature about this period; for example, 'the British Mandate', 'era of British rule' or 'British Imperialism in Palestine' and the 'Ottoman Empire'.

When these women spoke about the 'days of the English', their memories were part of their own experiences, as well as those of others that had been passed down from former generations in their families. The experiences of these women were not monolithic or uniform. In some cases, they describe the British era as a time when they had more control over their lives, felt safer and had greater freedom of movement in comparison with their contemporary lives. In other cases, they also recalled difficulties. Although the memories brought up in the course of telling their life stories are generally related to the interviewees' own lives or the lives of other family members from previous generations, at the same time they also indicate collective significance.

Haliemeh from Lyd recalls her grandmother and says:

> When the English came through here, they drove out my grandmother. They said my grandfather – her husband – was an officer in the Turkish army, and so was her brother, so they drove her out. Where did she stay? You don't want to know. They brought a donkey which would take them, and where did he stop with them? Not until they came to Hims and Hamāh in Syria, which was in the days of the English. When they first saw the English, not even a month after that, my grandmother came from Istanbul to Syria and took them, he [grandfather] brought them down here. He settled my aunt, my mother and my grandmother in Nazareth.

In Haliemeh's memory, the English are connected to the persecution of her grandfather, which led to the expulsion of her grandmother. In other words, Haliemeh's grandmother paid the price for the power struggles between armies, countries and empires. Haliemeh narrates a genealogy of suffering in her family, in particular how this affected women's lives during the English era. She describes the English forcing her grandmother to leave the country. Her family was uprooted and forced to move from Lyd to Hims, then to Hamah, and finally back to Nazareth.

In an account by Salma from Lyd, the English are depicted as expropriators of the land:

> Next to the station, there were two groves in this direction. We had a grove that was called al-Shat and another that was called Wadi a-Rubih in a southern direction, next to the station. And the English also took the station vineyard and made it into a parade ground for the army.

Additional memories of the English were brought up by Aysheh, originally from Isdud, currently from Ramleh, using the following language:

> Our Palestinian people were always oppressed and discriminated against. Turkey conquered us and put young men to death. My father-in-law was a fighter in Turkey… After the Turks, the English came, and after the English, Israel came [she laughs]. During the time of the English, I remember our neighbour had two bullets and they gave him two years [in prison]. They didn't find a gun or anything on him… Anyone who was a revolutionary got hanged. There's a song – I don't remember it – about Palestinians who were executed in Akka [Acre], three of them… The song is about the beginning of the English conquest where the English would execute any Palestinian who even breathed, or who was a revolutionary or anything like that. They say that the Palestinian people have always been discriminated against, have been humiliated throughout their life – since Turkey, and even before Turkey, and under those English, and now Israel. If only Israel had left the Palestinians in their own country! It dispersed them [*shatathum*].

Aysheh states that Turkey was responsible for the pointless death of many young Palestinian men who served in the Turkish army. She uses the phrase 'our Palestinian people', a statement that reflects an awareness of a Palestinian collectivity. The English, in Aysheh's memory, were oppressors who hanged and killed Palestinians for seeking liberation. Women observe a distinct similarity between the Turkish ruling power and the English ruling power. Both treated the Palestinians unjustly. It is true that Palestinians did not enjoy self-rule, neither under the Turkish nor under the British, but they remained in their own homes. In contrast, the Jewish Israelis dispersed, fragmented and shattered the Palestinian population and destroyed many of their homes, and indeed villages and towns. The women I interviewed did not passively

accept the aggression of these occupiers. Rather, they actively sought to liberate themselves and oppose them in any way possible.

## Revolution

The suffering and oppression of Palestinians had their origin in the era of the Turks but intensified during the British era, when Palestinians began to struggle for their right to sovereignty and self-definition in their homeland, as was the trend developing in the whole Arab region. In describing Palestinian fighters who struggled for the right to self-determination, the women I interviewed used words that are typical of the national political discourse, 'revolutionaries' (*al-thuwwar*) and 'revolution' (*thawra*), to refer to Palestinian resistance forces and the more distant events of 1936 to 1939. This is in contrast to the language they used to describe their experiences of the Nakba, which combines words from private life with the public domain.[26] The term 'Nakba' is more dangerously and intimately tied to their present lives as citizen of the State of Israel, which was established as a result of the Nakba.

Da'seh from Lyd describes an experience related to her by her mother:

> My uncle, Amin Hasuna, was ambushed at night on the way from Ramleh during the days of the English. The English commander, Totley, told him 'Turn around'. He didn't do so and Totley shot my uncle in his back. The English used to pick us up in the fields, where the peasants [*fellahin*] used to harvest grain. In those days, the revolutionaries would wear black jilbab [women's robes] and hide in the fields.

Fatmeh Abed el Hadi recalls:

> I was young and I heard about the revolutionaries. They were in the days of the English, not in the days of the Jews. I would hear about them, rumours. I was small and ignorant… A lot of them were killed during the days of the revolution… They fought against the English, my God. Lots and lots were killed, my God.

As I have already remarked, all of these women who mentioned the English used the same terms, 'revolutionaries' and 'revolution'. Only one woman, Aysheh, used the phrase 'the days of the strike', which is also part of the official public discourse. The term 'revolution' implies the possibility of making profound change for the better in liberating society and therefore implicitly justifies the act. The word 'revolutionaries' also carries the dreams and hopes of Palestinians in ending British rule and gaining liberation. By killing the revolutionaries, or as Sara[27] puts it, executing 'any Palestinian who even breathed', the British also killed the dream of Palestinians to liberate themselves and their country, thus making the invasion and dispersion of Palestinians by the Israelis all the more inevitable.

## The days of the Arabs versus the days of Israel

Language changes and is updated in accordance with changing social and cultural circumstances (Hertzler, 1965). New social needs and cultural experiences expand, modify and reshape the borders of language and its components. While the interviewees refer to the period of British Imperial rule as 'the days of the English', they also sometimes call this same period 'the days of the Arabs'. The period that followed the entry of the Jews is known as 'the days of Israel'. In this part of my discussion, I look at when, where and why the women I interviewed made use of named historical periods, examining the relevance and meaning of these references to their personal and collective lives as women, as Palestinians and as Israeli citizens.

Raiefeh from Lyd recounts life under the British:

> At first, and during the days of the English, we were in the Orthodox Society Club at the Christian Centre. There were English ladies who held exhibitions and organized outings. We finished school during the days of the Arabs, and the Jews came and we didn't continue the way we should have. There were no good

> schools anymore. I was in school before the Jews came in 1948. The [British] government was strong on education in the days of the Arabs. I studied from first until fourth grade at the Christian Centre School.

While speaking of the activities organized by the Christian Orthodox Club, Raiefeh sees the English in a positive light. When speaking of her positive experience of her school days, she uses the words 'in the days of the Arabs'. Raiefeh mentions the high standard of education 'in the days of the Arabs' but not 'in the days of the English'. Raiefeh does not perceive the Christian Orthodox Club and its establishment by the English as part of their missionary activity with imperialist objectives. When she speaks of positive experiences in her life, such as acquiring a good education, before the Jews came in, she generally uses the words 'the days of the Arabs'.

Alice from Ramleh reinforces Raiefeh's statement: 'We were in the Tabitha School, the best school in all of Palestine and known throughout the world. The elite people of Yaffa would go there; anyone who had money would go there.' Alice and her friends point to the decline in the standard of education after 1948 and the current poor level of achievement among the Palestinian population in Lyd and Ramleh. They spoke of 'the days of the Arabs' whenever they spoke of any positive experiences under the era of British rule. Um Nasri, originally from Lyd and now living in Ramleh, added: 'In the days of the Arabs, people were really simple. They didn't have numbers on the houses and they didn't have names for the streets [she laughs]… In the days of the Arabs, when someone arrived, he would ask, "Where is so-and-so's house?" "Where is Um Nasri's house?" and everybody knew.'

Um Nasri's statement reflects the security she felt when she remembers the days of the Arabs compared to her present insecurity and estrangement. She also expresses nostalgia for the closeness among the population, when everyone knew everyone else. She further recalls, 'We lived in a city where everyone knew everyone, there were no house numbers, no street numbers, and everyone

knew Um Anis and everyone could direct you to her house.' Fatmeh Abed el Hadi, originally from Zakariyya, expresses a similar sentiment: 'We lived in the best possible way in Zakariyya. There was no gossip like there is today, no "so-and-so" talk and no nothing, nothing like that. And there weren't people who killed other people, and there weren't people who hit other people. We were like one family.'

In a sense, these women are inventing a myth of a cohesive social group which lived in safety and security. This is how they relive the past today. As Lev Grinberg (2000: 13) puts it, 'the past is important only to the extent of present-day belief in its existence'. Irrespective of whether or not that memory is factually correct, the solidarity and security depicted in that memory indicate the absence of such feelings in their cities today.

Today, the words 'the days of the Jews' most frequently appear in a context of insecurity, in relation to poor education and other forms of discrimination. The sense of security that prevailed in the days of the Arabs disappeared when the Jews came in. Salma from Lyd describes the change that took place with regard to land inheritance:

> In the days of the Arabs, for example, if the parents had 10 dunums of land, they gave their sons two dunums each and their daughters one dunum each and everyone got his or her portion.[28] My grandmother inherited from her parents, and my mother inherited, too. During the days of Israel, they give the same thing to women as to men.

Elaborating how land arrangements changed within the family after 1948 and how this has influenced her life as a woman, Salma says:

> The land was ours, ours, and we were renting it from the Jews and working on it. Ours was rented too. The Jews took it. At that time, we did not have our land here yet [where her present home is], from the Jews, and we were renting [our own land].

When asked to clarify this arrangement – working on her family's land, but paying rent for it – Salma confirms this: 'Yes by rent. We

were renting it from the Jews, of course.' Salma's daughter offers further confirmation:

> Yes, they were renting it for twenty-eight years. Then whoever could liberate it, meaning set his land free, was doing that, and whoever could not liberate it after twenty-eight years, he could forget it. There are people who were unable to liberate their land after twenty-eight years. My father liberated [part of this land]. [My parents] could not liberate the olive plantation, it was over after twenty-eight years [and they lost the land to the state].

When asked why he did not liberate all of the land, Salma goes on to explain:

> It was over.[29] He had no money. They were paying so much money. They were paying to get the land back, which means [he was paying] as if he was buying it, until they gave him [the land], until they registered it in his name. Originally it was his own, in his name, belonging to his father, and grandfather… [The Israelis] were forcing him to pay so much until he was so poor, not having a cent. He was begging for money… Then we liberated it, as did the el Naqib and abu Hamameh [families]. We liberated [the land] at the same time, each one his own land. Each one [liberated] as much as he had money to [pay the taxes], and not as much land as he had; not all of his father's land. Which means, you, how many brothers do you have? Each one had a part… and you got a part too, but the girl [received an equal portion] like the boy. We were here [before 1948]. According to [Islam], one-third [of the inheritance] is for a girl and two-thirds for a boy… The Jews say that a boy and a girl are the same. They did not agree to give you according to our religion … which means that … you have one dunum and your sister one dunum, like you. But we were dividing land according to the religion … giving one-third for a girl and two-thirds for a boy. The Jews did not accept that. The girl has to take [an equal portion of the inheritance] as the boy. And you have to bring witnesses and say that those are your brothers and sisters and you don't have more, fearing that you may take more land. You bring witnesses and they swear to God that you have no other brothers [in Israel], and if you have more [siblings outside of Israel], then the Jews took their portions. [My husband] told

> them, 'I only have one brother and me and another sister.' And he brought four witnesses and swore that it was just them until they gave him this portion; it took him years.

When asked if she liberated her own portion of land from her parents' property, Salma responds:

> I have no money. We [she and her husband] were working on the land. I don't have money of my own. We were working together and he was going to liberate his land free, yes, we were planting, and we were collecting and they were selling. I mean the man [husband], taking the money.

Salma explains the legal procedures to retain land inheritance after 1948. Only those family members who were citizens in the State of Israel could be inheritors and the land was divided equally among them, regardless of their sex. Those family members who were refugees outside the borders of the State of Israel were not eligible to receive their share of the inheritance, which became the property of the State of Israel. Inheritors who remained in Israel could receive their share of the land share, but only after they released it by paying taxes.

At first glance, it would seem that the modern State of Israel introduced egalitarian laws and values, especially with respect to land distribution. However, Israel used the law to take control of the property of those Palestinians who became refugees. Considering gender relations in regard to inheritance, according to Salma, in contrast to the days of the Arabs, when daughters received less than sons, 'in the days of Israel, they [Israelis] give the same share to women as to men'. Under the 1950 Israeli Absentee Property Law, Salma was entitled to 'liberate' her share of her family land inheritance. However, because of the high taxes, she did not have the financial means to do so. As a married woman, she worked with her husband to pay the taxes on his share of his family land inheritance. They both worked hard to release his plot. Salma's position as a Palestinian who failed to pay the required state taxes, which were too high, and as a woman caught up in the patriarchal gender relations

in Palestinian society (e.g. she explained that her husband controlled all of the family resources, including her own) left her without the egalitarian share of her parents' land inheritance granted by Israeli law. Although 'in the days of Israel, they gave the same to women as to men', she was unable to benefit from that equality.

When these women recall 'the days of the English', they refer to memories of oppression, expropriation of land for military use, execution and persecution of revolutionaries. They frequently use the phrase 'days of the English', but when they discuss positive experiences during those years, they use the phrase 'the days of the Arabs'. It is important to note that periods marked by positive experiences were sometimes referred to by means of the words 'in those days', 'in ancient times' or 'the days back then'. Rarely did they refer to any time period as 'the days of Palestine'. In my view, this is because this particular phrase evokes memories of the protracted conflict over the land, which they do not want to think about – a situation that reflects and expresses the complexity of their reality and their position as Palestinian women, on one hand, and as citizens in the State of Israel, on the other.

## We liberated our land and built our home

As Salma states above in her life story, her husband was successful in liberating his share of land inheritance and built their family home there. However, few Palestinian families living in Lyd and Ramleh managed to reclaim the property that belonged to them prior to 1948. Interestingly, all those who succeeded in reclaiming ownership of their land used the term 'liberated'. Even those who did not succeed commented that they 'weren't able to liberate our land'.

As Raiefeh from Lyd says, for example:

> And now, we liberated the home by the court and judge, its [Jewish] inhabitants were evacuated… We were the first Arab [family] who liberated [our home] and the Jewish [family] had to get out of our home… It took many years in court and a lot of money.

Alice also describes how she rented her parents' home from Amidar and later succeeded in liberating it. Raiefeh from Lyd told two stories, one a failure and the other a success:

> We had a house. We wanted to build a house and such, a house with a garden and vegetables… Recently we were without land. To this day we haven't liberated it. It was next to the old city municipality [meaning the municipality before 1948]. Then we lived at my aunt's house… When we left, we migrated from here; the Jews took it from my aunt. My aunt was an unmarried woman, who can take it [inherit]. We, or her nephews, could, if only we had… [did not complete the sentence] but no! We don't have Kawashin or… [did not complete] and our land is lost. Now there is in a different place – we liberated it – a portion of land, but you are not entitled to sell it or build on it.

These women give a subversive meaning to the word 'liberation' in spite of the exhausting, painful, expensive and protracted process involved in liberating portions of land, a home or property. Liberating family land or homes is described as a private act. However, all of the women used the plural form of this verb, 'we liberated', giving this experience a collective and national significance. Women appropriate the same word, 'liberation', and use it in accordance with their own experiences and perceptions, with regard to their land, home and property being occupied, taken by force by the Israelis. When it is returned to their ownership, they say it has been liberated. In Zionist discourse, the events of 1948 are called the 'war of liberation', based on the claim that God promised the land to Jewish forefathers. In this context, the use of this same term on the part of these Palestinian women does not mean they accept Zionist claims. On the contrary, it serves an altogether different purpose – it defies and resists this Zionist claim and reveals the State of Israel as the occupier of Palestine. In doing so, the women challenge the well-known Zionist slogan 'land without a people for a people without land'. They also raise questions about and defy state power in the process.

## Conclusion

The women I interviewed recalled historical events and gave them names and meaning that mirror and reflect their own experiences, their world and reality as women in a patriarchal society and as part of a Palestinian collective that has experienced the traumatic events of 1948 – the past that is present in their daily routines, where history remains vividly alive – and as Palestinian citizens in the State of Israel. The fact that older urban Palestinian women use different types of language for different historical events reveals how power operates in different regimes. It also offers clues about women's resistance to these power relations.

The women who witnessed the Nakba demonstrate their capacity to shift from a situation of survival to one where they must multitask in order to rebuild and sustain their shattered and dispersed lives, as well as those of their families and communities. In this, they exercise an active sense of agency. Through their choice of language, these women also preserve collective historical events in the absence of legitimacy for these events in the public sphere in Israel. In the face of ongoing violent political conflict, the past lives on in the present and influences the way they conceive of and locate their personal and collective socio-historical lives. These choices of language blur the gendered dichotomy between private and public and the personal and the collective. Through their words, these women resist the Zionist historiographic narrative, undermining the hegemonic use of words like 'infiltrator' and 'liberated', giving them meanings that are opposed to the dominant Zionist ideology. Similarly, they challenge the Palestinian national narrative and reveal its masculine biases, as well as its limitations. Their words both reflect reality and deconstruct it to re-create it anew. At the same time, their language offers a potential route to recovery and an end to the violent political conflict that has plagued Palestinian and Israeli society for decades.

It is not a coincidence that in part of this analysis of the terminology these women used I decided to analyse what they were not saying, what I saw as 'missing words'. When they said, for example,

'the Jews came in' or 'the Jews entered and took us' instead of using the term 'Nakba', as a second-generation researcher in relation to 1948, I adopted the Palestinian national narrative and used this word. However, this is an imposition: I am imposing my language and terminology on these women, as I explained in the chapter about my experiences in getting approval for my research proposal. In addition, I also noticed that these women do not refer to themselves as refugees, despite the fact that they were uprooted from their villages and towns and prohibited from returning by the Israeli government. Where they refer to this experience as a migration, I instead protest this situation by using the phrase 'refugee at home'.

# FIVE

# The Body

They took all my oats away from me,
And I am pressing their roots to my breast.
The scent of jasmine lights the tips of my fingers
Illuminating history's decree
In the loneliness of exile.

Siham Daoud, 'I Am Pressing the Letters to My Lips' (1988: 11)

We left our homes and came out with just our bodies…
By God, everyone took his body and that's all.

Um Nasri (2003)

Born in Lyd as one of the second generation of 1948, the Palestinian writer and poet Siham Daoud describes her feelings of loneliness and exile in her native land in terms of her body, breasts, fingers and the scent of jasmine. Her body tells the story, providing knowledge and recalling those historic events from her present standpoint of being an Israeli citizen. Lebanese writer Elias Khoury (1998: 158) makes a similar connection between the body and Palestinian history in his book *Bab al-Shams*, when he narrates the story of those who became refugees in Lebanon: 'your body is your history'. Colonialism leaves its imprint on the body of the colonized, as Frantz Fanon (1986) claims in his book *Black Skin, White Masks*, such that

the colonial occupation, the oppression, is inscribed in the body, thereby objectifying 'blackness'. In similar ways, the occupation in 1948 and the ongoing oppression, whether direct or indirect, is inscribed on the bodies of Palestinians and tells the story of their history. Political, social and cultural norms are manifested in body praxis, performance and images. Michel Foucault analysed the body as object, claiming that disciplinary power produces a docile person and a subvervient body in modern society (Foucault, 1980). In contrast, Judith Butler regards the body as a subject that produces social meaning and performs it (Butler, 1990). In this sense, the body retains its agency although it is a socio-historical and political construction, and perceived differently in different historical periods (Foucault, 1995). The body is a cultural construct that changes throughout the course of history at both the epistemological and the ontological level depending on context, and is one of the central metaphors for political and social order (Turner, 1991). As Arthur Frank (1991) argues, the body is a history of oppositions. People become self-conscious of their bodies when they encounter resistance. Palestinian women described the body as the subject matter of both women and men; sometimes it is a means of staging resistance, at other times it is objectified and subjugated.

Human beings construct their bodies on the basis of an ideology of some sort. Social and political memory consists of a range of bodily practices and performances (Connerton, 1989). This chapter discusses and interprets the ways in which the women I interviewed recall historical events through bodily performance, experiences and images of the body during different historical periods. Bodily praxis, memories of the body, and memories through the body – of their own bodies, as well as those of others – represent change during different historical moments. Likewise, these historical changes shape and determine the way women portray the images of the body and its praxis.

In the absence of a legitimate public space for telling their untold stories, to remember and commemorate these events and experiences, Palestinian women of the first generation after the Nakba told the

forbidden story of Palestinian history in terms of bodily experience and through bodily images. The body functions as a tool that historical events script such that the private body becomes politicized and collectivized. It therefore provides alternative knowledge that is opposed to the hegemonic Jewish Israeli knowledge, and by doing so becomes a subversive site of resistance and commemoration for Palestinians. At the same time, the depictions of the body presented by these women show how the body complies with different oppressive mechanisms of the state and the patriarchal relations within Palestinian society. Historical as well as contemporary political and social realities – as they are manifest in the descriptions of the body – reveal the problematic position of these women, as women and as Palestinians in the State of Israel, and expose the internal conflicts and ruptures of this positioning.

## The body remembered

Experiences from 1948 cast a heavy shadow over the personal and family lives of those women I interviewed. These experiences dominate their life stories and explain their insecurity and suspicious attitude towards Israeli authorities, both in the past and in the present. These women describe how the 'entrance of the Jews' into their cities shattered their immediate families in 1948, and continues to do so in their contemporary realities. Palestinian men migrated, escaped, went missing or were killed. The ways in which these women perceive and remember their losses remain alive and well in the present. In this sense, the suffering of these women is ongoing, just as the prolonged Palestinian–Israeli conflict is. Remembering through their bodies, these women describe the complexity of their experiences during 1948.

### The death roads

The expulsion of Palestinians from Lyd and Ramleh is well known and has been documented in relation to the conflict in Palestine/Israel (e.g. Morris, 2004, 1987; Masalha, 2003). Those women who

migrated themselves or heard others describe the enforced expulsion continued to talk about it in bodily terms – through the body, by the body, and about the body.

Remembering in terms of bodies is most evident in the descriptions of the dead bodies on the road, the most prominent of which deal with the loss of family members and relatives, the elderly and children, who could not survive the difficult physical conditions, especially the heat, hunger and thirst. As Salma recalls:

> People died on their way. My husband's cousin died and his aunt and my cousin died on her way. The poor ones, they did not find anyone to say a prayer for them. It was so hot, so hot. The other people did not look at them. They died, they died. Yes, the old ones were dying. Bodies were left by the road. There is no one that took care of them. There was no drop of water. No water. We were fasting… I know someone who left his mother. She was old, and he left her on the road and she died… On the third day he came back, by infiltration, brought [the body of] his mother, carried her back and buried her.

A recurrent theme in the descriptions of the journeys on the road of expulsion, related by many of the women I interviewed – who gave eyewitness testimony or conveyed stories from other relatives of these ordeals – was people just dying on the roads and being left there. In other cases, the bodies were hidden in cactus bushes or trees until later, when the worst of the danger was over and family members could sneak back to bury the dead bodies of their relatives. An expression of disbelief that was repeatedly used was that 'no one believed our destiny was to die or that there was no one to bury the dead during the migration'.

The phrases 'the days are repeating themselves' or 'Gaza people have nothing to eat' were also frequently used, particularly after the Israeli attack on Jenin camp and attacks on Gaza City, Khan Younis and other parts of the Gaza Strip in 2003. The more recent suffering of the Palestinian people, especially the horror of dead bodies, hunger and thirst, effectively links contemporary events to the traumatic

recollections these women had of events in 1948. Recent events, such as the attacks in 2003 and the renewed attacks on Gaza that began in December 2008, appear to be yet another chapter in a collective history with recurrent themes of suffering and struggle for survival, which is so vividly recalled in the life stories of these women. Contemporary Palestinian experience continues to evoke memories of the past. The chances of forgetting the traumas of the past remain slim in the context of ongoing persecution.

Some of the women I interviewed lost their children on the road of expulsion. Most were unable to talk about these losses in any direct way, simply using the words 'he or she died' without further explanation. It was generally left for the listener to draw conclusions. Aysheh's comments typify this: 'We left Isdud after the occupation of the country [*el-Balad*]. We walked for over two hours on foot along the beach. My elder daughter was two years old when we migrated… My daughter was in my arms [silence].'

Aysheh's body embraced her daughter's body while she escaped the attack on Isdud, her home village. Although she did not tell me that her young daughter died, the manner in which she told this part of her story – the silences, facial expressions and the sweat that covered her face – indicated that she was concealing something. During our first interview, for example, she talked about a 2-year-old daughter, and another daughter who was in her arms. During the second interview, she talked about coming back with only one daughter: 'I had two daughters with me when we migrated. One was 2 years old and the other six months old. It was very hard. No doctors and no food. She sucked poisonous milk, because of fatigue.'

Aysheh never directly named the death of her young girl. The girl nursed on the milk of sorrow and anger which, Aysheh believed, acted on the baby's body like poison, and apparently she died. Aysheh's ordeal in talking about the child who died reveals her traumatic loss, her feelings of guilt and the pain of returning to her husband with only one daughter. When she recalled 1948, she connected the trauma of the expulsion with the trauma of losing her daughter; her anger over the expulsion poisoned her milk and subsequently her daughter.

Like Aysheh, a few other women describe similar experiences, reflecting their trauma, guilt and failure to ensure the survival of their children, causing those mothers unrelenting sorrow.

Many of the women I interviewed described the failure of their bodies to carry their own children to safety. They recounted similar stories from other mothers as well. Although finding safety for their children was one of the primary objectives of their journey, they were unable to do so because they lacked the physical strength to continue carrying them. Some of the women testified that they saw children left along the road, with the hope that somebody stronger would carry them. However, that rarely happened. One of the young men I met in Lyd invited me to his home to hear his parents' stories. For him, as a young son of a family from al-Majdal, his mother had a story that he felt should be heard and recorded. Her life story was based around being left on the roadside during the march of expulsion. Unlike so many other children, she was twice rescued by family members and managed to survive. Um Ismael also recalls: 'My uncle's wife carried a child in her arms, and twice she put him down on the road. She couldn't carry him anymore. It was boiling hot, and they had no water or anything.'

Another bodily remembrance is related by Aysheh, who tells an extraordinary story about men, women and children temporarily losing their eyesight on the road to expulsion:

> They went blind… My daughter was about 2½ years old. I went to the doctor and told him, 'My daughter can't see.' The doctor said to me, 'No, don't fear. It's because your food has changed… He gave me blue ointment for the mouth, and I'm saying, 'But my daughter!' And he says, 'No, a lot of people [are sick like her]. In a few days [it will pass]. It's because your food has changed.'

Clearly, temporary blindness represents a physical expression of extreme bodily duress. The temporary loss of eyesight that many people experienced also can be regarded as symbolizing the impossibility of being able to see and grasp the misery of what was happening to Palestinian communities.

## Hunger and thirst

Hunger and thirst are also ever-present themes remembered through the body, as Salma indicates in this description of her march on mountain roads:

> We had nothing, no clothes and no bread for the children… My daughter was in my arms, and I had no bread to give her. We had nothing with us. We went out just like that… We were fasting. My cousin died on the road, my husband's aunt and his two cousins died on the road. Old people who walked slowly … couldn't get to the end of the journey and died. The migration was hard, very hard, and it was very difficult to sustain oneself… There wasn't a drop of water to drink, not even a little. We the grown-ups, young and strong, thought we were going to die. By God, there were mountains without water, and the heat of midday. They drove us out in the middle of the day. It was a broiler… It was not easy to survive in the days of migration. One had no food, thirsty for water. One would walk on and look for a drop of water to moisten one's throat and didn't find even that. Someone had some mud in a bucket, and people [asked], let us drink. So he lifted the bucket like this, just to wet their throats from the bucket. Who knows where he got it from, some wadi or some other place, God knows. He let people wet their throats, we drank that watery soil. By God, he lifted the bucket, like this, and we put it to our mouths. He didn't let us drink a lot. The days are repeating themselves now. Look in Gaza. Some of the people have nothing to eat. The days are repeating themselves, more or less.

In Salma's description of quenching her thirst with mud, there is a symbolic dimension of being torn away from one's land, compressed together into one symbol with the experience of being forced away from the elementary sources of life, water and soil. In the absence of stable ground and water wells, what is left to her is only moist dirt that symbolizes the inaccessibility of both of these elements at once. In Salma's description of this incident, there is also a dimension of the struggle for survival, as this is represented by the choice to drink unclean water. Her repetition of the central themes in the story (food, water; hunger, thirst) shows the power of this experience – how it is

engraved in her mind and inscribed on her body. She tells her story to commemorate this experience and protect it from oblivion.

In telling of their experiences on the death march, these women express a deep sense of humiliation while also continuing to struggle for survival, as Alice from Ramleh explains:

> We were humiliated. We drank animals' water [urine] and licked watermelon rinds. Arabs exploited us. We paid a fortune to rent a camel. We suffered a lot until the trucks came and loaded us on [the Israelis loaded them on trucks and took them to Jordan]… There everyone was a hero [with sarcasm]! They asked for lots of money from us.

A sense of humiliation and helplessness arises from Alice's words, as she remembers, through the body, the intense thirst that drove them to drink animals' urine and muddy water. The feeling of humiliation is further sharpened in the words 'licked watermelon rinds', which are normally used to feed animals. The phrases 'loaded us' and 'exploited us' indicate that she remembers her sense of the body as object. All her expressions articulate feelings of anger, frustration and helplessness. Notably, she accuses not only the Israelis, but also the Arabs – especially the Jordanians – of being responsible for her suffering and humiliation.

The vast majority of the women I interviewed also recalled the Israeli occupation of Lyd and Ramleh in relation to Ramadan, the month of fasting marked in the Muslim calendar, as Salma explains:

> It was the fast, the first, no, the third day of Ramadan. We were fasting when the Jews came in… They [the Jews] didn't leave anything to us, not half a pitta, and no water for the children. And the people were expelled into the mountains barefoot, empty-handed… There was not a drop of water. Nothing to drink. We thought the old ones and the young ones were going to die, swear to God. There were mountains and no water… They [Israelis] got us out [*talauona*] at noon. It was noon. It was so hot, so hot.

Most of the interviewees describe the occupation of Lyd and Ramleh by emphasizing their recollections that 'people were fasting',

'there wasn't a drop of water and no food' and 'it was very hot, very hot'. These common phrases marked the conquest of the cities in terms of the body. Because it was Ramadan, the major religious fast for Muslims, these women conceived of the occupation of their cities as a desecration of their territory and its inhabitants. By combining time (1948) and place (Lyd and Ramleh), with the body and fasting during Ramadan, these women also present a symbolic reflection on the occupation that violated the sacredness of their life. They anchor the memory of this historical event in the bodily memory of fasting. Their distress from the event is sharpened and focused through the distress of the body. The enforced cruelty of the invasion imposed hunger and thirst, thus torturing bodies that were already obeying a divine command to fast.

## Images of the male body

The women's positioning as both Palestinians and citizens in the State of Israel shapes and influences the way in which the women I interviewed portray their images of the Palestinian male body, in the past and in the present. Some of these images are openly talked about, while others are silenced or described only in vague terms. The latter was especially the case with images of the male figure that had been contextualized in relation to active participation in the war against the Israeli invasion.

### The dead male body

Um Nasri offers a graphic image of the male body when she tells the story of how her mother-in-law's brother, Hamuda, was killed:

> We started searching in the vineyards and were aware that he had been shot. He [the corpse] was in the street, thrown down with a dead donkey; the donkey shot in the head… The shooting over our heads was like the… [silence] … Imagine how much shooting was over our heads. My mother-in-law was with us. She saw her brother dead like this and started turning him over, the poor thing… They shot both him and the donkey. So I returned to our

> house… If you only had seen the bodies in the streets, if you only had seen the bodies… Little children without their shoes walking about in the mayhem and crying, and our situation was really bad… The wife of my husband's uncle arrived, and asked me, 'Have you seen my husband?' I told her 'No I haven't.' What could I tell her, that they shot him and he was thrown into the street? She asked me, 'Why is your face like this?' I said to her 'Leave this to Allah.' All the way we wept and wailed, seeing all those [who lay] killed in the streets.

The dominant image of the male body here is the corpse, killed and thrown into the street along with an animal. This epitomizes the situation of Palestinians in 1948. The parallel description of the man's body lying next to the donkey's body emphasizes the devaluation of human life during the war. One of Um Nasri's most vivid memories of 1948 is of men's bodies lying dead in the street and barefoot children crying. At the time of her interview, her facial expressions offered a more accurate description of this experience than her words. Her body (face) and the dead bodies in the street are the primary medium she uses to tell this part of her life story.

I repeatedly encountered hesitation and reluctance in the speech patterns of many of the interviewees when they were speaking about the deaths of the men in their lives. Salma, for example, did not voluntarily talk about her father being killed in Dahmash Mosque in Lyd in 1948. Only at the urging of her daughter, who was present at the interview, did she eventually explain what happened. As Salma recollects:

> My father and many others, they went inside the mosque to protect themselves from the Jews. He was not fighting. He was an old man. My father and my cousin, the Jews squeezed them [into the Mosque] and shot all of them. On the first days when the Jews came in [people from Lyd] went inside the mosques. They thought that [the Jews] would not kill them … in the mosques. [But] they killed everyone who was inside. [Dahmash Mosque] was closed and the Jews did not allow it to be cleaned and opened again.

The Dahmash Massacre, as it is known, was carried out by Israeli forces who occupied Lyd on 12 July 1948. Controversy remains as to

how many people died that day. Israeli historian Benny Morris (1987) reports that 176 Palestinians were killed in the mosque. In contrast, Isbir Munayyir (1997) indicates that those who evacuated the bodies counted 93 corpses, but others said that they counted more than 100. The bodies from the Dahmash Massacre were buried in a collective grave in the cemetery in Lyd. Faieq abu Maneh, one of the men I interviewed, helped remove the bodies, as well as burn and bury them. The Dahmash Mosque serves as an informal memorial site for those who were massacred; in addition to its obvious religious significance, the mosque – the very site of the massacre – functions as a site of remembering and commemorates the loss of life that occurred in 1948.

## The forbidden male body

Those Palestinian men who fought against the Israeli occupation in 1948 tend to be described in ambiguous terms by the women I interviewed. Some of them refrain altogether from offering descriptions of these male figures – neither are they portrayed as clear-cut fighters or freedom fighters; nor do they possess any characteristics that resemble such descriptions. For example, when asked to explain the story of her maternal grandfather, Mustafa Abu Amara, who 'fell victim in 1948 and was shot in his house', Um Fathi from Ramleh simply says:

> There was a resistance in 1948. His house was in a fruit plantation and they made there something like, not a headquarters, [but] they came to the house because it was on high spot. A few people came who were without weapons, but [the Israelis] came and shot him. His house was ruined on the same day. This was the opening of 1948.

In this brief recounting of events, Um Fathi's grandfather appears as a victim. However, Um Fathi's story is not precise and there is a degree of confusion surrounding what happened. She says there was resistance, but not that there was fighting. Rather, her grandfather's house served as a type of headquarters. From her use of plural

pronouns, it can be inferred that the house was used not only by her grandfather but by others. However, according to Um Fathi, these are people who came without weapons. This confusion betrays the difficulty Um Fathi has in speaking about those Palestinian men, including her own grandfather, who were involved in resistance to the invasion of the Jewish Zionist Brigades.

In part, the difficulty here derives from being both a Palestinian and a citizen of the state that was established after the defeat of Palestinian fighters. Being a relative of someone who fought against the Jewish Zionist Brigades in 1948 situates Um Fathi and other women like her in an uncomfortable position, which is reflected in their difficulty in speaking about the Palestinian male body as alive and resisting the invasion. Instead the body of the male fighter is more easily represented as a victim, or at best as seriously wounded (but without further elaboration of what happened).

As with Um Fathi, Salma is equally reluctant to talk about her knowledge of her close relative's role in defending Lyd. Fortunately, however, her daughter was at the interview and kept prompting her mother to say more. Otherwise Salma may never have told the following story, which she begins by recounting, 'My husband was wounded by a grenade … from the explosions. He was hurt and stayed, but we migrated. We came back when he recovered. He asked us and we came here and lived here.' When asked to confirm that her husband was wounded, Salma's daughter instead replies in the affirmative, which encourages her mother to continue her story:

> I told you, he was wounded in his leg, this part was gone, and also in his shoulder. From his shoulder, part of the flesh was gone. When he was cured and got well again, we came here, came back. We came and he started working with … the vegetable company. We came and started working with him until, thank God, he established his life anew. By God, after we went out with nothing, then he started his life over again from the beginning. Thank God, he went to Tel Aviv and took from the land registry bureau a plot [of land], one of his father's plots, and we started working and planting … and make our living.

When asked how and where he was wounded, Salma explains: 'Why, there was war at the beginning of Israel. When the war broke out, then the Jews took us. They started hitting the armoured car with cannons from the sky.' Salma's daughter adds, 'He [her father] was wounded and his cousin was killed.' Salma confirms this: 'And his cousin died and he [her husband] was wounded.'

Like Um Fathi's difficulty in talking about her grandfather as a fighter, it was not easy for Salma to say her husband fought against the Israelis in 1948. Without prompting by her daughter, Salma would not offer any details about her husband's injuries or his role in protecting Lyd. As the story above indicates, it was difficult to draw Salma out. In the end, she did not in fact provide many details at all about what her husband did. Although these events took place more than sixty years ago, the reluctance of these women to talk about the active roles the men in their families played in resisting the Jewish Zionist Brigades indicates an ongoing fear that they might be accused of undermining state security in Israel, where they are now citizens.

Even talking about Palestinian men who merely supported those who were fighting (and did not themselves fight) proved very difficult. This is exemplified in Um Omar's story about her father, especially when trying to elicit information about his fate:

> I am telling you things so briefly, and not what happened and how a man was tortured… I just remember … that Abu Abed Hamam came. He knocked on our door and my father opened it to him. He told [my father], 'Haj, the town is gone. If you want to go out [*titlaah*]. [My father] came and said to us, 'Come, let's go.' We went to the mosque, but found it closed, so he took us to the church [Saint George's]. He took us in the morning. You can say in the afternoon [the Jews] came and took him… They took him and he did not come back.

When asked where they took her father, Um Omar only says 'they came' and does not complete her sentence. The interview continues in a stilted fashion, as follows:

Fatma: 'What?'

Um Omar: 'As I am telling you.'

Fatma: 'Did they take him alive from home?'

Um Omar: 'Yes alive. But not from the house, from the church.'

Fatma: 'And you never saw him after the war?'

At this point, Um Omar elaborates somewhat further, but is clearly still reluctant to talk:

> We were asking the liberated captives to tell us. [They] told us that they took him as a captive… [But when other] captives came home to here, he did not come back with them. And who to ask? We were little. I was the oldest. I am telling you, he did not come back… [silence] Whenever new captives were out, coming to here, we were asking them; they say that he was not with us, and there are many places, not just ours. There are people in other places. And that's it, this is what happened. And the days passed, who could you ask? We didn't know who took him or who… [unfinished sentence, then silence].

Throughout her life story, Um Omar described several times with great sorrow how her father took the family to the church and then he was gone. Towards the end of the interview, I again posed a question about what happened to her father in order to elicit more detail from Um Omar about this part of her life story. When asked if the family made enquiries about her father's whereabouts, Um Omar replies: 'What can I tell you? We asked and the Red Cross… [unfinished sentence, then silence].' When asked if the family asked the army, Um Omar responds: 'We didn't know who to ask.' And finally, when asked if the family asked the government, Um Omar is more forthcoming:

> Which government! Who to ask! We didn't know who. We were kids. Do we know who it is? We asked and asked. And there is one coming, his name is Moshe. Each time that he was coming, we were asking him, we were asking, 'Where is my father?' He was saying, 'He will come, he will come.' He was talking in broken Arabic. He was saying, 'We saw him and he was with them.' He

> was saying 'He will come, will come.' He was with them when they took him, he himself. He was telling us that he will come and the days passed and passed. You know, there are people … they were coming from captivity, people were still coming out until 1955. We were hearing that a person came, and those came and that one came.

It is evident that Um Omar found it painfully difficult to recount what happened to her father, Sheikh Mahmud el-Far. Although she indicates that she did not know her father's fate, in fact other interviewees from both Lyd and Ramleh did know this story. According to their version of events, Um Omar's father was killed and thrown outside the church, where his body lay for several days because no one dared to go near it. Haliemeh elaborates this by saying, 'Sheikh Mahmud el-Far was an old, respected man whom the Israelis took from the church and killed. His body remained on the street for several days. Nobody dared to come close to it.' When asked why, Haliemeh replies, 'We don't know, but maybe somebody informed on him as one of the Mujahedeen. God knows.'

The fact that Um Omar and her family did not dare ask the new Israeli government about where her father was reflects deep fear. This ever-present fear emphasizes the contradictions of her situated position as a Palestinian, with a close relative who likely supported the Palestinian resistance, with Israeli citizenship. Unlike others I interviewed, Um Omar was unable to speak about her father's body lying in the street. This may be due to her repression of a traumatic experience, or perhaps out of embarrassment and shame. In the end, no one knew what happened to his body. This is representative of the broader experience at the time: there is no official or formal monument or site of commemoration that marks what happened to Palestinians from Lyd and Ramleh. However, there are unofficial sites of remembrance, like the mosque at Dahmash. For Um Omar and many other Palestinians in Lyd, the Church of St George serves this purpose. Importantly, this church commemorates not only those whose lives were lost in 1948, but also those whose lives were saved.

The absence of any official monuments in Lyd and Ramleh reflects the ongoing Zionist politics of denial that defines the State of Israel, in particular the refusal to admit responsibility for what happened to Palestinians in 1948. Consequently, Palestinians have been denied the right to mourn and commemorate their losses in the public sphere, indicating their illegitimacy as citizens in the State of Israel.

## The hanged male body

In contrast to their vague and ambiguous images of the male body of the Palestinian resistance fighter in 1948, the women I interviewed spoke readily about those men who revolted against British imperialism in 1936. This male body was described as freedom fighter and revolutionary, but also as victim of the British – the 'hanged body' of those who were put to death in Akka as punishment for their role in the rebellion. Thus the male body is presented as both active and passive agent.

Aysheh, for example, spoke about these men in conjunction with the ruling powers in Palestine. Starting with the Ottoman Empire, when Turks ruled Palestine for more than four centuries, Aysheh explains:

> Here where we are! All our Arabs are traitors from the beginning [including] Abdullah from the days of our war [1948]. [Before] Turkey occupied us and made the young die… After Turkey, the English came to us… After the English, Israel came to us [*laughter*]. When the English were here, I remember our neighbour … they found two gun bullets in his house, [so he] got two years [in prison]. Whoever was making a revolution, they would hang him. I know about three Palestinians who were executed in Akka. I am telling you about the beginning of the English occupation, whoever was breathing, of the Palestinians, or wanted to make revolution or something, the English executed him.

Here Aysheh presents the youthful male body as victim; for example, Turkey is responsible for the deaths of Palestinians youths who served in the Turkish army. She carries this victim image through to the later period of the British rule, recollecting the execution of those men

who rebelled against this oppression. In particular, she is referring to Mohamad Jamjoom, Fouad Hijazi and Atta Al-Zeer, who were executed by the British in Akka in 1930. At the same time, however, this image of the male body becomes more complex: simultaneously victim and active agent. In terms of the latter, Aysheh, along with many of the other interviewees, describes the male body as linked to the physical need to breathe, to feel freedom. This is a concept of agency defined in relation to a capacity to struggle; the ability to bring liberation and freedom from British oppression. But this active agency comes with a high price: death.

Palestinian revolutionaries were not the only victims. As Salma indicates, entire communities suffered:

> The English… maybe hanged twenty people from here, from the city [of Lyd]. I know their names. Usama Al-Tartir, and I know Ali Shahin, and I know Ali Al-Said, and who else? And Yusef, Yusef Abu-Mashark. All these they hanged… Saad and Kamel Al-Said and Asad Al-Tartir and Yusef Abu-Mashark. All these, the Jews [she means the English] hanged… They caught all the revolutionaries from here and from all over the country and started hanging them. Each week they started bringing two in order to hang them.

Salma goes on to explain that the British immediately returned the bodies for burial in the hanged men's home towns, but refused to allow parents to see the bodies. Once the bodies arrived in the cemeteries, the entire town participated in the burial service. Um Mhimad, also from Lyd, mentioned the hangings in Akka, like Salma did. In her recollection of British regulations in relation to the bodies, she expresses with irony the fact that families were forced to pay a burial cost of 5 lira (then the local currency).

Returning to Salma's narrative about the broader effect of the hangings on families, she tells a story about how one mother insisted upon viewing the body of her hanged son:

> And one whose name was Mahmuod el-Zeen… They said his mother wanted to see him. She uncovered his face and then she went mad and they took her out. She went mad, lost her mind, no

> mind in her at all … since her son died… Yes, her son was gone and her mind was gone… She became crazy, lost her mind. She is from the Abu Najem Al-Din family…

In Salma's story, the loss of the revolutionary son is symbolically central: his death deprives his surviving mother's life of all meaning or hope, to the point of losing her mind. This indicates that the image of the male victim's body extends much further during this era: it embraces the family as well. Not only did Palestinian revolutionaries meet their deaths far away from their families, but their corpses most often were buried before family members could see them because the British prevented this. And in the case of this unfortunate mother, her very sanity was the victim of British cruelty.

Of particular interest in Salma's story is that she actually remembers the names of those residents from Lyd who were hanged by the British. However, there has never been a memorial site in Lyd commemorating these men. Oral traditions are, therefore, essential for documenting the names of those who were executed so they will not be forgotten.

## The frail male body

In the life stories of many of the women I interviewed, the wounded or captive bodies of the men in their lives were frequently identified as the primary reason for remaining and/or not being expelled. Two of the most common explanations I encountered were: 'The Jews left no one in the city – only the sick people and the old who couldn't migrate,' and 'The young and the strong migrated or fell captive.' In particular, strong, young Palestinian men were killed or exiled.

To avoid expulsion or capture, some men attempted to disguise themselves by appearing older than they were in order to be able to remain where they were, as Rashideh[1] from Ramleh explains: '[My father] grew his beard so long that they didn't take him captive… Then the Jews would come and tell him, "Come, come", but he would say to them, "I'm old, old, I can't walk".' The reasons for avoiding capture were obvious: those in captivity were subjected to violence

and humiliation. As Um Usif relates, '[The Jews] started collecting those who had papers and those who didn't have papers, putting them in a room. My husband they beat, until by God they didn't miss [any place on his body]… He shakes like this, his eye is like this.' Without mentioning the problems that arise from old age, Um Usif connects her elderly husband's current physical weaknesses to his experiences in 1948. In her perception, his shaking and loss of eyesight today are directly related to the violence he experienced many years ago. The body of Um Usif 's husband symbolizes the shaking and weakness that describe the conditions of life for Palestinian communities in Lyd and Ramleh. His blindness is also a symbolic parallel for the lack of vision and future that Palestinians experience.

As Um Omar recounts, the male body was also manipulated and exploited by the Israeli state, offering the Palestinians little chance to make a decent life for their families and leaving the male body imprisoned and humiliated:

> [The Jews] took them out of the prison… They worked on the train. Their job was driving. They would assign one Arab and two Jews to him so that they could learn. He taught while driving until the Jews learned and became drivers themselves. Then they took the Arabs out… and put them in a machine company. The poor man [husband] was at home all the time, by God, by God's name. I had a son in my lap, and I had six children. My husband, may you never know, was miserable – he was cold, caught a cold, got asthma, went to get a treatment and they told him, 'You have asthma'. He was hospitalized for about fifteen to twenty days, came back and found out that his place [at work] was taken. They brought other [Jewish] people instead of him, and so he stayed home [unemployed].

In addition to their needs being subordinated to the needs of Jewish Israelis, then, Arab men were also discriminated against.

## The missing male body

Referring to events some time after 1948, Haliemeh tells of her brother's failed attempt to escape from Gaza. Taking out the family

album, she shows me photos of her two deceased brothers, Muhammad and Othman, including a photo of the latter's corpse. In response to my shocked surprise at such an image, Haliemeh says, 'The police shot him.' When I asked where this had happened, she elaborates a confusing tale of intrigue:

> God knows. He [Othman] was accused of wanting to leave for Gaza. Someone testified that he wanted to. They brought us the news about him and brought [the body in a car] in June 1960. And [Muhammad] died ten months later, in April 1961… He [Muhammad] worked on a tractor… I told you that my brother ploughed on tractors and got wounded in his chest by an olive-tree branch and died. Then there arrived a forensic report; they said, no, he didn't die from hitting an olive tree, he died from *birtili*, kind of inhaling poison. He used to work around his house. They [the police] asked my father, 'Who were his enemies?' My father told them, 'I don't know that he had any enemies. Who would want to hurt him?' … and Muhammad died. There were men who left for Gaza or the West Bank… Who went out at first when… [unfinished sentence]. You know… [unfinished sentence]. They accused [Othman] of leaving for Gaza and shot him.

In response to a query about who shot Othman, Haliemeh continues:

> The Jews. The forensic report says, OK, you shot him, but what about the wounds on his face? He had wounds from blows to his face, so that each one parted the flesh. They hit him with a gun in the face so that it sliced the flesh like this, that's what they did to his face. And then he was shot with three bullets in his heart. The report said he was shot while escaping to Gaza, so they would have shot him in the back, and not in the face… By God, even now their death is a mystery. No one knows until this day how they died…

After the interview finished and the tape recorder was turned off, Haliemeh pointed to a part of the plot of land she inherited from her parents and on which she had built her house, saying about Muhammad, 'That's where he ploughed the land on a tractor. That's where the Jews drugged [poisoned] him.'

Marked by a similar degree of deep mistrust and suspicion, Um Adnan tells the story about how her son Yusef suddenly disappeared from Lyd one day in the late 1980s without a trace:

> No one knows if Yusef is in heaven or is on earth. He was 20. We still don't know where he is. On the first day of Ramadan, he went out at noon to buy sweets in Abu Suheel's shop. He went out with his bicycle and hasn't returned to this day. Journalists went out to search. There was a search. Nothing. We know nothing about him… Don't know if he is dead or alive or if the state holds him. We don't know. If he was a *Khawaja*, if he was a Jew, they would have turned the world over, but he is an Arab.[2] So, you know, we are the inferior sort. They ignore us, don't search or anything, don't ask… You see, if someone Jewish goes missing, they turn the world upside down, the orchards and the people, and they know where he is… [My son] went out with his ID card in his pocket. Went out and never came back… Even his bicycle wasn't found. God knows whether he is dead or in prison, God knows, God knows where he is.

During the process of doing these interviews, I heard numerous stories of disappearances and murders. As Um Mhimad says of her two sons, some of the women knew where the young men went: 'They couldn't bear the discrimination, so they got up and went. One left for Germany and another for the United States.' Women describe diverse reasons why sons, husbands and male relatives in particular left the family and the cities. Alice's son has a Ph.D. in physics and sought a suitable job in Israel; when he could not find one, he left for the United States, where he continues to live. Raiefeh's son is a chemist, who now also lives in the United States; he left the country because his political activism resulted in significant pressure on his parents (his father in particular) by the Israeli internal secret intelligence agency, Shabak. The sons of other women I interviewed have just disappeared, never to be heard of again, like Um Adnan's son. Other sons turned up later, as Um Usif's son did. He went missing and she only learned that he escaped to Jordan when the police came and searched her house in the middle of the night.

The most painful and recent among the many stories of murder and loss that I encountered during the data collection was the story of the death of 17-year-old Mahmud Al-Saadi, who was killed by the police in Lyd on 8 December 2004. According to his family, four policemen in civilian clothes approached Mahmud and asked him to stop. When he did not comply, they shot him at close range and killed him on the spot. On 10 December 2004, the body was buried. When Mahmud's horse saw the coffin, so the story goes, it too instantly died. Pictures of Mahmud riding on his mare were posted up in every shop and on walls all over the Arab neighbourhoods I visited at that time.

Whether the facts recounted in this, and other stories, are precise or even true is immaterial. What is most relevant in these personal stories is the deep sense of insecurity and mistrust they convey. Such feelings are manifest in an ongoing reluctance even to ask state authorities for information: there is no point, as these women have no faith that they can rely on or believe what they are told about the deaths or disappearances of their sons, brothers and fathers – not in 1948 and not now. This lack of confidence in the information they might receive is rooted in the fact that they hold the state itself responsible for these events. Conditioned in their experiences of 1948, the legacy of insecurity and mistrust continues to haunt the lives of these women and their communities today. Clearly, then, there is a deeply ingrained and long-held suspicion about the State of Israel's policies regarding the safety and security of its Palestinian citizens.

Without doubt, the war of 1948 was a formative experience for the interviewees. Not only does this impact negatively on their view of the state, in both the past and the present. It also spills over into their perceptions of the male body. The Palestinian man is seen as struggling: as hanged by the British in 1936; as casualty of war in 1948, dead and/or wounded beyond repair. In all, this is an image of the male body as beaten, humiliated, captive, incapacitated, aged, weak and powerless. Those who were young migrated and disappeared, and analogous subtle forced migrations continue with young, highly educated men today – the male body signifying absence and

dispossession. Perhaps what is most striking is that it is virtually impossible to describe Palestinian men as brave warriors, heroically fighting to defend their nation. Even when this was the case, this status was cloaked and hidden by ambiguity and confusion.

## The male body revisited: drugged, abused and abusing

Another form of dispossession manifested in women's life stories is the description of the drug-abused male body. The drugged body is described as a victim of self-destruction, but also as actively abusive and violent to women. In Lyd and Ramleh, where the Palestinian community lives in poverty and underdeveloped neighbourhoods, this problem is rampant. Although it is widely publicized in the media, almost none of the women I interviewed spoke about drug abuse despite having lost sons to overdoses or to crime associated with the drug trade. Instead, they largely remained silent. Nonetheless, it is an important factor in violence against women. For example, Yoavl Azoulay (2006a) wrote in the newspaper *Ha'aretz* about a 28-year-old woman who was stabbed to death, her violent husband suspected of the murder. Two days before the murder, the husband had entered a drug withdrawal programme.

Capturing the pathos of these self-destructive tendencies among Palestinian men, Um Mhimad describes the body of her daughter's husband who used drugs: he was alienated and died alone, far away from his family. It was only after some time that his body was found and brought home for burial, Um Mhimad explains: 'This daughter here … her husband died six months ago. Better this way. He drank and used drugs. He died, was so weak… [unfinished sentence] Here, he died. The poor woman, she is working and the girls too.'

Sara lost a son because of drug abuse, as she recounts: 'He used drugs, went to Tel Aviv and probably injected himself in a wrong way. And we got the news that he was dead. I was broken, stopped going to work and started feeling pain in my legs.' It is not only the young Palestinian men who suffer because of drug abuse; it spills over onto the women in their families, too. Sara's son's addiction broke her resilience and resulted in both emotional and physical

pain. As such, women are often described as victims of drug abuse on the part of their men who are the abusers. They must take on the burdens of the drugged body of the male member of their family, working hard and taking responsibility to maintain the whole family on their own. As the newspaper article above indicates, sometimes they even pay with their lives.

The drug problem in these two cities results from and reinforces feelings of insecurity and marginalization in Palestinian communities. This is indicated by statements like that of Alice from Ramleh, who asserts: 'We didn't see anything of the sort in the days of Palestine – battering and murder. As long as we lived in Palestine, we didn't see battering and murder like today. We didn't see and we didn't hear.' Similar nostalgic comparisons between the situation today and the 'days of the Arabs' were made by other interviewees, who also pointed out the increasing level of violence against women in Lyd and Ramleh today.

## Images of the female body

In the memories of the women I interviewed, the male body is often described as a victim: wounded, broken, weak and dead. In stark opposition to any of these images of the male body, the women I interviewed describe the female body in active terms: as working, providing, giving birth and breastfeeding; above all, this is a strong body. As such, this representation of the female body offers an alternative form of (non-violent) struggle, as well as an alternative image of heroism.

### The maiden female body

A phrase repeatedly uttered by those women who were unmarried was: 'When the Jews entered, I was still a maiden' (*laman dakhal elyahud kunt baidni bint*). This means that the woman was not yet married in 1948 when Israeli forces occupied Palestinian cities and villages. It also emphasizes that the woman retained her purity and resisted the forces of invasion. Similarly, some of the married women I

interviewed described the invasion in 1948 by saying: 'When the Jews entered, I was pregnant' or 'We got married at the same time when the Jews came in.' Such expressions locate the historic events of 1948 in terms of the bodies of these women. As Um Nasri explains:

> I embroidered this when I was a maiden. [Jews] stole my dowry [*Jhazi*]. Look how many nightgowns, a nightgown with a chemise, with twenty-four bedclothes, twenty-four kerchiefs made by my own hands. Twenty-four pieces of clothing were lost. I embroidered them with my own hands… I came [back] crying and sobbing over my clothes, over my life. My husband told me, 'Let them be lost. It's good that we have stayed alive to make up for all that.' I came to my house and found that all was empty. Who do you think stole it? Jews, Arabs, God knows… You know, these grape clusters, I made this when I was a maiden, in the days of my wedding, and I renewed it several times, changed the satin… From the days of my wedding I prepared this, when I was a maiden, and until this day I keep this.

Interestingly, many women, like Um Nasri, lamented losing what they had knitted or embroidered as part of their dowry. These items were a source of pride, indicating that they themselves had contributed to their new homes when they got married. Women living in the urban settings of Lyd and Ramleh bewailed the fact that their homes were broken into and the various items they had sewn or embroidered were stolen. Much of the stolen property, such as the kerchiefs, not only had financial value but symbolic value as well. Having had their homes broken into and their property stolen symbolized an invasion into the most intimate and private arena of Palestinian people's lives; 'when I was a maiden, and until this day, I keep [this kerchief]' is a statement that embodies both a private and a collective symbolic meaning – these women still maintain their right of ownership to home, both as women and as Palestinians. At the collective level, Um Nasri's story about the theft of her dowry represents the stolen land of Palestine. As with the remaining kerchief, however, there is also still something left: a sense of living at home despite the establishment of the Zionist State of Israel.

## The pregnant female body

When describing their pain and anguish on the road to expulsion, at the peak of the crisis in 1948, most of the women who were married at the time told about marching along while they were pregnant. In marching on the Death Roads, these pregnant women emphasize their preference for life – their capacity to make new life and maintain family continuity in the face of pain and death. As Alice from Ramleh recalls,

> We went the whole way by foot… My father was very concerned about me because I was newly married and at the beginning of a pregnancy. My mother was pregnant too and my father was old and walking with a stick. My father left my mother, and my mother left my father, and they left me [not clear]. Otherwise we would not have left my father and we would have stayed together.

The bodies of Alice and her mother enveloped new life while both of them marched along the Death Roads after the expulsion. This gives concrete significance to women's bodies, which carry new life. Pregnancy not only attests to the vitality of women's bodies, it also gives these bodies symbolic meaning in refusing to surrender to death. Alice also describes her father as elderly and weak, unable to walk. She and her mother are young and strong, carrying in their wombs the coming generation. Grief, sorrow and guilt showed on her face and were heard in her voice when she described leaving her weak father behind. Such experiences indicate that events in 1948 positioned Palestinians in a situation where they had to face unbearable consequences – the guilt of leaving family members behind to survive themselves (in this case, along with their unborn children).

In the stories related to pregnancy that arose in the interviews there was a special significance attached to the womb as a site of cyclic memory of birth, life and death. Pregnancy is related both to the arrival of the Jews and to the expulsion of Palestinians, and afterwards to the reconstitution of the family and the community. The references to pregnancy and the womb in the context of the Israeli occupation in 1948 have a particular significance because of

how the nuclear family, the extended family and whole Palestinian communities were shattered and dispersed. Creating a vivid image of life and death combined, Um Nasri recalls advising her sister-in-law, who lost her husband in the war and was newly pregnant, to walk under his coffin as a means of declaring her pregnancy, saying, 'Otherwise they will ask where this child is from!' By walking under the coffin as a pregnant woman (but not visbly so), the body of Um Nasri's sister-in-law functions as a provider of knowledge, whereby the body itself substitutes words in declaring information that was previously unknown.

By stating 'I was pregnant', these women symbolically challenged the attack and subsequent expulsion of Palestinians in the midst of a disastrous historical moment. Consciously or unconsciously, their statements symbolize a powerful desire for life and indicate the strength of these women in carrying new life. Therefore being pregnant is not only an everyday fact of life – normal, ordinary; symbolically, it is likewise an act of defiance and resistance that refuses to comply with the expulsion.

## The strong female body

As indicated above, on the road to exile, the migrating female body is remembered in terms of suffering and torture, but at the same time as strong and bearing new life. Once they had returned from the migration, these women talk about the able female body. In addition to a reproductive capacity, this is the female body as working to create and restore lives that had been destroyed and families that were scattered; to rebuild not only their immediate families, but their broader communities.

Um Mhimad from Lyd draws a contrast between the past and present in terms of the pregnant female body as strong (unlike today):

> Yes, by God. When I'm pregnant, working the land… By God, I was working the land. We planted seedlings and we turned over the ground around them, pulled out the bad weeds, everything. We went to weed the tomatoes… A woman says to me, 'I have a splinter from a date tree in my hand. I can't go [to work

> tomorrow]'. 'OK, no need', I said, 'I'll go on my own'. The field was far away… With the first ray of the sun, I gave birth to a son, so didn't go either… Until our [ninth] month we would go; did not pity ourselves. Today, from the start, if someone gets pregnant, [she says,] 'I'm pregnant, I don't know what… I'm not touching this'. Never in my life would I dare to say 'I'm pregnant' [as an excuse].

Like Um Mhimad, other women described sowing seeds in parallel with their pregnancies. As with working the land, then, pregnancy constitutes a symbolic expression of feminine resistance and the preservation and renewal of life: the earth yields fruit as the woman's body yields life. With pride, Haliemeh reinforces the image of the female body as strong:

> I used to work with my father. We picked squash. On the land opposite my brother's, where now they have built factories, on that land on the other side my father planted tomatoes and squash… By God's name, I could carry with a man's strength. You know, from much work one gets trained… An Iraqi Jew came, my father tells me, 'Come here, this way, turn around' and the man asks, 'Haj, is this your daughter?' He says to him, 'Yes, by God, this is my daughter'… [The Jew] says to him, 'By God, by God, except for her face, which is a girl's, her work and her body are not like a girl's.' I had so much strength and energy. I was like a doe, working with my father.

Alongside these agricultural tasks, when they returned home, these women would bathe their children so that they could go to school, and then do housework. After a day in the field, they would prepare and cook food; everyone would eat and return again to the vineyard to collect grapes; and also at night she would go out again with the children. Again, Haliemeh explains:

> [At night] we would turn on the Lux light [a kerosene lamp]. I would sit down to sew on a machine. We used to work until one past midnight, until two, when we lit the Lux. There was still no electricity then, and we worked… The wife of my brother … we have been friends all our lives, she was the best at knitting wool…

> Life was such fun. The day was long and the night was long. Today there is no day and no night.

All of the women I interviewed participated in sustaining the family economically, many as the primary breadwinner. Although they worked at least as hard as the men in their lives, these women did not garner the same social recognition and appreciation as their male counterparts for their efforts. Nonetheless, these women offer information about their contributions: their bodies are strong from work in the fields; they postponed marriage; they were forced to leave school to work; they worked while pregnant; they raised their children alone; they were skilled in knitting, weaving and sewing, earning money from these activities to cope with the economic challenges they faced after 1948; and so on.

Whereas these many contributions were not appreciated in wider Palestinian society, as Haliemeh's story indicates, she takes pride in her accomplishments. As the Iraqi Jew remarked, '[You] have the face of a woman and the body of a man.' Haliemeh perceives her attractive face and her strength as an integral part of her femininity. As Haliemeh also suggests, when speaking of her sister-in-law, these women created a web of friendship and support for one another, coming to one another's assistance when necessary.

## The unspeakable female body

The metaphoric representation of a nation as a woman, within the familial narrative, tends to conflate the political control of territory with the control of the female body and female sexuality. In ethno-political and religious conflicts, for example, intrusion into national territory is perceived as an intrusion into women's bodies and as pollution of the nation and its territory (Spivak, 1992; Nash, 1993; Peterson, 1994). This is one reason why, when a territory is occupied, a woman's body often becomes a battlefield that is vulnerable to invasion and violation by alien forces. In short, the female body becomes a target for violent penetration during war (MacKinnon, 2005). In such cases, when a woman is raped by a foreign aggressor,

this act of contamination is perceived as if the essence of her nation was contaminated. This perspective casts men in the role of protector: the soldier/warrior defending and taking care of the 'mother nation'. Consequently, women come to be nothing more than mere signifiers of a nation's purity. Zillah Eisenstein argues that 'rape articulates the violence encoded in gender; in wartime it reinscribes the continuity of gender inscription of woman as victim rather than actor. Yet … Men are demasculinized by the rape of their daughters or wives. Every one is shamed in this process' (Eisenstein, 2008: 37). In the case of the Palestinians, the reluctance of both men and women to talk about rape during the war in 1948 derives from shame. They are, according to their perception, preserving their dignity in the face of defeat. This suited the attitude of the Zionist Jewish authorities, who silenced the cases of rape in order to demonstrate moral superiority.

During the interview process, it was amply evident that stories about rape remain very difficult to bring up.[3] By and large, this theme is silenced, within both Palestinian and Israeli communities. When these experiences were discussed, the interviewees spoke in a vague, enigmatic way on the sensitive topic, without personal or family names, on the grounds that they did not wish to offend or act against the honour of the family. However, reading between the lines of the interviewees' words, it is clear that rape was part of their experiences of 1948. Even the stories of those who deny that any wrong was done to them personally are highly indicative.

As Um Mhimad recalls: 'The Jews did a lot of evil to us, when they came in… You know that they assaulted the girls, beat them… They would tell them, "Come over to this room and bring food here", and would do their deeds… Many things. We used to hear about this, so my mother didn't allow us to hang around… They pulled me by the hair… Our heart was stolen because of them.' Her difficulty in making any direct reference to the term 'rape' is evident when she later obliquely remarks, 'They do what can't be done.' Or, as Salma puts this, 'they did something to her'. However, after talking for a while, Rashideh states quite clearly that, 'In the

beginning when they entered, they used to rape.' Asked to elaborate, Rashideh recounts a number of different incidents, shifting between euphemism and direct reference to rape:

> Yes, one woman was [there] when the Jews entered in the beginning… Far away, someone [else] had a beautiful and good-looking daughter and [they] came to rape her. Took her [out] under a fig tree. Her father started shouting, 'Ya! Ya! People!' [screaming for help] and no one came… Upon hearing his voice, the voice of an Arab…[the soldiers] ran away and didn't do anything to her… Another unfortunate one [Palestinian woman], they did do something to her… In the beginning of the occupation there were no people, there were [just] the old ones… But [the Jews] did not do anything to the old, only girls they took, or women… At night [Jews] would come and take the girls and the women…

Rashideh goes on to explain her own experience of attempted rape in Lyd, albeit in an indirect manner: 'I was walking, I had a long braid and with a dress like that. They [Jewish men] came close to me, pulled my hair to throw me down. I went straight to my mother, who said, 'You are not going to cross the road outside. Stay with me at home.'

In addition to euphemistic references to rape and attempted rape, Rashideh indicates that young Palestinian women were humiliated and treated like servants by the Israeli forces. The entrance of Israeli forces in Ramleh directly influenced Rashideh's life as a young woman, as well as her mother's life. It also had an impact on her relationship with her mother at home. For Rashideh, home became a place where she was virtually imprisoned in order to be protected from the threat of rape by the invaders. In this case, supervision of women by women, and the very necessity of supervision, become more pronounced. That is, although mothers (and fathers) sought to protect their daughters from sexual abuse by confining them to home, they also inadvertently reinforced those same gendered power relations that left young women vulnerable to attack in public places.

In spite of the overall positive tone of her testimony, Haliemeh also hints at cases of sexual exploitation:

> Thank God, thank God, we were never humiliated in our life, God forbid. Israel came in and we were here… Even after Israel came in, no one harmed us; let's say, someone, a soldier. I was 15 years old, a girl pretty like the moon I was, and this wife of my brother was there [she was present at part of the interview], and my mother… This one asks me [another interviewer, unconnected to the present study], I told him, in my life there never was a soldier who would put his hand on us, and in my life there was no soldier who said a word to us. He [the same interviewer] said, 'people talked', [and I answered,] 'They are free [to say what they want]'. But us – there was never anyone who humiliated us with a word or touched us.

In Arabic, the term 'being touched' has a very explicit physical meaning, and in this context has clear sexual connotations. The apparent defensiveness accompanying Haliemeh's emphasis on the fact that Israeli soldiers had not physically touched her or other female members of her family indicates that this was in all likelihood an issue for other women. At the very least, people were talking about other women who had been 'touched' by Israeli soldiers. Haliemeh's emphatic denials also express a measure of fear, thereby reinforcing the reality that other women were hurt.

Haliemeh also offers evidence that both women and men were enslaved and exploited during the events of 1948: '[The Jews] would come and take workers from the farmers… Farmers from al-Safiriyya, from Sarafand and from Bayt Dajan… This army … coming and taking the workers to work in the city. I don't know, only God knows, it never happened that someone would take us and we would go.' When asked what she meant by the word 'workers' Haliemeh explained that Israeli soldiers used to come and collect the people from her father's vineyard to perform work in other places. By saying 'I don't know, only God knows' she further hints that there was 'talk of rape', whereby women were exposed not only to exploitation as labourers, but also to sexual exploitation. Like most of the women and men I interviewed, Haliemeh is unwilling to talk directly about rape. However, when she was directly asked if she had heard about

incidents of rape she said yes, but again this statement was immediately followed by the qualifying statement 'only God knows'.

One of the men I interviewed, Faik Abu Maneh from Lyd, also raised the topic of rape in the course of telling his life story: 'When [the Jews] came to take us they said "go out". We went out, loading… clothes, like this, costumes and everything. And then the soldiers who had come and told us to go out came to us again and brought us a girl, a little girl who was at our neighbours.' Asked if everyone knew the little girl, Faik Abu Maneh responds by saying, 'Yes, we know her, this little girl. Her mother, may you never know, six soldiers entered her, lay with her. Six entered her.' When asked who the mother of the little girl was, he immediately becomes evasive: 'A lady, some woman that is, someone, a woman.' Pressed to elaborate, Faik Abu Maneh stoutly declines: 'No, I think there will be shame. I know the family name… She ran away from home.'

Faik Abu Maneh refers to this incident of rape in relation to his story about being expelled from his family home by Israeli soldiers. However, instead of using the term 'rape' he says the soldiers 'entered her'. This phrase for the desecration of the woman's body is the same one that is widely used to describe the invasion of Israeli forces into Palestinian territory; for example, many of the interviewees described events in 1948 with the phrase 'when the Jews entered' (see Chapter 4). Here, then, there is a symbolic link between the rape of a woman's body and the violation of the sacredness of place: the cities and the country (*liblad*) are invaded or 'entered' like the body of a woman.

Although home is perceived as a place of safety for women, at the same time it is a place where women can be attacked. This is evident in Faik Abi Maneh's recollection. It is also the experience of Alice, who explains:

> We all went to sleep in the living room and not in the bedrooms. Then Jews came to us, three of them. My aunt's daughter was close to the door, they started saying to her, 'Go inside' [into the room]. They were close to raping her, but then one girl started shouting and the other yelling… One of the [would-be rapists] came in. He

> saw my aunt and asked her, 'What are you doing here?' [She] told him, 'This is our house, my father's house, we are here. Take them out' [the other two Jewish men].

One of the primary reasons that Alice's cousin was saved from being raped is that one of the Israeli men knew the family. Whereas 'before the Jews entered the city' he had socialized and eaten with them, afterwards this 'invader' became a potential rapist.

In addition to being hidden away in their homes – which in some instances were obviously not safe places, given that women also were raped or experienced attempted rape in their homes – other tactics were deployed to avoid being raped. For example, some women testified that they used to defile their bodies with dirt or animal excrement, either by their own initiative or because they were forced to do so by male family members, mostly their fathers. As Salma explains:

> We would put dirt on ourselves, excrement of cattle, to prevent the Jews from approaching us… The women used to say that they put dirt on themselves … out of fear that the Jews would approach them… They would put dirt and things on themselves so that the Jews wouldn't do anything to them, and sleep in trees, poor ones, fearing the Jews… There is someone who burned his daughter's hair and dressed her in a ghalabia, so that she would look like a boy and the Jews would not do anything to her.[4]

Repeating Salma's claim almost verbatim, Um Omar from Lyd also tells a story about a young woman dressed in a ghalabia to avoid being raped.

Both before and after the Zionist invasion of Lyd and Ramleh, many Palestinians also sent female members of their families away – to Ramallah, el-Bireh and even Amman. According to the men I interviewed, women and children were evacuated not only because they feared for their lives, but also because they feared for the 'honour' of their women. Um Isa'a[5] described how her father came home in 1948 and asked the family to leave Lyd: 'My father was working in the municipality of Lyd; he said to us you have to go to

el-Bireh, stay there until the war will be over, the situation is not good, Lyd will fall. Until the war will be over; you will come back. My mother and all the family went to el-Bireh and he stayed here.' He did not say overtly that they were made to leave because of 'honour' but it is implied. Only when I asked directly why they were forced to leave did they say that they were afraid of the possibility of rape. One incident was a particular source of fear: what happened in Deir Yassin. As Um Usif insists, 'You've heard about the village Deir Yassin, where there were lots of bad incidents. Rape. Murder of a child in his mother's lap. There they pitied no one, whether woman or man, killed everyone.'

Asked whether she had heard about the massacre at Deir Yassin during the war or afterwards, when she was an adult, Um Usif responded: 'I heard about Deir Yassin before we migrated. That's why our mother pressured our father to migrate. If my mother could have, she would have gone much further than Ramleh… She was most of all afraid for her daughters.' Other women also mentioned Deir Yassin, as Um Mhimad indicates:

> [My father] told my mother, 'Take the children and go out'… I was 17 years old, my brother 15 and my sister 13 years old… He told her, 'You take the girls out of here and go… because of what happened in Deir Yassin.' We were at the summit of our youth; at the summit of our beauty then. She couldn't stay here, so she said, 'Put on all your clothes so that we don't carry them, put them on; put them on.' It was the peak of the hot summer. [My] face was going to burst. We almost died. We were in a very bad state.

Both accounts, along with those of many other interviewees, corroborate the significant influence of the massacre at Deir Yassin on their life story. Women reported the impact it had on their lives and the lives of other Palestinians, especially their fear of rape. In this instance, the decision to leave is an act of survival, to protect the lives of men and women, of children, and preserve the honour of the girls and women. Both men and women made these decisions. In the case of Um Usif, for example, it was her mother who prevailed on

her father to leave because she worried for herself and her daughters. In the case of Um Mhimad, in contrast, her father asked her mother to take the girls and migrate to protect them from the possibility of rape. Women depicted the massacre of the civilians in Deir Yassin through the body and through bodily expressions and images, such as '[The Jews] cut their bellies [of Palestinian women], to take the children out of their bellies.'

Historically the massacre in Deir Yassin was committed by the Irgun Zvai and the LEHI,[6] who attacked the village of Deir Yassin, near Jerusalem, on 9 April 1948, before the Arab League Army entered Palestine. According to Sabri Jiryis, 'More than 200 of the Arab inhabitants of the village, including old people, women and children, were butchered … the object of the massacre was to terrorise the Arabs of the country into fleeing from their homes' (Jiryis, 1969: 91). Faiha Abdel Hadi (2005) presents the testimony of women who witnessed and heard about the massacre in Deir Yassin. Women reported both the killings and the rape, although the range and the numbers are disputable – exaggeration in the numbers and the brutality of the rape served to increase the panic of the Palestinians and incite more to escape the horrifying acts that they had witnessed or heard about. To flee a place, especially home, out of fear of rape, massacre, or the violent degrading of human rights and humiliation during war time, is a rational and human act. In the context of the Palestinians the question to be posed in such circumstances is not why people left Deir Yassin, but why they were not allowed to come back to their homes after the war was over. What is interesting is that whereas women were reluctant to talk overtly about the incidence of rape in their own villages and towns, they were prepared to do so in relation to Deir Yassin.

Frances Hasso (2000) argues that the Palestinian elites and intellectuals avoid addressing the impact of sexual assault in the refugee exodus after Deir Yassin, while the women that I interviewed (both the city dwellers and women from peasant backgrounds) do recognize rape in Deir Yassin as a major factor that forced many Palestinians to leave. The silence from the national elite and intellecuals reflects the

shame of defeat in 1948 and the failure to protect the women and the land, as well the lives of the Palestinians who were murdered, including women and children, male and female. That women talk about it is in fact a challenge to and a redefinition of the meaning of honour at the same time; they reject the notion that it is the exclusive responsibility of men to protect the honour, the land and the lives of the Palestinians; and in this they also challenge the modern construction of the national land in territorial terms that objectify women's bodies and subordinate them to male protection.

Events at Deir Yassin not only spread fear through the Palestinian population; they also encouraged Israeli invaders to engage in similar behaviour elsewhere. Recall Alice's story about the near rape of her cousin by someone who was known to the family. As with other families, this prompted swift action in Alice's home, as she explains:

> When the elders [her father and her uncle] heard about this [rape attempt] they said, 'This time, God sent someone who helped [the neighbour they had previously socialized with]… Tomorrow you do not know who they will send.' In the morning of the next day, my father loaded up all sorts of things. My uncle and aunt stayed here. My father took all of us, look how many people, seven girls and three boys of my uncle, and we are five girls and two boys. I was married, two daughters of my aunt left with us, also another aunt and her husband. My father gathered the rest of us and took us [to Jordan].

The migration journey of Alice and her extended family began after Ramleh fell. They did not want to leave the city, but finally they were forced to, by the threat of rape.

What stands out in these stories is the relative silence of Palestinian men and women alike. With few exceptions, this difficult topic was treated with extreme brevity, without much detail, without names or any elements that might reveal the identities of the victims of rape. A variety of factors explain this tendency to silence. The shame and humiliation of being unable to protect their women, and by association Palestine, are what lie behind the silence of Palestinian

men. In all aspects of Palestinian society, men perceive themselves as the protectors of the nation, including its women and territory. At the symbolic level, being unable to talk overtly about rape (instead, hiding it) hides their inability to prevent both the rape of women and the rape of Palestine.

By hiding incidents of rape and silencing these stories, Palestinian women cooperate with Palestinian patriarchy in reproducing the cultural, social and national presentation of men as the sole protectors of the nation, its women and territory. In so doing, they are complicit with the self-perception of men as 'warriors', devaluing their own contributions to society and thereby reproducing the subjugation of women by men. Likewise does this complicate the cultural definition of the term 'honour'. This marked silence on the topic of rape is in complete contrast to the way these women describe their role as active agents in rebuilding, taking care of and protecting themselves and the family at the peak of crisis and war.

This silent discourse on rape, where a variety of other terms and phrases are used to signify the act, could also be interpreted from two other perspectives. In her book *Sister in Sorrow* (2003), Illana Rosen examines the experiences of women who survived the Holocaust, and notes that sexual exploitation was not given prominence in the women's stories. In the Palestinian case, it is possible that for many women the issue of rape or sexual exploitation was not central to their experience of 1948. On the other hand, I think that women's silence is an expression of the shame and humiliation associated with rape. Although these analyses may partially explain the reluctance of Palestinians to speak directly about rape or the threat of rape, the issue nonetheless played a crucial role in the decision-making process of many Palestinians who chose to move their families to safer places. As was explicitly stated in several women's life stories, the rapes at Deir Yassin compelled many Palestinian families to seek temporary refuge and escape the threat of rape in order to protect the honour of their female members.

In contrast to this silence (however it may be explained), Bosnian Muslim women who were raped on ethnic, religious and nationalist

grounds have made their voices heard in the public domain, telling detailed stories about what was done to women at the height of the genocide. Sexual atrocities during the war were revealed; rape was publicly redefined as a political outrage against women, which in turn facilitated the disclosure of these stories (MacKinnon, 2005). Likewise, Palestinian women and men should not continue to be victimized and/or silenced victims of sexual assault; rather, they should raise their voices in order to expose the past, learn in the present and prevent such acts in the future.

One device of war is the feminization of the enemy, such that the rape and sexual exploitation of women become one of its expressions. Unsurprisingly, then, stories about rape are also silenced within Israeli communities and very little has been written about the topic. The first to reveal these stories was the Israeli historian Benny Morris (1996). Israeli motives for silencing stories about rape during 1948 differ from Palestinian motives. For example, in order to maintain their claim to 'superior moral values' in relation to Palestinian values, Israelis deny outright that they would do such a thing as rape. However, Avi Shlaim (1999: 173) shattered many Zionist myths related to 1948: he addresses the use of the Hebrew phrase *tohar haneshek* (the purity of arms) 'which posits that weapons remain pure provided they are employed only in self-defense'. This phrase is prevalent in Israeli public rhetoric, as its use in relation to the name 'Israeli Defense Forces' (IDF) indicates. That is, the combination of the word 'force' (not army), which implies neutrality, with the word 'defense', which implies non-aggression, conveys that the 'Israeli Defense Force' is 'forced' to be defensive; as a corollary, the IDF is not an 'attacker'.

To be able to establish an exclusive Jewish state, the strategic plan of Zionist ideology was to evacuate Palestinians from Palestine. In part, this was accomplished by both the actual and threatened rape of Palestinian women, which was deliberately designed to make Palestinians flee their villages and cities. The Deir Yassin massacre and the terrifying stories of cruelty, including rape, by what later became the Israeli Defense Forces urgently motivated Palestinians to

seek safety. (Later, they were prevented from returning.) Through such acts – in particular using rape as a weapon of war – Zionists took advantage of Palestinian norms concerning women's bodies to make Palestinians leave their homeland.

What happened in 1948 was not a temporally isolated historical event that is now complete, but is instead an ongoing process, whereby the bodies and sexuality of Palestinian women have constituted a site of assault for the Israeli occupation forces in the occupied territories, since 1967. A prominent case that was covertly discussed in Palestinian society during the first intifada that broke out in 1987 is known in Palestinian discourse as 'fallen' (*isqat*). This refers to a mechanism devised by the Israeli authorities to recruit women who were close relatives of men active in the intifada, but who managed to elude capture by Israeli forces, in order to provide information about them, their movements and plans. Palestinian informers who served the Israeli military services trapped women in intimate relationships, or in other ways, and took photos of them in sensitive situations in order to exploit them, forcing them to cooperate and become informers on their male relatives. In a dialogue group, a Palestinian participant from el Khalil in Hebron shared her experience, speaking about how a collaborator with the Israeli military brought her relative friend a parcel of incriminating photos to blackmail her into providing information about her cousin, who was active in the first intifada and whom the Israelis found difficult to reach and arrest.[7]

Despite ongoing silence and humiliation, the women I interviewed who spoke about rape and/or attempted rape, whether directly or indirectly (as was more often the case), also actively resisted these efforts on the part of Israeli forces. These women and their families sought to protect themselves in various ways: imprisoning the female body at home; contaminating it with animal excrement and other substances; or by disfiguring it by the cutting off of hair and dressing it in male clothes. However, the ultimate form of protection was migration, though this came at the highest price – the rape of the Palestinian homeland.

During war, women's bodies become a site of battle for the invaders, which is exemplified by the rape of enemy women; rape becomes a weapon of war (Scott, 1996). For the defeated, the collective woman's body becomes a signifier and symbol of men's control, and therefore violence against women increases and 'incidents of so-called "honour killings" [rise] drastically', as Al-Ali (2003: 228) observes with regard to Iraq.

Today, Palestinian women's bodies continue to be oppressed and discriminated against in at least two different ways. First, Palestinian patriarchy seeks to actively control and supervise women's bodies, and women consequently experience a range of violence, including 'honour killings'. Second, their bodies are regarded as a source of the demographic threat that increasingly concerns Israeli authorities – that is, their capacity to reproduce represents a threat in itself. While both of these factors must be analysed within the context of the unresolved historical conflict and the socio-political position of Palestinians that has emerged since 1948, here I focus on the first. In so doing, I am arguing that 'honour killings' have become more prevalent since the loss of the *watan* (homeland) in 1948 and with the stresses of close interaction with Jewish Israeli society; in the contested towns, there has been increased male supervision of women, and women have experienced ever-shrinking borders to their freedom. In turn, when women have sought to challenge some of these patriarchal boundaries, it has sometimes resulted in their death under the rubric of what has been called 'family honour killing'. It is important to emphasize that I am not saying that 'honour' crimes did not exist in Palestinians society before 1948; however, I am saying that the hostile state policy, ignorance and absence of protection when women needed it were all described in the women's retellings of their life stories.

While conducting these interviews, I heard many different stories about violence, murder and missing bodies. Perhaps the most severe manifestation of contemporary violence against women is this killing of women in the name of 'family honour'. Sara from Ramleh tells a particularly harrowing story:

> We left Hadera and came here. I built a magnificent house, [with] three storeys. We came here, to the Arabs. You know, Arab life is different from Jewish life – do not go out; do not talk with those [others]. My children could not bear it. They suffered from the life here. My daughter took a gun and shot herself. She was 16 years old. I was outside in the yard. I went and found her lying in my bedroom… Before that I had told her, 'Why are you talking with these [men] and what will people gossip?' In God's name, my daughter is pure, more than gold… Woe to me, woe to me… Both [children] were young and both went away from me [I lost them]. When I think about them, may you never know, this morning I cried. I heard that a young man from Ramleh, aged 22, was shot. I said to my daughter, 'Take me to their house, I want to visit them, they shot him like that poor one' … I want to visit them; today is his funeral; very hard for me, really hard. It reminds me of my children.

In response to a comment on the hardships of her life, Sara confirms this by saying, 'Yes, very hard and painful; very difficult for me. My life was beautiful. We were fine. Our [family] fell apart, my home fell apart, house broke, everything fell apart, everything.'

It is clear from Sara's story that her 16-year-old daughter committed suicide because of accusations related to gossip that linked her to what is known as 'family honour'. Phrases like 'My daughter is pure, more than gold' imply that her perception is that her daughter was innocent; that she killed herself for no valid reason. Her guilt at having talked to her daughter about the gossip that prompted the suicide is best expressed not in her words, but by the floods of tears she cried during the interview.

Other women I interviewed also spoke about honor killings. For instance, when I arrived to visit Alice and Fotin in Ramleh, I found both women engaged in a conversation about what had happened that night, when two young women were murdered in the city. As Alice exclaimed:

> They killed two yesterday, saying family honour! Some say family honour! Their life is annihilated and nobody asked about them, even the police did not intervene. Two women's lives, may we

> never know, gone for nothing. There is no one to ask about them! They say family honour! No one intervenes. Even the police did nothing. They tell you that the police are afraid [to enter the neighbourhood], that's what they say.

Fotin argued with Alice that the killing was not 'honour killing' because the police were involved in this case; if it were an 'honour killing', the police would not have been involved in this way, she repeatedly said. In the face of Alice's argument that women are slaughtered every day, Fotin replies, 'Women are murdered every day. There is no law and no judge.' Such phrases reflect a deep sense of insecurity on behalf of Palestinian women, indicating that they do not have any protection, that their lives are in danger on a daily basis in Lyd and Ramleh. 'Honour killing' is committed by relatives, mainly husbands and brothers (Azoulay, 2006a, 2006b). According to Baxter (2007: 753), such murders represent the collapse of the moral order and 'the quintessence of a system gone terribly wrong'.

Aysheh makes an even stronger protest when she says:

> Today, they make slaughtering daughters into something fitting and good that's *haram* [religiously forbidden] by God. They killed four girls, I think. A week ago they killed one; they said she was pregnant. Pregnant? So what! So leave her to the one she wants. Why did you let her get pregnant in the first place? She is maybe the fourth or the fifth one they have killed. Isn't that *haram*?

Some women, like Alice from Ramleh, express a degree of nostalgia when they say things such as 'there were no killings and no murders in the era of the Arabs'. Whether this perception of the past is accurate or not, statements like this indicate a longing for a time when these women felt a sense of stability and security in their lives, which is in sharp contrast to life in Lyd and Ramleh today.

Veena Das (2000) describes the way in which colonialism in India left a heritage of relationships characterized by bitterness and betrayal,

not only between Hindus and Muslims but also between women and men. British colonialism in Israel/Palestine left a similar legacy. Moreover, the ongoing violent colonization continues to sharpen the hatred and bitterness between Jewish Israelis and Palestinians, as well as encourage violence between Palestinian men and women. Manar Hasan (1999) showed how in the killing of Palestinian women in the name of 'family honour' the Israeli authorities approach the problem with a forgiving attitude towards those men who are guilty of violence against women, thus exposing women to two sources of violence: from Palestinian men and from the State of Israel. In the latter case, this state-sanctioned violence is in addition to political violence on the part of the State of Israel against all Palestinians, including women.

## The body: agent of resistance

So many of these stories reveal that after the events of 1948 women were required to show resourcefulness in order to survive. Their capacity to multitask served them well. It appears that these women adjusted quickly to their new situations, but not in the sense of resigning themselves to what happened. Rather, they indicate a powerful ability to start anew with what was available and to do what was possible. Theirs was a pragmatic approach to rebuilding their lives, at both the individual and the collective level. Whether in the private sphere or in the economic sphere, these women define themselves in terms of strength and resistance.

As structured in relation to the female body, this version of resistance is based on the literal and figurative renewal of family and community life. This is in sharp contrast to the version of resistance that resides in the image of the male body. This is a failed notion of resistance – be it the inability to launch a successful military campaign against the invading Jewish Zionist Brigades (or, earlier, the British or the Turkish forces) or as the ongoing failure of any broader political campaign for Palestinian independence.

## Refusal and compliance

All of the women I interviewed spoke of their pain and suffering while marching on the road of expulsion in their bare feet. Many of these women recount stories of wounds on their feet and those of their relatives. The bare feet are associated with walking and, in this context, suffering, but also with direct contact to the land. The description of aching feet highlights the pain they felt. The direct contact between the feet and the land has a symbolic dimension, as if the feet refused to cooperate with the expulsion orders. This is epitomized by Salma's recalling 'I was unable to walk. My feet were all swollen because I had been walking barefoot.' Land and body are unified on the road to expulsion. The deep suffering and pain of the body resulting from the occupation of Palestine indicate a symbolic refusal to accept the uprootedness of the body from the land. In this, the body becomes an agent of resistance.

There are other ways in which the body resisted domination and humiliation while at the same time complying with power relations in order to survive. For example, Salma describes how, on the way out of Lyd, neither women nor men were able to escape body searches: 'Male soldiers searched the men and female soldiers searched the women.' Like the other women I interviewed, Salma also tells how the soldiers stole personal valuables from everyone leaving the city: 'They were heaping it [personal valuables] on a sheet that was put on the ground near the crossroads… Every person who had something with him would take it and put it there.' None of the interviewees ever knew what happened to these valuables – whether the soldiers kept them themselves or handed them over to the state.

Despite these humiliating experiences, women found ways to resist (however symbolically), as Um Mhimad's indicates:

> The army searched people. In the army there were girls, they body-searched the women. There was a maiden [a single woman], an unfortunate one, sewing clothes, saving money and buying gold. In order that they wouldn't search her body, she put them [her valuables], may you never know, you could say she was

> wearing something narrow and everything was seen. They told her, 'Take off what you have with you. Otherwise we'll come and search you.' Her mother and her sisters hid her behind an olive tree and took [money and gold] off her, and she [the seamstress] threw it in the white sheet. She gave everything to them… She is a woman from the house of Juda [family name]… Her money and herself, everything she put down for them, the poor one. She said, 'By God, nothing has remained with me.' They took the woman's gold… They kept saying, 'Take off the gold and everything and put it here, all that you have in your hands, put it here.' Whoever had anything put it down with his own hands! While we were migrating, they plundered all our money. Someone had earrings, someone had jewellery, she had anything. There was a kerchief on the ground and [they] had to take off all the jewellery and put it on the kerchief. Anyone who has anything, they tell her, 'Put it into place. Put it here.' And she would put it… Money, anything… 'If you don't do it, we will search you.' They [the women] put [their valuables down] because they feared for themselves and for their honour.

On the one hand, the body is described as an object, being searched, touched and humiliated. All of the interviewees linked their experiences of the migration and the dispossession of their personal belongings to offences against their bodies. If they did not voluntarily give up their valuables, or denied having anything, this meant their bodies would be subjected to searches by Israeli soldiers. To avoid this invasive procedure, many people complied with the order to give up their valuables.

On the other hand, in the case of the seamstress, whose mother and sisters undressed her themselves, her family protected her body from being searched. This was an act of resistance that preserved her moral refusal to completely surrender to the Israeli soldiers. It is all the more powerful because it happened at the peak of the invasion, when Palestinians were at their weakest – being dispossessed of everything they had and forced to flee their homes. By throwing her valuables on the sheet by herself, the seamstress demonstrated her inner strength (as well as compliance).

By protecting the body from being searched in a situation where everyone and everything was vulnerable, penetrable, exposed to groping, expropriation and plunder, women's bodies may be described as a site of resistance and resilience. Um Mhimad also recounts her own story of resistance in the face of her fear when she was returning from Amman to her native city, Lyd, via Jerusalem:

> My husband asked me to come from Amman… My mother said goodbye to me. When she parted from me, I was hitting myself, because I didn't want to be with the Jews. I was afraid of them… Before we entered [Jerusalem], my brother gave me three Israeli pounds. I asked him, 'Why?' He said, 'Keep them with you.' [A border guard] asked me, 'Do you have money?' I said, 'Yes, I do.' He said, 'Where is it?' I told him, 'Here' and put it on the table. He said, 'No, pick it up.' To those who were with me he said, 'Do you have money?' They said, 'No we don't.' I don't know what else he said to them. To those who were searching he said, 'Search them, and see if they have gold, money or anything.' Me, by God, they didn't search. I didn't have money from home. I had nothing with me except the three pounds. They took them [the other two women] to search them. I don't know if they came out after me or not. To me he said, 'Go outside to the Arabs.' I found my husband waiting for me.

Um Mhimad protected herself from a body search by openly admitting she had a small amount of money, which she immediately put on the table before the Israeli border soldiers. During the interview, she used her body to demonstrate the manner in which she held her body back and threw the money on the table. Her movements are an act of resistance stating: 'Take the money but do not touch me.' In this, she represents the body resisting the invaders' attempt to subjugate it. Her actions are in contrast to the actions of other Palestinians, who complied with the authority of the Israeli border soldiers to search anyone they wanted. Here, the body is described not as a monolithic and static entity, but as a dynamic one that functions differently at the same historical moment.

## The female gaze

Towards the end of Salma's interview, conducted in her house in Lyd, I asked if she remembered anything from the British era in the city. She laughed and began her account as follows: 'I used to see them only in their cars. They never came near to our house… There was the army, and they used to pass that way, over there, on our land, passing next to us. My father used to tell me, 'Don't look… don't look at them; don't look at the army.'

Salma explains that the British soldiers did not have direct contact with the Palestinian population. She saw them only from a distance. Her father's warning not to look in their direction indicates his control over her gaze, which symbolizes the control and discipline that the Palestinian man applies to the body of the Palestinian woman. There is extensive literature on the freedom of men to gaze at women, whereby the male gaze is described as a penetration into the woman's privacy and body. In contrast, Salma attempts to penetrate the body of the 'other' (British Army soldiers), despite her father's admonition for her to look away. Her defiance is an act of resistance. Moreover it subverts the privilege of the male gaze.

The picture outlined by Salma reveals the complexity of oppression for both the woman and the man in this case, with regard to the British imperialist forces that were present in the town. The Palestinian man, in this case Salma's father, exercised power over her body, supervising, disciplining, restraining and controlling it. The demand to control her gaze and prevent her from looking in the direction of the British soldiers illustrates her father's fear of revealing his inability as a man to defend her.

The British presence in the city exercised political power that influenced and disciplined both men's and women's bodies. At the same time, the presence of the British as a foreign force maintained patriarchal authority over the female body and controlled both the male and female bodies of Palestinians. The father, controlled by the fear of his inability as a man to protect his daughter and fear of the British soldiers, ordered her not to establish eye contact with the

soldiers, thus planting in her consciousness the seeds of self-policing and fear of this power. The story of the gaze is an informative source not only of the situation of the Palestinians in the context of the British era but also of the gendered nature of relations in Palestinian society. At the same time, it is also a story about the refusal to obey and comply with those very forces of oppression.

## Naming the body

Women in their life stories linked their body's ability to give birth, symbolize the desire to live and continue, during a time of great traumatic crisis, and simultaneously give names to commemorate the historical moment as well. The 'power to name' has long been recognized as structuring reality. Not only is it integral to the exercise of power as domination; it is also a powerful source of resistance. Palestinians tend to name their children (whether male or female) after the names of territory, cities and villages. Names like 'Falastin', 'Yaffa', 'Bisan' and 'Sirin' are quite common. They also name their children with words that carry hope, like 'Awdeh', which means 'return'. These names are also subversive because they give voice to the forbidden legitimacy of Palestinians in Israel to commemorate what happened to them in 1948. The women I interviewed attest to the importance of remembering by giving their newborn babies names that commemorate historical moments and events, as can be seen in the interview excerpts below.

Explaining that her mother was expelled to Amman, then came back to take her from Ramleh where she had stayed, Um Usif goes on to say:

> My mother came to take me so that I would go with them to Amman. I was pregnant, perhaps four or five months. I told her, 'I can't walk'. And now [that] the world is upside down [I felt] their heart was with me. The world went upside down, you know, the war of 1948 broke out, and there was fighting and shooting, and what not, when she [my mother] said, 'The poor thing is still in Ramleh'. Afterwards the Jews came in. She took herself up and went back [to Amman]. The people went out and she [my mother]

> too went among them. They took the men prisoner. And my husband, Yasin, too and everyone left. My parents started asking about me, sending letters through the Red Cross and the monastery. My father started sending letters because [people] said [the Jews] cut their bellies [of Palestinian women], to take the children out of their bellies. You know, at first there is a lot of news and there isn't anyone who knows the truth… Then I gave birth to him and called him 'Asir' [captive].

The entrance of the Jews is juxtaposed in her story with the new life growing in her womb. She remembers and refers to the pain of what happened to her and her family via the body. 'Their heart is with me', she says, expressing her parents' worry because she remained in Ramleh, which was occupied. Once her son was born, she commemorated his father, her husband, who was imprisoned, by naming him 'Asir'. The word 'Asir' derives from *al asr*, or 'captivity', which refers to being captured by the enemy in war (Nashif, 2008: 19). Thus the name not only memorializes a private family event (the father/husband in prison), but also reflects the collective experience of Palestinian men being held in captivity after 1948.

The womb as enveloping new life during war was a widespread and dominant motif in the memories that the interviewees recounted in their life stories, as were stories about miscarriages and breast-feeding. Salma recollects that before 1948, 'I was pregnant seven times; gave birth to two girls and two boys. One daughter died here and two boys died here before we went out, and I had miscarriages; that is, before we migrated. Then, when we migrated [in 1948], I was pregnant.' Like Um Usif, Salma also refers to naming as a means of commemorating broader Palestinian experience:

> We were migrating and I was pregnant with her [pointing to her daughter]. I bore her there [in Amman] then he [Salma's brother] called her 'Hajar' [migration].[8] Because before her, two sons and one daughter died, before we migrated. I told them, 'I don't want her. I don't want her.' [laughs] My mother would tell me, 'Mercy, daughter, she is so miserable, suckle her.' I didn't want to nurse her… So my mother would give her to me and I would nurse her a little.

Although there are many reasons why Salma may have had difficulty bonding with her baby daughter, several bear mentioning here within the context of Palestinian culture. First, there is a gender preference for sons over daughters, and hence the birth of a daughter can be cause for disappointment. Second, the situation in 1948 – when war was being waged by Israeli forces against the Palestinian population – served to underscore the lack of security people felt, which consequently sharpened given gender preferences as these were rooted in a cultural expectation of protection from male family members. Third, the unwanted daughter born during the expulsion of Palestinians from their native land symbolizes the unwanted and forced exodus (the Hijra).

By naming this daughter 'Hajar', the family sought to commemorate their experiences at both personal and collective levels. Salma's 'mother-body' remembers 1948 by being pregnant and refusing to nurse the newborn child, and the newborn child's body also becomes a memorial site for these disastrous events. As such, both bodies become sources of knowledge and memory: of forbidden history in Israel; of the centrality of the female body bearing new life amidst death and destruction in order to ensure continuity; of social and cultural practices at pivotal historical moments in Palestinian history; of the importance of naming to commemorate what has been lost so as to keep those memories alive in the present.

## The clothed female body

Clothes are also significant in terms of understanding the performance of the female body as an agent of both resistance and compliance. Covering the woman's body completely in a black dress, including the face, in public is a phenomenon in Arab and Muslim areas. In her study of San'a, the capital city of Yemen, Annelies Moors (Moors and Tarlo, 2007) argues that women – traditional, Islamist or modern; young as well as old – link their outdoor dress to express ideological and religious convictions, which can have multiple meanings and significance. The form of Islamic fashion, according to her argument, is an example of a shift from a localized authentic to a more

cosmopolitan style of dress from within the social boundaries of what is morally and religiously acceptable. Some women may consider wearing strict forms of veiling as a religious practice and technique of self-help. Yet, through the wearing of full-cover dress they also signify their sense of responsibility in removing from the public realm all reference to sexuality. In addition, by so doing women also show to the world that they are good Muslims of a particular conviction. From a Palestinian historical context, the current diversity of the social fabric of Palestinian society in the cities is concretely apparent in the various styles of dress of Palestinian women. Some women wear embroidered dresses and the jilbab in public spaces; others are veiled in black from head to toe; young women combine headscarves with jeans; and some women wear entirely Westernized clothes, with their Palestinian identities only divulged when they speak Arabic.[9] In particular, the various modes of dress that preserve collective identity are also a political statement: these women claim their right to be in the very place that seeks to delegitimize and erase Palestinian existence. Randa Farah (2002) argues that Palestinian women's dresses serve as signifiers to distinguish them from Jordanians and to preserve their identity in the hope of some day being repatriated to their homeland.

In Lyd and Ramleh, contested cities where Palestinian women live, and in their contested homeland, the manner in which most women dress signifies an act of resistance intended to distinguish Palestinians from Jewish Israelis. In the life stories of the women I interviewed, they described the way they dressed in different historical periods, thereby providing knowledge of social and political history. In particular, their descriptions of how clothing changed over time demonstrate how dress style has been influenced by both external and internal relations of power as domination. Despite this, the way women dress reflects the way in which they exercise choice and present themselves as active agents in their daily lives who are engaged in a unique and peaceful form of protest.

When I met Fatmeh Abed el Hadi for our interview, she was wearing an embroidered black dress: 'This is how we used to dress

in Zakariyya, my daughter [*ya biniti*].' She further remarked that 'The ones who change their dress change their origin [*assloh*] and we don't do that.' For many women originally from villages that were destroyed, continuing to wear their traditional dress means that they are maintaining the memory of their origin; it is a reminder of the place they come from. In both Lyd and Ramleh, I could readily identify Bedouin women from the village of el-Naqab because they still wear their traditional embroidered dresses. However, this was only true for the older generation. Second- and third-generation Bedouin women wear different styles of dress, like the jilbab or Western-style trousers and shirts with headscarves.

The way women dress is also a marker of historical events, as well as of social and political change. Salma from Lyd, who dressed in light clothes covering most of her body and a white scarf, explains this in some detail:

> My grandmother used to wear white dresses, like white dashdash.[10] She would also put on a black shanbat,[11] like this, and then she would add a white collar and this is how she would go out… When we went out with our heads covered, we would cover our faces with a black cloth, a kab.[12] Then there was the black covering, the malaya,[13] so that the whole body was covered… And then we would cover our faces. Once a girl reached the age of 12, she was supposed to cover herself… If [a woman] wanted to hide something, she would also put it under the cloth; under the burnus…[14] It is just like the nuns wear.

Whether Muslim or Christian, urban women dressed in black clothing, covered from head to toe, when they went out. According to Kadora-Hartvill (1995), both Muslim and Christian women living in the Middle East wore hijabs at the beginning of the twentieth century. Consequently, it was very difficult to distinguish between them. Muslim women described themselves as dressing like nuns, reflecting the presence of these religious women in their city lives. These nuns were both Palestinian and European women, who dressed like Muslim women, thus dismantling a series of dichotomies: East versus West; Christian versus Muslim; the perception

of Muslim dress as backward versus Western (Christian) dress as progressive.

The kab and burnus are specifically articles of urban clothing. Women who wore these clothes marked their status and class as belonging to the modern city and modern culture as opposed to the village and a culture seen as backward. One of the women I interviewed was born in Lyd. Her mother had followed her husband, who moved from a village to work at the train station. Her mother used to wear a village-type dress, but, as Um Mhimad explains, 'When I turned 13, I asked my mother if I could to wear a kab and burnus because I want to be urban and modern [*ana badi atmadan*].' The word *atmadan* means 'to be urban and modern' or 'developed and progressive'. This term is used in opposition to villagers, who are conceived as traditional or backward. As Um Omar describes this difference, 'There are peasants, please excuse the expression, and there are city women. Those living in the city would cover their heads, dress in black and wear a burnus.' Wearing the urban-style kab and burnus indicated a woman's modernity, which was in contrast to women living in villages. The latter did not wear these articles of clothing, nor did they cover their faces and hands.

The practice of urban women to dress in black from head to toe relates to social and political influences of the time. In particular, it signifies the insecurity urban women felt compared to village women. There are two reasons for this insecurity. The first is related to external rulers, particularly in the late nineteenth century during the Ottoman era, when the whole population suffered from a lack of security. Women therefore were forced by their families to be confined to the home and cover themselves completely when they went out. The second is related to the development of city life at the beginning of the twentieth century. Communities in the cities increased in size, becoming more diverse and alienated compared to life in small villages. In these urban settings, women were increasingly exposed to danger. Covering themselves from head to toe in black was a precondition for access to public spaces, whether by their own choice or because of coercion from other family members.

Women from smaller towns, like Isdud and al-Majdal, dressed differently from those in Lyd and Ramleh. Aysheh wore what she called 'al-Majdal dresses', which are white garments with fine embroidery and a special head covering. A dress like this marks Aysheh's place of origin, as well as reflecting differences within urban Palestinian communities. Like Aysheh, women from different areas of the city indicate that they all wore a distinctive type of clothing, with their own designs, embroidery patterns and colours, in order that others could identify where they came from.

A few of the women I interviewed, each of whom came from a different place of origin, reported that their dress codes were influenced by the styles of Israeli Jewish women after Lyd and Ramleh has been occupied in 1948. As Um Adnan recalls with laughter: 'We saw that the Jews [Jewish women] did not cover their heads, so we went out without covering our heads, and we did like them.' Some women said that they started wearing short-sleeved dresses and stopped covering their heads. For example, Haliemeh showed me photos in which she is wearing knee-length dresses and skirts, and no headscarf, explaining: 'We saw the Jewish women dress like that, so we imitated their style.' These changes in dress code were not the only changes to the lives of these Palestinian women. Some indicated that they no longer fasted or prayed. In such cases, these admissions were immediately followed by statements such as 'we ask Almighty to forgive us' or similar expressions of remorse. Alongside this, those women who adopted the dress codes of their

Jewish counterparts justified these changes by claiming that they had been young girls or immature at the time.

While imitating the dress codes of Jewish women may be interpreted to signify compliance with Israeli power and domination in the wake of 1948, retaining distinctive styles of clothing also functions as a medium for distinguishing Palestinian women from their Jewish neighbours. It can even signify resistance to that very oppression and domination. Among the women I interviewed, for example, one of the most oft-cited reasons for changing their style of dress was religion. Many of these Muslim women made the pilgrimage to Mecca, which required that they dress in accordance with religious practice. Haliemeh says, 'I had enough time showing my hair, and may God forgive us and have mercy on us… I went on a pilgrimage and I returned to Omrah.[15]

These changes in dress style reflect broader political changes over time, not only in Palestine but in the region as a whole. The rise of the religious Islamic regime in Iran in 1979, for instance, fostered a widespread tendency to return to religion. Israeli Palestinians were part of this trend. As such, women began to dress accordingly. This change in dress style was further encouraged when in the 1980s the State of Israel lifted the ban on making the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Today, dress is still a distinctive marker of the differences between the Palestinian population and the Jewish population, as well as within Palestinian communities. Criticizing a particular style trend that is increasingly popular among young Muslim women, Aysheh explains:

> A daughter of my daughter's sister-in-law studied in a Jewish place. In her last year of studies, she had to do training in a Jewish school. She wore black… She became religious. [The Jews] told her she couldn't do her training with [Jewish] pupils like that [with her dress]. They told her, 'Go look for Arab [schools] if you dress like that.' I wish she had put on a white scarf or something. But no, she was all black, down to here [pointing at her feet]… There are many, many young women here who have become religious. In Lyd and in Ramleh they wear socks. I dress in the usual way.

> When I go out, I just cover my head with a scarf, and that's it… [But] she is all covered up. You can barely see her eyes.

Aysheh's description of this young woman, covered from head to toe in black clothing, is in contrast to her own decision to wear only a headscarf in public. It also defines differences within the Palestinian community, specifically the renewed interest in adopting a conservative religious style of dress in urban settings. In part, some Palestinians have become more religious, and adjust their clothing habits accordingly, in order to seek security and protection from the frustrations to which daily life gives rise. Covering the body from head to toe could be interpreted as women complying with the religious imperative to discipline their body and reproduce their subordination. However, the choice by a young, educated woman to dress in such a fashion that 'this woman who sees without being seen frustrated the colonizer' (Fanon, 1965: 44) resulted in her having to leave her teacher training at a local Jewish school can also be interpreted as an act of resistance; a refusal to comply with the requirements that the Jewish school head demanded she fulfil. Instead, this young woman preferred to maintain her style of dress as a way of maintaining her identity and protecting her family, as well as an expression of her political attitude – namely, that she is entitled to wear what she wants in public, despite the ongoing Zionization of her home city.

Aysheh's obviously critical attitude towards this young woman's choice to wear an orthodox style of dress points to broader tensions within Palestinian society. That is, Aysheh's position reflects divisions between more religious, traditional lifestyles and secular ones. Whereas donning conservative dress among women is easily dismissed on the grounds that it can be attributed to Palestinian male power exercised over Palestinian women, it is also possible to interpret this trend in terms a women's choice to protest against control, discrimination and/or racism that they experience in their daily lives.

Clothing always makes a statement of some sort. As the women I interviewed attest, how they dress at any given time is indicative of

the historical, political and cultural dynamics that define the social relations in which they exist. Choice of dress not only offers insight into the personal aspects of women's lives, but also identifies them as belonging to this or that community – whether this is a specific village, a city or even where they see themselves in relation to the entire Middle East. How women dress serves to preserve their identities (and those of their families), but at the same time it can also function as a political statement of resistance oriented to challenging the dominant State of Israel in which they live and asserting their right to retain their Palestinian identities.

## Conclusion

As the foregoing discussion indicates, the women I interviewed recall historical events, over different periods of time, through their bodies: body time, body performance, body features, images of their own body and images of the male body. From the standpoint of their present lives, they describe what the body does and what they do with the body, the practices of the body at different times and on different occasions, and the meaning of body functions and performances in various circumstances. The body, then, is a dynamic source of knowledge. In particular, it subverts dominant historical narratives, filling in missing parts of these stories. Sometimes the body even serves as a substitute for 'dominant' and 'traditional' sources of knowledge. Through the body, these women told forbidden stories and revealed the silenced others, as well as completed partial stories.

At the time of writing, Israel's attack on Palestinians in Gaza was at its peak, with the killing and destruction reported live on many television channels. An old Palestinian woman, shown on Al Jazeera, stood on the ruins of her house, screaming out the names of those in her family who has died and saying, 'The Jews do not give us a chance to forget.' Her black dress and white head scarf, the pain on her face and her hands stretched out skyward seeking help, drew my attention to the sophistication and depth of her body performance.

Her eloquent expression called on the rubble of her home, oral language and her body to convey the depth of the ongoing suffering of Palestinians.

I completed the interviews in 2004. While telling their life stories, so many of the women I spoke to noted that 'time repeats itself'. In implicit references to the territories that were occupied in 1967, these women commented that 'those in Gaza do not have water or food' or that 'they hit them from the sky'. Their expressions refer to the body – hunger, thirst, hitting, killing. Repeated over and again, these women are living witnesses to the continued violence and oppression that first began in 1948 with the foundation of the State of Israel. As such, their present and past intertwine, as this is expressed in and through the body.

For these women, the body is a site of memory in which their experiences are encoded and preserved. It is by means of their bodies that they remember historical events. Their past bodily experiences are still vividly present, directly influencing how the present is structured. At the same time, the present influences the way they shape their past, the historical events that are a continuous presence of the past in the present which has not yet been resolved.

Women memorize historical events by linking them to 'body time': maidenhood, pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding. As such, these are feminine patterns of memory that are directly related to the female body and its various functions. Their bodies rebirth families that were shattered and dispersed, maintaining continuity, preserving the family and becoming a site of commemoration. These female bodies tell the story of the past–present in the absence of a commemoration site for Palestinians in Israel within the public sphere.

The descriptions of the body and bodily practices offered by these women are sometimes contradictory. On the one hand, for example, the body is described as an object, but on the other it is a subject. These variations in status depend on the historical contexts and circumstances in which the body is remembered. In the context of the lives of Palestinians in Israel, the female body is described as a success story. Women demarcate a situation where they succeed

through their body, in the private sphere, using the body to rebuild and maintain the family and the community. In contrast, the male body is more ambiguous: at once an active agent as fighter, but also a victim – hanged, imprisoned, expelled, drugged. This body signifies failure in the public sphere, where Palestinian men have not successfully gained access to the political arena.

# SIX

# Home

> I began to feel my anger after my mother's death in 1948… I will never forget the tremendous slap my brother gave me because I refused to leave my mother in bed by herself. (Herzog, 2004a: 241)

> In so many ways, I had left home to find home, to lose it, and to find it again. I did not know all this on that important day. I just had a feeling that sometimes one's home is like an airplane. Home can move with you and can take you places. But what about the people you leave behind? What about the tearful eyes, and the sad smiles? (Kanafani, 1998: 311)

In telling their life stories, home was one of the most dominant themes for the women I interviewed. Home was also one of their most complex themes. As such, the concept of 'home' as understood by these women is highly revealing. These various insights cut across their private lives and their collective sense of home based on city or village life, as well as Palestinian national identity. The following discussion delineates this crucial concept as it is described by these women – both as women and as Palestinian citizens in the State of Israel.

As women, the interviewees denote their sense of home in multiple ways and with different functions and meanings. These range from

an idea of the home in terms of spatial organization and social affiliation to the home as a concrete physical presence or a place rich with symbolic meaning. Over time, home is simultaneously seen as a place of safety and abundance, as well as a battleground coming under attack. Nostalgic memories of home life before 1948 are contrasted with the harsh realities of rebuilding home and community life immediately after these events, along with the ongoing struggle for entitlement to land and property in contemporary Israel.

As Palestinian citizens in the State of Israel, these women describe having witnessed how their private homes became the homes of Jewish families, and their collective home – Palestine – became the national Jewish homeland, the State of Israel. Here, home is presented as a site of commemoration that is saturated with political meaning. It not only signifies loss, but is also the one place where history and memory are transmitted, thereby preserving the continuity of cultural and national identity. Beyond being a site of commemoration, then, these women also highlight the importance of home as a site of resistance to the Israeli occupation, thus expanding the range of possible meanings that define the term 'home'.

The contested and modifiable concept of home that is described by these women becomes even more complex when closer attention is given to how these women historicize and contextualize their sense of home and, more broadly, place. These women create and constitute in their life stories the sites of historic events, telling stories about their experiences and memories in order to keep Palestinian history alive for coming generations. Taking the contemporary standpoint of these women as a starting point and moving back through the history of their lives, this discussion examines their past and present perceptions of places and the memories these places evoke, with particular attention to how these memories influence and play a part in their lives, as a personal and collective experience. Unsurprisingly, a sense of loss and destruction are ever-present, forming one of the most predominant themes to which these women consistently return in describing their concept of home. The sophistication of the concept of home in Palestinian women's life, in the private and the collective

sense, is manifest in the naming of the remains of pre-1948 Palestinian homes as 'Arab home'. The phrase 'we lived in Arab home' was used by some of the women to describe their current residence prior to 1948. Palestinian homes from the pre-1948 period in both cities are known in both Palestinian and Jewish discourse as 'Arab homes'. During the data collection, I noticed that some of the Arab homes that were lived in had ruins beside them. When I asked why, the answer was that a Jewish family used to live in this part of the building and when they moved out the municipality demolished it.

Use of the phrase 'Arab home' renders visible in the present the history and memory of Palestinians who once lived as a community in these cities. However the phrase 'Arab home' is ambivalent and liminal. The use of this phrase by Palestinians serves to preserve the Arab identity of these places while simultaneously suppressing their Palestinian identity. In the latter case, this is designed to avoid the continual tension of being both Palestinians and Israeli citizens caught up in a situation of ongoing conflict. In contrast, use of the term 'Arab home' from a Jewish Israeli perspective is an acknowledgement that Arabs, as part of Arab communities in an Arab region, lived in these homes, but not as Palestinians who were entitled to their homes in both private and collective senses. From the Jewish Israeli perspective, recognition of an Arab identity in these places is understood as part of a foreign Arab ruling power, like the Turkish and British ruling power – the Arab as non-native stranger. Thus Jewish use of the term 'Arab home' embodies the eradication of the Palestinian identity of the place, along with the collective home.

## Home contextualized and historicized

### The Zionization of space

Collective memory is interpreted and develops in a spatial framework (Halbwachs, 1992). When a claim to control space is made by an entire group of people who can exercise domination in a totalizing way, it does so by neglecting, ignoring and even annihilating the

presence of the oppressed group, which is particularly obvious in regions with colonial patterns (Kuper, 2003).

In the case of Palestinians in Israel, for example, Oren Yiftachel (2000) argues that immediately after the establishment of the State of Israel the government began an accelerated process of renewed territorial formation, with a twofold strategic objective at its heart: the simultaneous Zionization and de-Arabification of the space. Yacobi (2004) shows that after the military administration in Lyd, Ramleh and Yaffa ended, the territorial Judaization of these spaces continued. As a result of state policy and its Zionist nature, Palestinians paid the highest price. They were witness to the repossession, division and destruction of their property and possessions, as well as their private and collective rights.

In this intensely politicized context, the term 'Judaization', which is used by both Yiftachel and Yacobi, is highly problematic. It implies that Judaism, as a religion, justifies the purification of territory and asserts an exclusive Jewish sovereignty over Palestine. In my view, this term is both misleading and inaccurate. It is misleading because it does not represent the values of Judaism as a religion. It is inaccurate because it is a misnomer. That is, this process of controlling territory in order to establish a national state for Jews in Palestine and claiming exclusive Jewish sovereignty is instead a cornerstone of a secular Eurocentric Zionist modern national ideology.

This ideology has co-opted Judaism as a religion in complex ways that both adapt and reject various aspects of the religion in order to further its ideological aims and objectives. Hence, throughout this text, I employ the term 'Zionization' of territory and space rather than 'Judaization' because it more accurately reflects the actions and policies of the State of Israel in relation to Palestine.

Crucially, the foremost objective of Zionism – creation of an exclusively Jewish homeland – is integrally dependent on the systematic erasure of the very existence of pre-1948 Palestinian cities. In turn, this more broadly serves to negate Palestinian history and rights to this territory. Demolition of these cities also isolates and removes Palestinian experience from modernity, justifying Zionist

claims that Palestinian society is a backward peasant culture; a heritage remote from the values of civilization. All of this may be summed up in a key Zionist assumption about Palestinian life: 'a land without a people and a people without a land'.

The ongoing Zionization of territory is evident in the cities of Lyd and Ramleh today. The local state apparatus literally wrecks this space by destroying the old cities and historic sites, both public and private. In the course of my research, I encountered these realities first hand. As the life story methodology requires, I returned to the interviewees to get more information on certain topics or have them elaborate others, to ask their opinion on issues that were unclear and to verify sensitive matters. When I went back to the homes of both Da'seh, 'originally' from Lyd, and to Um Ismael, 'originally' from al-Majdal, to my surprise I instead found two mounds of rubble and the remains of what were once their homes.

Neither woman raised the issue of having to evacuate their homes – not when they were telling their life stories, nor when I told them that I might come back to ask more questions. Their reasons for not sharing this crucial information with me were based on a discomfort related to their collective sense of identity as Palestinians. That is, they sold their Arab homes to the Loram Company, a state agent of oppression, which demolished the houses. In selling their private homes in order to build newer, better homes, both women became active participants in the systematic erasure

of Palestinian history in the interests of their own personal gain. In contrast, two other interviewees, Um Omar and Hanieh, had warned me that I might not find them when I came back and I probably would have to look for them elsewhere. In clear and precise detail, they explained that they were negotiating with the Loram Company over a demand to evacuate their Arab homes so that they could be demolished in order to make room for new housing.[1]

At the same time, when I enter these two cities, important historical landmarks from the pre-1948 period are ever present, despite being in various stages of dilapidation and ruin. These visible remnants – such as the Turkish public bath, Khan el Hilu and the el-Far family oil press, Hassona's soap building and the el Sabil well, the old municipality building in Lyd and the current Lyd and Ramleh municipality buildings, sacred places like churches and mosques, Maqamat,[2] Zawaya, domes, shrines, and a few leftover private homes – are the eyewitness testimony of the history and memory of the bustling life in Palestinian cities before the Nakba.

Telling the story of what has happened to the Palestinian population since 1948, these neglected ruins and half ruins are therefore monuments that commemorate the forbidden and delegitimized story of the history and memory of Palestinians in public spaces. The concrete existence of these remains and their visibility in Lyd and Ramleh challenge the systematic erasure and

destruction of Palestinian history and memory by the Israeli state apparatus and signify the limits of its Zionist aspirations.

There is no greater evidence of this than the stories Palestinian women told within the confines of their family homes.

## Telling forbidden stories at home

I met the vast majority of the women I interviewed at their private homes. When these women told their life story, in most cases other family members of different generations also attended the meetings and actively listened. Some of them interrupted the storyteller, asking her to elaborate various topics. In other cases, they added details or reminded the storyteller about specific information they wanted to be included.

The active participation of these family members in the storytelling process left no doubt that these stories were being transmitted across different generations. It also made clear that this was not the first time these stories had been told, in particular those related to 1948. This multi-generational engagement in storytelling indicates that the private home functions as a site of commemoration that celebrates Palestinian history, heritage, culture and memory.

It is important to note that during some of the interviews both women and men suppressed particular details or specific parts of broader stories. These details were related to both Palestinians and Jewish Israelis. When suppressing a part of a story, those who did so used the phrase 'Osh, the walls have ears'. Use of this phrase reflects a feeling of fear, along with a view of the private home as a place that had been penetrated and consequently was not secure.

At the same time, however, it is evident that by telling and transmitting their stories in spite of this fear, these women, along with other family members, defy state domination. That is, they subvert both the Zionist narrative and Israeli state policies that seek to silence and erase Palestinian experience in the public space of Israel. The home is, then, a site of resistance that protects Palestinian history (as narrative and memory) from oblivion.

Taken in combination, these three competing but always related dimensions of home – commemoration, insecurity and resistance – suggest that the private home is likewise a collectivized and politicized space in Palestinian culture.

## Home as social and spatial organizer

According to Doreen Massey (1994: 168), 'Social relationships have social form and content, which exist in space and which cross it. This is the source of the creation of a particular social relationship linked to a specific place.' Debora Pellow (2003: 160) elaborates: 'Like language, space is socially constructed; people everywhere produce houses whose spatial organization suits the inhabitants' social life. Presumably, then, people sharing a cultural tradition may well also share socio-spatial traits.'

These two insights into the linkages between place and the spatial organization of social relations are exemplified in the statements of the Palestinian women I interviewed. Their use of the concept 'home' expresses not only a broad spectrum of social relations, but other multiple meanings as well. In particular, many of their comments about home also include temporal references that distinguish between the 'days of the Arab' (a time prior to 1948) and events after 1948, including comparisons with their contemporary experiences.

Both rural- and urban-dwelling women in the interview sample describe their affiliation to the nuclear family, the extended family and life in their neighbourhoods by using the word *dar* ('house') or its equivalent *beit* ('home'). As Um Omar from Lyd says, 'I am from el-Far home [*beit el-Far*]… My father was a well-known and educated man.' Here she indicates her familial affiliation to her father in her use of the term 'home'. Elsewhere in the interview she says, 'We are the home [*beit*] of Haj Mahmud el-Far.' While pointing out places in the city of Lyd, Um Omar goes on to say, 'All this belonged to the home of el-Far… In the Arab days, all of this was ours, property of the home of el-Far.' Here, the phrase 'In the Arab days' connects Um Omar's contemporary sense of place directly to the historical period of life before 1948.

Whether in a city or a village, the concepts 'house of' or 'home of' are also often used to designate the place where the majority of an extended family used to live – what in English idiom would be referred to as a 'neighbourhood'. For example, the neighbourhood where the extended family of Abd El-Hadi lived was called the 'Abd El-Hadi neighbourhood', with the word 'family' being replaced by the word 'neighbourhood'.[3] As Um Omar indicates above, she also replicates this usage, with her expression 'the home of el-Far' [*beit el-Far*], simultaneously referring to both her nuclear family and her extended family.

The practice of calling some neighbourhoods by the names of the families that inhabited them fuses together place and social-familial identity. For instance, as Hanieh, from al-Majdal, a neighbourhood in Lyd, explains: 'al-Majdal used to be in the Arab days (but not now) divided into homes [neighbourhoods]; the house [*dar*] of Awadieh is in the Awadieh neighbourhood in al-Majdal… I'm from the house of Awadieh; my late husband was from the house of Abu-Sharikh.' Immediately shifting her narrative to a recollection of events in 1948, Hanieh goes on to say:

> I was at home in my neighbourhood, up the hill, the neighbourhood of Abu-Shanab… By God, an hour or an hour and a half hasn't passed, when they [the Jews] hit the western neighbourhood, our neighbourhood, the neighbourhood of Abu-Sharikh, the el-Awadieh neighbourhood. We all lived in neighbourhoods, al-Majdal [was built as a series of] neighbourhoods… The explosion happened in the Abu-Sharikh neighbourhood; I was in a house in the neighbourhood of Abu-Shanab.

Many of the women I interviewed traversed time and place in a similar manner. That is, they rapidly moved back and forth between contemporary reality, events of 1948 and the 'Day of the Arabs', which pre-dates 1948. At work here is what Henri Lefebvre (1991: 161) emphasizes as the symbolic meaning and significance of particular spaces: how spaces are culturalized and how culture is spatialized, or how cultural practices are lived in space. In the case of the women I interviewed, they enrich their cultural experience of

space by imbuing this with history. In so doing, they define 'home' not only in concrete terms, but also as a symbolic construct.

This awareness of temporality and place is reflected in another common expression for the term 'home'. This too carries deep symbolic meaning. The term 'house' or 'home' is alternately referred to as '*sakneh*, which means 'a dwelling place'. This word derives from the verb *sakana*, which means 'silenced' and/or 'cannot move'. In this sense, *sakneh* is the place – the home or the neighbourhood, where people live and where they expect to die. As a woman from Ramleh said, 'I am from the house of El-Wahab and we lived in *saknet El-Wahab*.' Other women also used the same term for both the family home and the neighbourhood; for example, *saknet El-Wahab*, *saknet Hijazi* or *saknet Fanos*. This indicates that extended families live in these places and expected to die there as well.[4]

Reinforcing Zionist stereotypes about Palestinian culture, sociologist Halim Barakat (1993: 58) asserts: 'The peasants' sense of belonging is defined as much by attachment to the family home (*beit*) as it is by attachment to the land.' Presumably this is in contrast to an urban sense of belonging, which would not be linked to land. However, as the interviews suggest, Barakat's view is limited. That is, rural and urban women alike relate their sense of belonging to both the family home and the land where they lived.

The link between culture and space that Lefebvre emphasizes finds further reinforcement in how places are named. Notably, all of the affiliations used by the interviewees referred to the father's name and not the mother's. This reflects a shared experience of patriarchal culture in the organization of social relations and place in both rural and urban contexts. However, there are some rare exceptions, as Um Omar indicates: 'The original inhabitants of Lyd are el-Habash and li-Munayyir and Hasona, but we used to call them 'the house of el-Hajeh' [*beit el-Hajeh*], but not Hasona. No one knew the name Hasona. It's new.'

Although the term 'el-Hajeh' refers to a woman, this does not follow the pattern of naming customary to masculine patterns of identification. Whereas the proper names of men are used to name

houses (individual homes and/or neighbourhoods), the word 'el-Hajeh' is not a proper name for a woman, but rather an adjective that describes a woman. That is, 'Hajeh' is a term of honour for a woman who has made a haj, a pilgrimage to Mecca. As such, her family home is identified by her designation of honour, but not by her proper name. On the one hand, this example indicates the power of patriarchy in Palestinian society, which uses proper names when they are male and only uses an impersonal designation when referring to a family known by the name of a woman. On the other hand, this case (however rare) nonetheless shows that naming a family after a prominent female figure is possible, thus rendering that woman more visible.

The women I interviewed were also sources of information about the impact of natural disasters on the spatial organization of homes. In 1927, for example, an earthquake caused serious damage to houses in the old cities of Lyd and Ramleh and killed many people. In response to the question of when she was born, Salma replies:

> I don't remember when I was born, but I remember that there was a big earthquake… My mother said that I was 2 years old when the big earthquake happened. The market collapsed… The same day there was a market at noon there was an earthquake that killed many people in Lyd. My mother said, 'You were 2 years old and I had another girl after you.' She said the earthquake was the biggest in Lyd… There were earthquakes that were smaller but that one killed, houses collapsed and people were killed. Many. Like the one that happened in Iran, the poor ones. Like Iran, did you see? May God help them! What can a human being do? When the earthquake happened there was a market day – on Monday, the market was taking place on Monday.

Given the scale of the destruction caused by the earthquake, families with the means to do so built new houses outside the confines of the old city in Lyd, resulting in a reorganization of community space, as Salma continues to explain:

> After the earthquake, people started to go outside the old city… It was falling apart because of an earthquake. The people started to

> build outside the old city. They went, buying and settling outside… [which] means outside the city, outside the city.

Repeating a familiar pattern among the interviewees in how they expressed their recollections, Salma almost immediately goes on to reference 1948, and eventually compares this to contemporary reality:

> The homes then were new… In 1948, the people [Israelis] ruined them all. Whenever someone was going out of their house, they were ruining it and throwing its stones into the wells. They were ruining it. They don't want to leave a single home there. Israel, I mean, does not want the Arabs to say that it's ours. They ruined them all.

Like Salma, many of the women I interviewed expressed dismay as to why these newly built homes had to be demolished in 1948. At the same time, however, this long-term ongoing destruction of Arab homes is understood as part of the erasure of Palestinian history and memory.

The term 'home' was used by the women who were interviewed as simultaneously a concrete private home, immediate and extended family affiliations, a neighbourhood and a place. 'Home' thus denotes a complex web of social and spatial relations. In both villages and cities, family names (most often the father's) are used to indicate the social organization of space. As such, these descriptions of home reproduce gendered, hierarchical and patriarchal power relations within Palestinian society. Importantly, events of 1948 are also an inescapable part of these narratives, lending a symbolic dimension to the sense of home that these women describe. Taken together, this defines local society, territory and its living borders in terms of a sense of history that accounts for the 'day of the Arab' in comparison to contemporary life in the State of Israel. This convergence of meanings shapes and constitutes the interviewees' expressions of home and reflects their perceptions and experiences of its meaning.

## The days of the Arab

### Standing in tight rows

The women I interviewed recollect their sense of home in a nostalgic manner, longing for the homes that used to be there but are now either no longer in existence or not at all as they once were. Adding another level of complexity, this can be regarded as an imaginary construct of home. As Haliemeh el Naqib recalls, 'The old Lyd was beautiful, beautiful, Fatma, how beautiful it was, more beautiful than Nazareth. The houses stood one next to the other. On both sides of the main street, the houses stood tightly together, side by side.'

Her brother, Abd el-Hamid el Naqib, who was present for part of the interview, added: 'In my teens, I used to walk all over the city of Lyd, from roof to roof, on the adjacent houses. You walked across its joined rooftops.' He continued: 'I used to look at the date palm trees from a height up on the roofs. I saw all of them. Lyd was beautiful.'

Most of the interviewees emphasized the fact that the old Arab homes were made of stone and stood in tight attached rows, with similar descriptions of pre-1948 life given by both city and village dwellers. As Rosemary Sayigh (2008) describes, the peasant houses and buildings in Palestinian villages were not walled, but nonetheless clustered in close formation so that their solid stone facades were a formidable obstacle to most attackers. This pattern of construction was replicated in the cities.

Although the women I interviewed use patriarchal descriptions of the home or neighbourhood, other descriptions reflect a personal and communal sense of security, safety and stability in people's lives up until 1948. As previous discussion indicates, the word 'house' or 'home' signified individual belonging to a father's house and also a more collective belonging and relatedness to the extended family, community and a specific place in the city or village. The way these women shape their descriptions of the home of the past defines a Palestinian identity characterized by social consolidation and the security

of community life. The use of stone as the primary construction material symbolizes the strength and stability of community life.

Fatmeh Abed el Hadi's comments about life in Zakariyya before 1948 bear this out:

> On the days that we should pick up the piles [of crops] in the fields, those who were left behind with their harvest [the people of the village] would gather and help him, harvest with him, would load the grain. We loaded the crops on camels and horses… It was a whole world! …People [men] were cutting, the women were collecting, and the whole world [community] was harvesting, collecting and loading all together until they were finished. Zakariyya's people were all good to each other…

This is opposed to the current texture of life, which is seen as a split and dissociated society both within Palestinian communities and between them and Jewish communities. The divided community, which sharpens the lack of security, continues to weaken Palestinian life in Lyd and Ramleh today.[5]

Comments from the interviewees, such as 'Now you can count the original residents of Lyd on your fingers', or 'Only we remained from the house of el-Far, everyone migrated' and 'Only my husband alone remained from the house of el-Bana, but thank God we bore children and raised them and they live around me', testify to the collective devastation of Palestinian populations in these cities. At the same time, however, these comments also verify the reality that Palestinian communities continued to exist in both cities, albeit in greatly diminished numbers.

### The abundant home

In addition to the sense of safety and security that defines nostalgic memories of their former homes, the women I interviewed also describe a rich abundance of food and other necessities as part of their past lives. Um Omar from Lyd exuberantly recalls this when she says, 'Our home was full of goods… What was stored in the house could probably fill a whole truck. You know what a storeroom is? It

was full of produce, oil, cheese, yogurt, and all sorts of things and I don't know what else!'

This is in stark contrast to their present reality of poverty, economic insecurity and dependence on the State of Israel for economic well-being. Such comparisons only add to the sense of loss and resentment that these women express since their lives were shattered in 1948. Fatmeh Abed el Hadi sums up this tension between the past and the present in her description of home:

> The houses were full, the khawabi and wheat, corn, lentils, beans and cattle fodder and everything, daughter.[6] Would we sit here and wait for Israel to give us money to buy food? [laughter] You are spreading salt on my wounds, daughter. The wounds are open and you spread salt on them, daughter… In the English days, I tell you, only those who had sheep or cattle… [The English] counted the heads and asked the owners to pay taxes. Not as now, we have to pay for the house. In the English days, we did not have to pay for the home or land… One of us had a terrific house but we didn't pay for it. Then everything went [was lost]… We have to come here to Ramleh, waiting for Israel to give us money to buy food… [*laughter*] What we saw [suffered], my daughter… We had a good livelihood from our livestock herd – sheep and goats and cattle. Swear to God, we had a whole world…
>
> [Then] we saw plights. We saw, as you see now, like the residents of Gaza[7]… What I saw! What we saw! The Jews as they do to the Arabs [today] were doing to us [in 1948]. [They] were shooting at us, frightening us. Afterwards they would collect all the people in the village, in a yard, and scrutinize them [asking] to what you gave birth, when you gave birth, how many children do you have and how old are you? All sorts of questions, like they were investigating us. After asking these questions they would say, 'Go back home'… And we came here [Ramleh], my daughter, and here we sit. What can we do? The Jews made a lot of hard things, like they do now for the people of Gaza.

Fatmeh's testimony is rich with meaning, particularly in its movement across time. First, along with Um Omar's recollection, it is a description of the past in terms of economic independence, a sense of control over their lives and sources of sustenance. In short, it is

an idea of communal solidarity as the fulfilment of needs. Second, Fatmeh Abed el Hadi and Um Omar, like many interviewees, express a certain degree of romanticism in remembering the past, thereby reinforcing the imaginary dimension that helps define this multilayered concept of home. In particular, Fatmeh Abed el Hadi's nostalgia is heightened further when she compares life in the past with her experiences of 1948, and the consequences of this on her present-day reality.

Third, and most important, is the meaning embedded in the phrase 'spreading salt on open wounds'.[8] For those women who used this expression, it relates to particularly painful memories of what happened to them in 1948. It implies that the pain of losing their homes (both at the individual and collective level, as well as in concrete and symbolic terms) is still an open wound that hurts. Currently living in neglected and disadvantaged neighbourhoods, with high unemployment, drug problems and low education rates, only sharpens these feelings of loss, making the wounds more painful. Moreover, recurrent references to ongoing assaults on Palestinians, especially in Gaza or the Jenin camp in 2003, suggest that these women see the initial Israeli assault in 1948 as one that continues to this day.

## 1948

### Home as a target for attack

When discussing the Israeli attacks on villages and cities in 1948, the interviewees described home as a target with permeable walls. Intended to make the residents flee, these attacks on local homes are recalled by Hanieh in vivid terms:

> By God, did they hit! By my life, they bombed the house above, the house of my parents, up in the market. This was the first bombing of the market, by God… I saw it with my own eyes, I was there, my neighbourhood is up the hill, the neighbourhood of Abu Shanb. I came downhill, and the plane dropped bombs in the direction of my mother's home. I came down running. I said,

'That's it, the house is gone, that is, my parents' home'… A bomb comes down, hits the street and tears down the entire street, and left its parts piled one on top of the other. I came down running. There are planes. We were expelled, didn't see any Jews. I saw the plane dropping a bomb on the mother of my sister-in-law and hit her… I came down to see my mother. It was dark at the time of the great bombing… I said, 'My mother is gone and our home is gone'. I came down running…

In the second bombing, my sister-in-law, whose mother died in the first bombing, and her aunt, sister and niece died in the second bombing; this sister-in-law was wounded, it hit her, and so she went to get first aid… Her father's home is gone, all the homes are finished [bombed out, destroyed]. They brought her to me, the house where I was. I lived in one room, and there was another big room. They said, 'That's where we want to put her, in the big room.' I told them, 'No, bring her to me, to the door that's close to my room', and they put here there. She got a new life. I tell them, 'Bring her to my room.' They would have sent her to the other room… [The next morning] the bed was twisted like that … and the wall collapsed…

As people say, they expelled us with bombings, by God, we didn't see any Jews… After the house was bombed, we escaped into the vineyards, we sat under the trees… By God, a week passed and airplanes flew around… They wanted to terrify us. We went on straight to Gaza. No one stayed in al-Majdal except for several old men. When they told the residents of al-Majdal [who hid in the vineyards], 'Return to your houses', I came back with my husband and daughter… We found al-Majdal empty. Whatever you want you can take. The houses were empty.

As Hanieh's account indicates, private homes were deliberately attacked in the 'war' of 1948. Other women from al-Majdal and Isdud told similar stories, reinforcing the claims that the overall objective of the bombing raids was to force people to leave these cities. This contradicts the received wisdom of Zionist narratives which assert that Palestinians left of their own free will or were encouraged by the Arab Liberation Army to leave. However, as the interviewees witnessed, many Palestinians were forced to flee because their homes were directly attacked by Jewish Zionist Brigades.

Unlike the experiences in many other cities and villages, the residents of Lyd resisted these attacks, according to the women I interviewed who were originally from this city. With pride, they explained how the local Palestinian population fought against the Israeli invasion – albeit unsuccessfully in the end. Consequently, as the interviewees suggest, Lyd has been subjected to severe hostility and revenge from the State of Israel, starting in 1948 and continuing to this day, as is indicated by the almost total absence now of any pre-1948 buildings and homes in the city.[9]

As described by the women I interviewed, their concept of home is the mirror opposite of the Zionist story, which is about reclaiming a Jewish homeland. In contrast, Palestinian women from Lyd and Ramleh depict how they watched as their homes came under attack, were looted and penetrated, as well as literally transformed – often into piles of rubble.

## Looting homes in broad daylight

The women I interviewed described the chaos in the streets after Palestinian residents had been expelled from Lyd and Ramleh, – dead bodies lying around, animals roaming free, shop doors wide open after they had been robbed, and the looting of private homes in broad daylight. Um Omar, who came from a relatively privileged family background, recalls the plunder of her parents' house with obvious distress:

> One feels so sad for it! So sad! We did not have a *kawashin*[10] when they [Palestinians] migrated. They [Jews] stole our home and took our heart blood, and we are keeping silent. They [Jews] came in and looted it all. They did not leave anything. We were standing and watching. They did not leave a *kawashin* or anything… I am telling you, I swear to God that they [Jews] loaded all of our goods while we were watching – our velvet sofas, the carpets. What can I tell you? What can I tell you? …When they migrated, the Jews came in and brought cars, I am telling you [loaded from our home], cars full of all of Rubin's goods and commodities.
>
> The [festival] of Prophet Rubin was taking place. It was the season for two months. They [local merchants and festival

> participants] were opening shops and playing games and all of that for the kids. Toy cars and balloons and all. They loaded Rubin's goods into trucks in front of our eyes. We were standing there and watching… They brought trucks and loaded it all. Goods, I am telling you, a full truck. And the sofas and the things and the carpets, whatever you want.
>
> This El-Habash wife was telling me, 'Poor one, go and tell them this is yours!' I said, 'They will shoot me. What can I do?' We ate it.[11] My father did not stay and we had no money and no property. The house is gone and the goods are gone too… When people migrated, [Jews] came in and plundered our house. Didn't leave the *kushan* and didn't leave anything.

Many of the women I interviewed lamented the loss of their homes. They had no option but to stand by helplessly and watch in terrified silence as the blatant theft took place before them. As Um Omar observes, the Israelis even took the *kawashin* so that it would be impossible for Palestinians to prove ownership of their homes and other property. Consequently, these witnesses became dispossessed and homeless people in their own home. And it happened right before their eyes.

Although she describes her private experience, Um Omar's consistent use of the plural pronouns 'us' and 'we' simultaneously expresses a collective dimension to this shared experience. The loss of the private home where Um Omar and her family lived corresponds exactly to the loss of cities and the loss of their whole land, Palestine, which were stolen from Palestinians in broad daylight. The helplessness and dispersal of her family – her father was killed; her mother and older brother ended up in Ramallah – are parallel to the collective Palestinian experience.

## Home as burial site

When the collective home comes under attack, as in the city of Lyd, the private home consequently functions as burial site. Raiefeh's story bears this out:

> He was with us, getting first aid, when the Jews entered. [It was initially unclear whom she was talking about.] We forgot the

> stuffed zucchini, cooking in a pot on the fire, so we sneaked home and brought it with us. They [local Palestinians] told him that they [Israeli Army] took all the people to the mosque, [and] we all stayed in that one, the Protestants' one, the Protestants' [the building that was used as a hospital during the war in Lyd]. They came and told him, 'Your sister has died at home', and my mother feared for him [going alone], so she said to my 15-year-old brother, 'Go with him.' He went with him and they buried her, *ya haram* [poor one] in the home… After they buried her, they were prohibited by the Jews to come back [to the Protestant hospital], so they went with the rest of the expelled.

The mysterious 'he' in Raiefeh's story is George Habash, the founder and former leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). George Habash's sister, Fotin Niqolla, known by her nick name el-Habasheh,[12] died during the Israeli attack on Lyd. At first, Raiefeh did not want to say his name. When I asked her who 'he' was, she told me that the woman was a sister of George Habash, and that they were family relatives. As to my question about why she did not want to mention his name, she simply replied, 'Because of what he did to the Jews.'

Being a Palestinian and relative of George Habash, on the one hand, and a citizen of the State of Israel, on the other, situates Raiefeh in a position defined by perpetual silence and threat. She is aware of her position and thus hides her familial relation to George Habash in order to protect family members from any harm, in spite of the many years that have passed. Such a familial connection may be interpreted by the Israeli authorities as a connection with the enemy.

One way to interpret Raiefeh's story about this home as a burial place is that the home becomes a site of memory and bereavement, but also a sacred place. Recall the term *sakneh*, which means the place where people lived and expected to die. The sacred nature of the home is therefore analogous to the view of the land of Palestine as sacred. Modern national discourse constitutes the national home as the land where the nation's best sons are buried. But in this case, it is not the militant sons and warriors who are buried at home, but an ill

woman who symbolizes the human character of Palestinians' right to their own homeland. Moreover, this is not only part of constituting a modern national home, but also refers to a community who lived and desired to die at home, because 'we were here', as all of the women stated in the opening remarks of their life stories.

## No one believed this would happen to us

When they described the Israeli invasion of Lyd and Ramleh and the experiences of losing their homes in 1948, all of the women I interviewed expressed surprise and devastation, in either direct or indirect ways. Utterances of wonder and dismay, such as 'Didn't you hear what happened to us in 1948?', 'Don't you know what happened to us?', 'It's unbelievable what happened to us in 1948!', and so on, indicate the extent and severity of the ongoing trauma these women express in losing both their private and collective home. Such feelings were reinforced by many other similar phrases, such as 'We didn't believe that this could happen' or 'Whoever tells you that we considered the possibility that this could happen to us is lying, don't believe them.' These phrases express an unadulterated belief on the part of these women that they did not anticipate losing their homes.

This disbelief is also evident in their stories about their parents and other relatives, who hid money, gold and precious belongings in different places in and around their homes, thinking that these valuables would be safe there. For instance, in Um Mhimad's life story, she explained how her mother dug a hole in the ground under the jasmine tree outside the door to the family home and hid her gold and jewellery there. Um Fathi elaborates a similar experience:

> My father – I don't remember if it was at the end or in the middle of 1948, because we migrated that year – [he] built a house on his land, where Al-Dejani is, a little bit further, in our orchard in Yaffa. He built a big home in which we hadn't lived even a year. I don't remember why we migrated from there. A new house, new everything… And we left it. We left all the furniture inside it. We believed that it was going to be for a month, two or three months

> or less, and then we would come back. My brother, who was 22 or 23 years old, was going to be married, and he furnished his own house, perfect with everything… Didn't take anything with him, nothing… Locked the house, with all the furniture and left. That's our story… My father's orchard was there… Now when I pass by Holon, I try to guess where our land was – here or there? Every time I pass [Holon], I become emotionally troubled. I was 12 years old and I knew that our land was raped, taken from us with no compensation. All we got is the scattering and exile. That's what happened to my father's house.

Locking up their homes and keeping the keys nurtured the hope for many Palestinians that they would eventually return, which is a dominant theme in Palestinian history. As expressed in Um Fathi's story, the lost homes of those who remained in Israel are nearby and ever present, still causing pain in their daily lives. Like Um Fathi, many other women I interviewed said that they would hide their eyes or turn their heads in the opposite direction when they approached their lost homes or lost land. Um Nasri, for example, expresses this most poignantly: 'Believe me, when I go in the direction of our house, I want to fall to the ground and faint, because we lost it… Believe me, we've lost it all. I'm bewailing this house.'

In addition to their words, the interviewees' behaviour reinforced the idea that they did not believe their private homes were in danger and would be lost. On the contrary, they perceived their homes as safe places, not only for themselves but for everything necessary to their lives, including household possessions. Portraying the home as a safe place for her father's merchandise even in the midst of an Israeli attack, Um Omar say, 'There were thefts, [so] he [her father] was afraid and moved all of his merchandise. It was the Rubin season. He was afraid to lose it [his merchandise] and moved it into our home.'[13]

Such testimonies indicate that Palestinians perceived the 'war' in 1948 as only a temporary event. As Um Omar indicates, some Palestinians even continued to act as if their homes remained safe places, despite Israeli attacks and widespread looting. They were

confident that they would be able to return to their homes when the 'war' was over. It never occurred to them, on either a personal or a collective level, that they would permanently lose their homes and their land.

### They didn't allow us to return to our homes

Regardless of whether they could prove ownership or not, Palestinians living in Lyd and Ramleh were prohibited from returning to their homes. There are several related reasons for this, all of which demonstrate the complex mechanisms used by the State of Israel in its objective to achieve the Zionization of territory.

First, many family homes had been destroyed and rendered uninhabitable or beyond repair, as the interview material in the foregoing discussion has indicated. Second, those few homes that did remain standing were taken over by Jewish or other Palestinian families, with the former owners prevented from returning. Third (and most salient to this segment of discussion), bureaucratic rules and regulations pertaining to the sale of houses and property in the newly established State of Israel made it virtually impossible for Palestinians to prove legal ownership, a situation that continues to this day. In many such cases, those homes were taken over by Amidar, either to be rented to other families or to be demolished.[14]

In fact, most of the original homes in Lyd and Ramleh were destroyed in 1948 or shortly thereafter. It comes as no surprise, then, that almost all of the interviewees had a story of destruction to tell – either the demolition of their own family home or those of relatives. Recalling Salma's story of the earthquake in 1927, when families with the resources to do so built new homes outside the old city, this meant that many of these homes were still relatively new in 1948. Salma elaborates:

> They didn't allow us to come back to our homes. We lived in the house of other Arabs, and Jews took our house. [Later] they destroyed it… I don't understand why they destroyed the houses! They were new and in good condition… They [Israelis] left us nothing in the house near the mosque. No one came back home.

> To this day, there is a big stone [from the house] on the ground lying in that place, our house, in here next to el-Hamam well. They destroyed it and buried the stones in the well. Our house, the Jews took it. Until this day, we did not go back to it. They destroyed it.

Um Usif recounts a similar experience: 'We didn't return to our house… Amidar took it. We used to live far away from the house we lived in before. It's on Rehovot Road, in the city of Ramleh. But they destroyed it, by God; it was new and they destroyed it.' Speaking of the Israeli government authorities, Um Ali also says that they 'destroyed the houses and paved a highway; what I can tell you, they destroyed our house. I sold my jewellery and everything I had, and sold it for the sake of the house. Also the land, a dunum and a half of land.[15] Look how many buildings we could raise there.'

When they finally were able to return to Lyd and Ramleh, many of the women I interviewed explained that they became tenants in other Arab Palestinian homes in the old city. With their original home taken over by Amidar, Um Usif explains that she and her family had to move to another house: 'Who knows what will happen in the world? … We have lived in this house since the Jews entered here. We have stayed in this house since 1948, gave birth to our children here.' In her comments above, Salma also says that 'we lived in the house of other Arabs' because 'Jews took our house'.

In a few rare cases, they also described having to rent their own home from Amidar, the government-run public housing authority, which took possession of their houses after the State of Israel had been established. For example, Alice tells the story of fleeing her family home with her parents and living in Jordan for a couple of years. According to her testimony, she returned to Ramleh to rejoin her husband after he had been released from prison in 1950. Her parents remained in Jordan. As Alice recalls, 'Haleh, my baby, was a year and four months old. I went back and lived in my parents' home, where I grew up. I paid rent.' When asked why she paid rent for her parents' home, Alice replies, 'The government took it… After

we migrated, Amidar took the home… And we had to pay rent.' Throughout this part of the interview, Alice expressed a clear sense of absurdity regarding this situation.

This sense of absurdity, combined with an even greater degree of frustration and loss, is reflected in the primary reason that interviewees gave for being prevented from returning to their homes: lack of a *kushan* (or *kawashin*). Even when families originally had such a document entitling them to their homes and possessions, these were stolen, as Um Omar indicates: 'When people migrated, [the Jews] came in and plundered our house, didn't leave the *kawashin*. They didn't leave anything.'

The personal experiences of these women illuminate effectively the paradoxes created by the new legal regulations governing real-estate transactions that came into force with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. These laws are in stark contrast to former customs related to the transfer of houses and property in Palestinian communities. As Um Usif explains in relation to her uncle's attempt to prove ownership of their former family home, which was taken by Amidar: 'in the past people were ignorant. Let's say, you sold to me and I bought from you. That's it. We write on some paper, or don't even write anything, and that's it. It's yours, people trusted you. I bought and you sold it.'

Here, Um Nasri describes the old conventions for buying a house, as opposed to the modern bureaucratic rules regulating such transactions. The latter are mechanisms of deprivation used by the State of Israel that aim to legitimize the dispossession of local Palestinian residents from their property. Um Ali explains this Zionist pretext in great detail, beginning with her efforts to secure some form of legal recognition of ownership:

> Um Hasan Al-Saadi was his [the previous owner's] daughter. We took her to the lawyer to sign, and she wrote that we bought from her father… We took her to sign, before she died. She witnessed in court that we bought the house and the land from her father, Saber Salim Al-Saadi, and it didn't work. They wanted a *kushan*.

When asked to confirm that she has a written note that was legally verified in court, Um Nasri replies:

> It says in the note that we bought the house, but there is no *kushan* that was signed. They want a signature. I'm telling you how simple the Arabs are. I even cried, I told him, 'I sold my jewellery and sold myself… [silence and doesn't finish] for this land, and it's gone.' But we aren't smart either. We didn't get a signature when we bought from him, from Salim Al-Saadi. I had a pair of Mabarim.[16] I sold them and bought the land [on which the house stood]… [But] there was no *kushan* for the house. We lost a dunum and a half of land… They said I have no *kushan*. It's lost. We've hired many lawyers who say, 'Not enough, *kushan* is needed.'

Um Nasri continued talking about her lost home in different contexts, comparing the ways in which she perceives Palestinian Arabs and Jews:

> You think if the Arabs remained here, would you see buildings like these? The Arabs are poor. The Jews have got cleverness, administration. A Jew is more worldly wise, more experienced than the Arabs. We say that the Arabs are good but the Jews are smarter than we are… Before he [a Jew] buys, he asks for a receipt or a note. The Arabs don't. Shake hands and that's it, *mabruk* [congratulations]. Could something like this happen among the Jews shaking hands and saying *mabruk*? Could we think that the Jews will come and our house would be gone?!
>
> Would we say to them [the former owners of the land], 'Give us a note or a signature'? No, when we sell the whole vineyard, we will give you a note.[17] The vineyard was only starting to be sold. We were the first who bought part of it. We waited until the whole of it had to be sold before we could get a *kushan*. The home on a dumun and a half of land was gone, the house with the land gone. If the house was mine [slaps one hand on the other, a gesture which is a cultural expression of sorrow and loss], all my children would build there… When I hired a lawyer, he said, 'What will you complain about? Where is your paperwork?' What can you say to [the judge]? That we shook hands and said *mabruk*?

In Um Nasri's story of buying and losing the house, she points to two different worlds. On the one hand, there is the bureaucratic world of the state, requiring official paperwork and legal proof of sale. On the other hand, there is the world of local Palestinian customs (in the days of the Arabs), when words, a handshake or a small piece of paper were enough to certify ownership in the sale of land or a house. The first world is represented by the Jew, an expert on the ins and outs of bureaucracy and law, adept at using the rules of the modern world to dispossess the Palestinians of their property, including homes. The second world is represented by the simple and naive Palestinian, accustomed to unmediated trading agreements based on trust; rules based on familiar social codes that were acknowledged and respected by the whole community.

As with many others, Um Nasri's testimony also underpins the veracity of statements related to the prevailing sense of disbelief among this population – that they did not think it possible, much less expect, that they would be driven out of their homes and off their land in 1948. Nor did they subsequently anticipate having to prove ownership within a new legal system that refused to acknowledge Palestinian customs related to property transactions. As a result, the State of Israel could legitimize the confiscation of homes and land (part and parcel of the Zionization of territory), leaving so many Palestinians dispossessed.

In the following comments, Um Nasri continues to describe in detail the use of bureaucratic mechanisms as a tool of dispossession and oppression on the part of the State of Israel. Here, however, she puts this in a contemporary context. Speaking about her 'new' house in Ramleh, which was empty when she took it over in 1948 and where she and her family have lived ever since, Um Nasri says:

> This house, I want to buy it. If I die tomorrow, Amidar will take it away. I want to buy it and give it to my children. I am asking for this house. They send me back and forth for all sorts of different documents, always saying, 'Tomorrow'. They came and measured and this and that, all right, we will come to tell you. How much money do you want for it? Yes, we will give you an answer.

> Until today they are giving me an answer… That is how slow the government is, and it's unbelievable. I want to buy it today and not tomorrow…
>
> My sister's son, my daughter's husband, every two days he goes to Amidar, asks them, 'What have you done?' Today, tomorrow, postponed… If they want a penny from you, they want you to pay it immediately. If you want something from them, they neglect it. My children tell me, 'Mother, come live with us.' I say to them, 'The houses are yours, and I will come to you as a visitor, but not to live with anyone.' My son, Yusef, the one you saw, told me, 'Mother, I have a room for you upstairs.' He built it, his house is big. I told him, 'No, son, God be with you, I will come to visit, but I won't sleep at your place.'

Despite bureaucratic obstructions and procrastination on the part of Amidar, Um Nasri is determined to purchase the house in order to make her family life better. She wants to buy this particular house for several reasons. First, it reminds her of her husband and the place where she raised her children. Second, although she is welcome to do so, she is not prepared to live in any of her children's homes because she wants to preserve her independence. And, finally, she wants to bequeath it to her children. Put in a historical context that also reflects contemporary political realities, Um Nasri's persistence in trying to buy the house also has a symbolic value: she feels a sense of entitlement to own a home in her city, Ramleh, even though the local authority is yet again depriving her of this right.

Taken in combination, these excerpts from Um Nasri's life story offer ample evidence of her capacity for agency, in particular as this is manifest in her active role in building and rebuilding her home and family life. For example, in a recollection of her conversation with Salim Al-Saadi, from whom she bought the land upon which her first house was built, Um Nasri says, 'and when I was going to build I told him, 'I have a pair Haiaia.'[18] My husband said, 'We've stripped you of your gold'. I said, 'We want to have a life.' The house near the railroad where we used to live has only two rooms; it's not enough for our children.'

Having twice sold her own gold – first to buy the land, then to build the house – Um Nasri exhibits an extraordinary commitment to improving her family life. This is reinforced by the fact that gold has a special significance for women in Palestinian society. It is regarded as a woman's private property and is customarily not shared with her husband for any joint purpose. Against tradition, Um Nasri freely decided to sell her gold. Her current determination to buy her 'new' home in Ramleh is entirely consistent with her actions many years ago.

In Lyd and Ramleh, those Palestinians who did not leave, along with those who eventually returned, were never again permitted to live in their original family homes. Instead, they lived in other Arab homes, which they were forced to rent from Amidar. For those original Palestinian residents who remained or returned to these cities, their lost homes were there before their eyes. This fact only exacerbated their sense of pain and suffering.

## After 1948: ongoing struggles for entitlement

### Building a new home in the ghetto

Whether Palestinian owners had a *kushan* or not, their homes were lost, destroyed or transformed beyond recognition. Immediately after the events of 1948, all of the Palestinian citizens remaining in Lyd and Ramleh, as well as incoming refugees from surrounding villages, were moved into the old city centres, which became segregated ghettos (Yacobi 2003, 2004; Nuriely, 2005). Prevented from returning to their original homes, they became displaced within their own cities. If they had not been destroyed, their homes became state property managed by Amidar. Women from villages, who had also lost their homes, moved to Lyd and Ramleh, thereby becoming displaced within their own homeland. Having been given no option by the State of Israel, Palestinian residents were concentrated in the old quarters of both cities. Here, in these ghettos, displaced Palestinian women played a crucial role in rebuilding their homes, family lives

and communities anew out of the ruins, even as they witnessed the ongoing destruction of their former homes.

Walking the streets of Ramleh and Lyd, it is impossible not to notice the partial ruins and half-demolished Arab houses. A common answer to my enquiries about this was that during the 1950s and 1960s neighbouring Jewish families had left and moved into the *shikunim*, the Hebrew term for public housing. Once these families had left, Amidar demolished their part of the building, while Palestinian families continued to reside in another part of the same home. From the testimonies of the women I interviewed, Palestinian homes of 1948 in both cities provided new housing for immigrant Jews and displaced Palestinians. Haim Yacobi (2003) argues that the Israeli state initiated a plan of rapidly redesigning its territorial spaces. At the heart of this endeavour lay one main principle: turning Arab spaces into Jewish spaces (Yacobi, 2003). Amidar's and the local municipality's attitude is part of the Israeli strategy to purge its territories of its Arab past and to maintain a strict separation between Jews (particularly Jews who emigrated from Arab countries) and Arabs (Yacobi 2003; Nuriely, 2005).

The departure of Jewish families from the old cities was accompanied by the destruction of Arab homes, the stones from which were often thrown into wells, As Salma explains in great detail:

> Before I migrated, we lived here. 'Here' was the well of el-Hamam in Lyd. The Jews filled it up [*ttamooh*]. There was another well, called el-Wasata, in the middle of the town that the Jews also filled up. Two wells that the Jews filled up. It is where the mosque is. They did not leave the old wells… They were ruining the old houses…which means the entire old city. They also ruined the wells. They ruined them and buried the wells. When they ruined the old city, they threw the stones of the homes into the wells. They ruined the old city… They blocked all the wells with the stones from the houses. They were digging, ruining the house and then they were digging with a tractor, and add, add, add, until they blocked the wells completely.
>
> The well el-Hamam was at the entrance of our house. This well had a motor to pump drinking water [for] the people and irrigate.

> El-Hamam was irrigating the whole town. There were many wells; not only these in the old city, but many, many wells. I don't know their names… They blocked them with the ruins [of houses]; with the ruins they blocked all of them.

This description of filling the wells with stones from destroyed homes is potent with concrete and symbolic meaning. On the one hand, the destruction of the old Arab homes signifies the destruction of the safety and security that those homes once provided to the Palestinian community. On the other hand, burying the stones of these homes in the source of life, the water wells, symbolizes the intention to destroy the life of the Palestinian population.

The wells dried up, the homes were destroyed and the Palestinian population was forced into a territory known as 'the old city' before 1948 and 'the ghetto' after 1948. During the interview process, for example, I asked Um Nasri's granddaughter to give me directions to her grandmother's home. I was told that she lives in the ghetto. Later, as the women told their life stories, I repeatedly heard that 'All the Arabs lived in the ghetto' or 'To this day, they call this a ghetto.' A commonplace name for these parts of Lyd and Ramleh, the word 'ghetto' was sometimes spoken in an everyday manner, but at others it became a protest. With obvious difficulty, and sometimes unable to complete some of her sentences related to the takeover of Arab homes by Jews, Um Omar explains:

> All the Arabs were expelled… Expelled from their homes, the church and the mosques. Those who remained were allowed to live in a ghetto. We were surrounded, the army took our homes and we were in a closed ghetto. No one went out to work and the army in the… [unfinished sentence] The Jews put up a wire and we sat [*a'adna*] there. The old city was deserted, but people lived in it at the beginning [until 1948]. When they [the original residents] went out, I lived there. Yes, we stayed there for a while, maybe two or three months, something like that. Then you couldn't go out, and we lost… [unfinished sentence].
>
> It was called the ghetto. To this day, they call it the ghetto… All of the Arabs in Lyd were in the ghetto. They say they went to the ghetto and came from the ghetto. His address is in the ghetto…

> [Jews] ruined it because this is the old city and not… [unfinished sentence]. They built new buildings here. It was all houses and people and they forced them out and gave them… [unfinished sentence]. There were Arab homes. All of it was homes from the old city. All of it was homes and the people living there. All of the Arabs had houses on this side, and were living there. Now they ruined the [Arab] houses and put them out [the original Palestinian inhabitants] and built *shikunim* [public housing] in place of them.

Yacobi (2003) explains that the term 'ghetto' was originally used by Jews to mark out Palestinian territory in the city and simultaneously clear it of its 'primitive' Palestinian past in order to turn the space into a 'modern' Jewish city. This term also serves to define Palestinian cities as abandoned, undeveloped and uncivilized. As Um Omar did, most of the interviewees used the word *shikunim* (public housing) for the buildings that replaced the Arab houses that had been demolished in the old cities. According to Danny Rabinowitz (1997), the Hebrew term *shikunim* became a Palestinian synonym for the Jewish city and a marker of the process of turning their city into a Jewish one – that Zionization of space that underpins state housing policies. A process of effacement that has been ongoing since 1948, this means that very few Arab homes and buildings still stand to tell the story of the past in the present.

Haliemeh el Naqib expresses a sense of rebellion in using the word 'ghetto', in particular wondering how Jews could force her and her community into this way of life, given their own recent experiences in Europe: 'The old city was ruined… All the Arabs were put there and it was encircled, so that no one was able to get out… That was what they called the ghetto. You see, "ghetto" was used by the Germans. We didn't know that word before.' Interestingly, Haliemeh explains in her life story that immediately following events in 1948, she shared a living space with a Jewish family who had survived the Holocaust. This living arrangement allowed Haliemeh to draw a link between her own situation and that of European Jews, giving rise to both a deep sensitivity of the latter's experiences and a sense of protest related to her own

experience, as she indicates: 'But then they put people in the ghetto. [The Jews] say they saw much oppression from the Germans and they don't like to do injustice to anyone… But look who they put in the ghetto! The lame, the blind, the old, those who couldn't walk, the weak, people in the worst condition.'

On the one hand, Haliemeh el Naqib describes the unfamiliarity of the word 'ghetto' to Palestinians, as up until that point it had been a concept irrelevant to their lives. On the other hand, she demonstrates knowledge about this term as historically connected to Jewish life, mainly in Europe, where Jews were forced to live in congested areas, enclosed by walls and gates, separated from the rest of the city – the ghettos. She also acknowledges the suffering of Jewish communities during the Nazi regime. In short, she describes how ghettos were created for the purpose of control, isolation and humiliation. Under the Nazi regime, the ghettos were used to suppress the Jews and often functioned as part of the extermination machine. Haliemeh el Naqib's comments therefore contain a double accusation against the Jews who entered Lyd. First, she points out that since they came to the cities, Jews have been doing the same to Palestinians as the Germans did to them. Second, she says that Jews oppress the weakest part of the Palestinian population – 'the lame, the blind, the old'.

Describing daily life in the new ghetto home in more detail, Salma explains:

> There was a place that they called the ghetto. It is where the old city is. We used to call it the Eastern neighbourhood. It's next to the big mosque. There were ruined places, there were old houses. The people lived in the old houses and they [the Jews] put a wire around them. They were not allowed to go out from this area… They were not allowed to leave unless they had a permit. If they wanted to bury a dead person they needed a permit, but they were not allowed to go out from the old city… They did not dare to go out, unless they had to bury a dead person. They were not allowing them to come to this cemetery because it's far. The southern cemetery is closer to the old city, closer to the town, so they were allowing them to bury just there… And there were old men [allowed to go out to bury the dead], so it was hard for them to

> carry the corpse a long distance, so they would bury them [in the nearby cemetery].

Salma's daughter asks her mother to confirm that only older people, not young people, were permitted to leave the ghetto and Salma goes on to say:

> Yes, yes, just the old ones were allowed out. They would bury the dead person and come back. [The Jews] told them, 'An hour or two.' The police [watched over] as they buried them. And then they came home and were not allowed to go out… There was no food, nothing. Once a month they delivered a small hen… A chicken and half a kilo of meat for each one, and one kilo of sugar for a person each month… After two or three years, they [Palestinians] started to go out to buy and sell… But for three years, they did not have food. They gave them, like, a little bit of sugar, half a kilo of meat. They gave for a person a little chicken, a small chicken for each person per month, and the rest, you can eat whatever you eat… Three years after, they [Palestinians] started to buy and sell and plants and go out to the valley where we were leasing lands. If a man collected olives, they imprisoned him and hit him. They did not allow us to collect our own olives… Forbidden. There were guards for the olives. The Jews patrolled with tractors on the land. They did not allow anyone to go and come. We were only stealing, swear to God that we were stealing… [laughter] What can we do? [We were stealing] from our own olive groves. Yes, we knew every stone in our land.

The women I spoke with described their lives in the ghettos of Lyd and Ramleh in ways that indicated that conditions were strikingly similar to those in the Jewish ghettos in Europe. Life in the Palestinian ghettos involved restrictions imposed by the Israeli army – residents could not move freely; there were only limited distributions of food and other necessary supplies. Consequently, Palestinians were forced to steal and smuggle food from their own land, which had been taken over by the Israeli government after 1948. Their knowledge of the local geography – as Salma remarks, 'We knew each stone on our land' – enabled them to thrive by deceiving the Israeli soldiers. Not only did families feed themselves, but they shared their

produce with other families in need. This success in stealing from their land is ironic, given that Palestinians were forbidden access to these places from 1948 onwards and risked imprisonment and beatings if they were caught.

As exemplified in Salma's testimony, most of the interviewees described their everyday life in the ghetto in terms of its private and domestic, rather than its political and public, aspects. Salma elaborates on her new life in the ghetto:

> At first, the people were few. You could say they were like one family. They lived next to each other. For example, if a woman didn't have any relatives there, the old women used to tell her, 'You are like our daughter.' They would ask what she needed and bring it to her… In those days, people were not like nowadays. Everyone… [unfinished sentence]. We lived near the big mosque. Every time I remember this life I cry. It was very hard because I was alone there all the time. Now my daughters come to spend time with me, I forget it a little bit. But the people were good people. That is, your neighbour used to come and talk to you. Someone would come over and tell a story. There were neighbours all around me. They used to come and sit with me at night. There was no television or anything… I was alone. The old women, my neighbours, used to come over and stay with me until midnight. I used to bathe the kids, wash the laundry at night, so I could go to the fields in the morning [by military permit], and the older women used to talk to me all the time. In the old city, we were all very close to each other. The houses stood very close, like that, door to door. I used to bring vegetables with me on winter days: spinach, onion, broad beans, peas, okra, and black-eyed peas. I used to take a little of everything we planted and hand it out to my neighbours.

During the military regime, in both cities women needed military permits to go out to the fields. The military confinement ended in July 1949 (Yacobi, 2003: 77). However, the women I interviewed said they were still prohibited from going to their farms after the military restrictions on their movement had ended.

On a social level, Salma describes a loneliness felt by many of the other women in the ghettos. Family life was at the centre of women's

relationships, but after 1948 families were scattered and lost. As repeated again and again by the majority of the women I interviewed, Haliemeh sums up the devastation of Palestinian communities when she observes, 'It was rare to find a whole family.' Despite this, as Salma and others indicate, women started to reorganize their daily lives and rebuild their homes, families and the broader community anew.

In particular, inside the ghetto, Palestinian women managed to form an alternative family where women's mutual support for one another is evident. The older women in the ghetto provided Salma and other young women with solace and emotional support. In return, Salma supported them with produce that she brought from the fields. The new web of relations described here, and which involved the entire community, emerged as a result of loneliness, shattered family lives and the absence of male figures. At the time, most young men had been taken captive, hidden themselves from the Israeli authorities or become refugees. Some were also persecuted on the grounds of being communists or collaborators. The absence of men therefore allowed women living in the ghetto to arrange the division of the new space and place according to their own preferences.

Aysheh describes how she rebuilt her shattered family life:

> In the beginning, if you had two rooms in one house, they [Jewish family] would attack you and beat you and take the other room to live in. You have a room and I have a room, that's how they did it. When we came to Lyd, Nasar's family came to the house. They called us uncles and asked us to move in with them. They told us that the Jews attacked them three times. They wanted us to take the room; my five children and I would sleep in that room. We lived with them for three years… I'm telling you we were like siblings, us and them. I'm not a gossip-monger. I don't pass on information from one woman to the other. My heart is pure, thank God. My neighbours here are mostly Christian. There is a mixture here of Christians and Muslims, us and them… [unfinished sentence] I lived in Lyd with a Christian woman, my room here and her room here. In the beginning of the migration, a Christian

> woman from Nazareth, from the house of Nasar. No one would have guessed that we had different religions. People would think we were sisters. They used to ask me where my sister Rose was. Until they finally found out that we were not sisters; that I'm Muslim and she is Christian.

As space permitted, the families of the original Arab inhabitants and Palestinian refugees shared homes that had been fenced off in the centre of the old cities. The women I interviewed explained that kitchens and bathrooms were often shared by multiple families. Immigrant Jewish families, especially from other Arab countries, also moved into Arab houses in the old city that Palestinian owners had been ordered to evacuate when they were expelled from Palestine in 1948. Immigrant Jewish families lived in those same houses with these remnants of the Palestinian population. As Nuriely (2005: 19) writes, 'When [Jewish emigrants from Arab countries] arrived in Lyd, a relative helped them, and arrangements were made to place them in the ghetto.'

The term 'ghetto' is used by both the Jewish-Israeli population and the Palestinian population, but for different reasons. The Zionist narrative has its own motives for maintaining the memory of the ghettos in the minds and consciousness of both Jews and Palestinians. For Jewish Israelis, use of this term is a reminder of their history in the ghettos of Europe, when Jews were an oppressed and alienated community. This is in stark contrast to the present independence and sovereignty of Israeli Jews. From this standpoint, Palestinian ghetto residents are perceived as enemies who continually threaten their Zionist-Jewish existence in these cities. 'Ghetto' thus serves as a permanent call of alarm for Jewish Israelis, a reminder that the enemy is now within. At the same time, the memorialization of the ghettos works to remind Palestinians that they are perceived as a threat; that they are not legitimate residents in these contested places. In turn, this reminder contributes to thwarting the development of opportunities for genuine equality and peace between these communities.

Palestinian use and preservation of the term 'ghetto' represents resistance to events since 1948, the effects of which are still ongoing. Defiant use of the word 'ghetto' aims to make the claim that Jewish Israelis are now doing to Palestinians what the dark regimes in Europe did to Jews in the past. At the same time, Palestinian residents also insist on utilizing and preserving the term *sakneht el-Jamal* in Ramleh and 'the old city' in Lyd, which are names from the Arab-Palestinian period that mark the place with its past history, turning these two cities into sites of commemoration.

According to the interviewees, Palestinian and Jewish families occasionally cooperated with one another. With their shared living spaces separated only by a thin wall or a piece of cloth, there was a shared sense of misfortune that could be the subject of commiseration over a cup of coffee. More often than not, however, these Palestinian women described how the Jewish newcomers turned their homes into a battlefield. Many remarked that Jewish women would throw their possessions out in an attempt to get them to leave the house. Despite some degree of cooperation, Jewish families mostly were depicted as invaders. Stories about struggles over rooms indicate that Jewish families were seen to be part of the penetrating forces of the Israeli occupation. In other words, by taking over rooms or even whole houses and leaving Palestinians with nothing, Jews were understood to be part of the same aggressive mechanism that won the war and took over new territory in the Zionization process. The women I interviewed who had such experiences talked about their capacity to remain in a room or a house as an achievement, as was renting to another Arab family.

In order to prevent immigrant Jewish families from taking over Arab houses, local Arab families preferred to take in other Arab families who arrived as refugees, even when they were unacquainted with them. As Um Omar (Lyd) explains, 'We lived in El-Habash's house. That one, El-Habash's wife, got into the house too. It was neither our house nor theirs. There was a vacant room in their house and they took us in to live with them.'

## The home here and now: struggling for legitimacy

Our neighbourhood is embarrassed…
Our eyes watch the children looking for a
Future where 'the sky is the limit'.
Slogans covered with the dust of the ruins
But the light still did not stop burning.

Abir Zinati[19]

It is a hunting season; the game is another house
Of a dove trying to survive under the eagle's rule.
Let us try something more optimistic,
For each morning, waking up, I see some thousand policemen –
Perhaps they've come to arrest a merchant…
He's here, he's here, oh no,
They've come to destroy the house of his neighbour.

Tamer Naffar[20]

The destruction of those few Arab homes that remain from the period before 1948 is systematically taking place in Lyd and Ramleh at the present time. The Loram Company, acting as an agent of the State of Israel, is negotiating the evacuation of Arab homes in order to destroy them and build public housing instead. At the same time, Palestinian families are building new homes, many of which are known in official discourse as 'illegal homes'. These, too, are being demolished, sometimes not long after they have been completed. Adalah, the legal centre for Arab minority rights in Israel, argues that the practice of illegal building in Palestinian sectors of Lyd and Ramleh is due to the difficulty in obtaining the proper permits because of unjust land allocation and town planning practices that coincide with state policy.[21] Nadera Shalhoub Kevorkian (2007) argues that the demolition of Palestinian houses is used as a tactic by the Israeli military; it is a very powerful means of militarizing spaces and imposing spatial dominance, which also intensifies the continual policing of Palestinian spaces, thereby giving sweeping powers to the Israeli state, the military and the police, allowing them to attack without discrimination.. Perhaps less obvious, but of critical importance, is the fact that house demolitions turn the home – both materially and

symbolically – into a battlefield. Thus there are no safe havens left for Palestinian citizens.[22]

In addition to this, especially in contested cities like Lyd and Ramleh, the state fails to provide an appropriate response to existing housing needs. Among other reasons, these unfulfilled needs stem from population growth. Official statistics currently indicate that in Lyd, some 1,800 homes are under threat of demolition because they are considered illegal. The local community organization claims that 500 homes of these homes will be immediately demolished.[23] According to a report from Shatil (a non-governmental organization dedicated to fostering social justice in Israel–Palestine) that addressed housing solutions for the Palestinian residents of these two cities, 2,390 houses (comprising 60 per cent of the Arab houses in the city) are neglected, unlicensed or under threat of demolition by the authorities. Buthaina Dabita, an engineer who coordinates the 'Right to Equality in Mixed Cities', a project of Shatil, claims that 500 houses have been destroyed in these two cities during the last five years.

Unsurprisingly, then, many of the interviewees had stories about their experiences of demolition. For example, during my interview with her mother, Salma's daughter says:

> Not long ago, we had a house demolished here in Lyd. You may have heard of this; they destroyed houses… Journalists came. They destroyed the house of my nephew. It was ready to be lived in. The only thing left was for him to get married… His name is Samir and they destroyed his house. In the last two months, they have destroyed so many…

She falls silent for a while, but eventually continues:

> We are also on a conditional order. I built next to here and got a destruction order. Seven other houses here without licenses also have destruction orders like us… I built my home with bricks, but then they told me to stop, so I stopped. But they did not tell [Samir] to stop. They let him finish and all, and then they came and destroyed it…

Salma elaborates her daughter's story:

> I am telling you that even the army came. You could say they were going to war; some soldiers and police cars. You could see that there was something happening in the area… They closed the roads… They blocked it from here and from there. It looked like war… You would know that there is something going on in Lyd – that they are destroying something [laughs]. An airplane patrolled in the sky, military and police cars patrolled and they closed all roads and didn't let anybody move… They destroyed a house that belonged to the Nakib family in the beginning… [But] they rebuilt it from the skeleton of the house with help from Ta'ayush.[24]

Salma's daughter goes on to say:

> Yes, look what they've started to do. They have started to come early, before the court office is open, so you cannot bring an injunction. They came and wanted to destroy [the home], so the lawyer had a restraining order, by chance [laughs]. Now I have acourt hearing. Now we live in our home without anything. There is no floor and no plaster [on the walls]. With nothing, the human…

Salma's daughter yet again falls silent, but her mother explains the situation: 'We are hesitating to invest money and then they destroy it again. They hired a lawyer and we hope that all the best will happen. What can a man do?' As Salma's daughter points out, 'We have elections now, on the 28th of this month. There are elections to the municipality. Who knows what might happen after the elections, really?'[25] And then she laughs.

This conversation between Salma and her daughter points to two simultaneous processes that in combination put a stranglehold on the Palestinian communities in Lyd and Ramleh, forcing families to move from their homes. The first is the ongoing methodical destruction of Arab homes in the old cities, which has continued since the occupation in 1948. The second is demolition of so-called illegal houses, or those houses built without a permit.

The extent to which Palestinians build illegal homes reflects a lack of adequate available housing – the failure of the municipal government to fulfil Palestinian needs through legal channels. Moreover,

the Israeli authority creates ongoing obstacles to granting permits for legal houses. But building a house is an existential need. To build a house in occupied territory creates even more multiple layers of meaning. In the face of the ongoing transformation of these two cities since 1948, for example, the obstinate insistence of Palestinians on building their own homes, regardless of whether they have legal permits or not, is an act of resistance. Taking risks to build illegal homes is likewise a statement about the legitimate entitlement of Palestinian residents to live in these two cities.

There has always been a clear Israeli consensus that the state is facing constant security threats and 'demographic threats' as a Jewish state. From such a perspective, the demolition of illegal buildings can be interpreted as part of an Israeli state policy designed to combat the demographic threat posed by a growing Palestinian population in the cities. It aims to forcibly expel Palestinians to nearby Arab villages in order to secure an exclusive Jewish majority, hegemony and domination in both Lyd and Ramleh in accord with the Zionist state agenda. By issuing demolition orders and pulling down illegal homes, the municipal government also helps incite the Jewish community against the Palestinian community by portraying the latter as criminals and violators of the law.

A news article of 13 January 2006 in *Ha'aretz* illustrates these points. Written by Daniel Ben-Simon and Alex Libak, the text reads: 'There is almost no other Jewish city that experienced so much sorrow and despair as Lydd in the recent years. A poor city in the center of the country, with a complex demographic make-up… 27% of its residents are Arabs.' Despite the fact that more than a quarter of the population of Lyd is Palestinian, these journalists refer to the city as a 'Jewish city'. Given ongoing violent conflict, their words further imply that this 'Jewish city' experiences pain and suffering because of its Palestinian residents. Palestinians living in Lyd are not seen as the victims of discrimination and racism. Rather, they are perceived as a problem in relation to the 'Jewishness' of the city.

Later in the same news article, the journalists report that when Lyd's mayor, Benny Regev,[26] received Eli Yishav, head of the Shas

party, he remarked: 'A week ago, demolition orders were carried out in the city on three illegal buildings, and the angry owners of the destroyed houses promised the mayor that they would end his life in the same way as the buildings did. Who knows whether they will carry out their threat or not?' Where Mayor Regev portrays himself as a law-abiding leader, in contrast he suggests that the Palestinian owners of the demolished houses are potential criminals.

The same article goes on to claim,

> As in Akko, here too an apprehension is felt about losing the Jewish majority. This apprehension is talked about openly, as if it were an open scar. If it wasn't for the new immigrants that streamed into the city in the last two decades, it is not certain whether the Jews would succeed in preserving the existing power relations of two-thirds as opposed to one-third Arabs.

And the mayor is quoted again as saying,

> I am trying to preserve the present situation, but if there is no extensive government action, I am not expecting this city will last more than 10 years before we lose it to the Arabs. And I assure you that if this city falls, all the surrounding settlements will fall too. (Ben-Simon and Libak, 2006)

The mayor of Ramleh, Yoel Lavie, also expressed his determination to carry on with demolitions, stating that he did it in the past, is doing it in the present and will do it in the future. Mayor Lavie goes on to assert: 'I have completed military service, and such events do not alarm me… I have already made contact this evening with the district police chief that I intend to carry out demolitions of illegal houses this week, to prove my determination' (Singer, 2004).

Later, in November 2006, Mayor Lavie expressed similar contempt for the Palestinian residents of Ramleh. Responding to a reporter's question about a Palestinian request to change Jewish street names in their neighbourhood to Arab street names, Mayor Lavie remarked of the Palestinian residents in Ramleh: 'If they don't like it, they should go and live in Jaljulia [an Arab village], which has an Arab name. What happened? What? Why should I change the name, because

Jamal [an Arab name] wants to change the name? He should change his Allah [God].'[27]

Clearly, then, the mayors of both Lyd and Ramleh view each Palestinian house as a security threat not only to the Jewish residents of their cities, but also to the surrounding countryside and, in the final analysis, to the whole country. In short, Palestinians are perceived as a security threat to the very Jewishness of the State of Israel. Hence the aggressive approach to demolishing Arab homes.

The struggle of Haliemeh el Naqib to establish a legitimate home in Lyd on land that she inherited from her father – her persistence in building this house, the emotional and financial costs of this experience, as well as her efforts to resolve the issue in court – is characteristic of the stories of so many Palestinians who live in Lyd and Ramleh. Therefore it is worth repeating this story here, at length. Haliemeh begins:

> This house, I have built it on land I inherited from my father… I took my share of my father's land. My husband finished a job and received his dismissal compensation. We were also lucky to get several pennies for the land of his father. So we built this house. A simple one, not something fancy, but I'm happy with this house. It's comfortable, even though I have court [hearings]. The day before yesterday I was in court.

When asked why she was in court, Haliemeh's reply is brief: 'The house, they don't want us to have built it.' Asked to continue with her story, Haliemeh explains in great detail:

> They don't want that we build for ourselves here. They summoned me to court because there is no licence. I am not lying to you. We don't have a licence. We came and built, but there was no licence. We are not the only ones without a licence. It's this way in almost all of Lyd. Someone builds on the land of the [Land] Authority; someone builds on his own land. We still want the municipality to give us a licence.
>
> They came from the municipality and measured the house and I paid 4,000 shekels of taxes on the house here, but I saw that it did no good. Then I paid 2,000 again, to no effect. No one collects the garbage, and they don't give me electricity.

I went to the judge without a lawyer. I wanted her to understand from me directly. I wanted to talk from my head to her head. She said to me, 'Did you build?' I said to her, 'Yes, I did.' She asked, 'Why did you build?' I told her, 'I don't have a house, what can I do, stay in the street? And besides, this is my land and the land of my father and the land of my grandfather, so I built a house and I live in it.' And she tells me, 'You know you are not permitted to.' I said to her, 'It's not permitted to someone who builds on the Authority's land, the government's land, but I [built] on my own land.' And then she says to me, 'Who told you it is your land?' I said, 'We have a Turkish *kushan*, an English *kushan* and an Israeli *kushan*.'

And someone from the municipality stood up and said to her, 'She is lying, this land belongs to the railroad, not to them.' Then I told her, 'The British came, it is true that they received the land, built the railroad from here, from the city down, and divided our land, the land of Al-Nakib, into two parts. They took land for the railroad from our land and the land of my uncle. My uncle's house is on the western side and ours is on the eastern side and the road divided us, in the year [1918] in June.'

She clicked-clicked in the computer and she tells me, 'You are right; who told you that?' I said, 'My father used to tell us, and then Israel came and took more of our land for the railroad; now there are two lines, one up and one down.' And that one [from the municipality] says to her, 'This one is a liar, this land belongs to the railroad and they stole it.' The judge told him, 'You are a liar, and she is right.'

This was the first judge in the first hearing, but she [fined] me 48,000 shekels. We paid 10,000 in one fell swoop and took care of it. Now I'm paying 1,000 shekels every month…

I had another court [hearing]. In the second one, what does she say to me? She says, 'Why didn't you destroy the house? There is a demolition order on the house.' I told her, 'How can I destroy it if I live in it? Where will I go when I destroy it?' She says to me, 'Now, now I'm putting you in jail.' I'm telling her, 'What will you put me in jail for? I haven't done anything that was wrong, and you will jail me!' … I said to the judge, 'I was born here in the vineyard, I came and built where I was born… My father built here and my mother gave birth to all of us here… We have all grown up in this place and I love to return to where I was born.'

> She told me, 'You are saying that you are 70 years old.' I said, 'I am 70 years old and I was born here.'
>
> They destroyed [my father's home]. I'm telling you, destroyed it. It was a house of more than eight rooms. My brother Ahmad was married and had a room; he was married before 1948. My father had a room and we little ones had a room. In those times, we used to store wheat and sesame and olives in the house. We had a storeroom maybe as large as this living room, and it had anything you can think of… We lived from the work of our hands.

When Haliemeh took me out to show me the location of her father's home, she pointed to the nearby Jewish neighbourhood, Navie Aviv, and said, 'You see, this colony [*Musta'amara*] was built on el Naqib land.' Despite having a *kushan*, she still could not get a legal permit to build a house on the land that she inherited from her father. So she wonders, 'Where will I go?'

Haliemeh wanted to talk to the judge because she was a woman. Haliemeh thought that she might be more sensitive and understand her woman-to-woman. However, as Haliemeh indicates, this was not the case. As Haliemeh's testimony and the testimonies of the other interviewees suggest, it does not matter if they have a *kushan* or not because their very existence in Lyd and Ramleh is contested by the Jewish authorities, as this is represented in the form of the municipality and Israeli laws.

Like many of the other women I interviewed, Haliemeh told her story in her house and wanted to make sure that everything is recorded. She wanted to have this conversation documented for successive generations. Although she is aware of the importance of her personal story, she is only able to tell it in her own home – a private story that remains in a private space. Presenting her story here therefore begins to break down those barriers between the private and the public.

Sociologist Halim Barakat (1993) claims that Palestinians' sense of belonging is rooted in the home and the family, as much as it is rooted in the land; the home and the land are markers of identity that one is forbidden to abandon. The interviews with these women

demonstrate how deeply they are rooted in their land and family life, highlighting a strong sense of belonging. And it is a deep longing full of sorrow and grief: for these are stories of dispossession and displacement that mirror broader Palestinian experience. As Fatmeh Abed el Hadi poignantly remarks, 'If I had the wisdom I have today, I would never have left my home, even if I was told it is only for a few days. I would not have left the home. Today, I would prefer to die in my home than to leave it.'

## Conclusion

The word 'home' carries multiple connotations in the Palestinian context. It is elusive and dynamic, even mobile; nostalgic in its past, contested in the present. Home has both personal and collective meanings – it is at once a private and a public political space. It is a place of safety and danger; a place of life and death. Home is concrete and physical, but always imagined and deeply symbolic: a stone building or a pile of rubble. And it is a thoroughly gendered space, producing and reproducing changing versions of femininity and masculinity. Perhaps, above all, this is an idea and a lived reality of home that is punctuated by time: the year 1948.

As the interviews demonstrate, the Palestinian women narrate a complex idea of home. This is a sense of home and belonging that shifts through various contexts and different historical periods: the days of the Arabs, the Nakba and life since then. These perceptions of home reflect the situated status of these women, who are positioned in a liminal place. They are citizens in a state that took their homes as a consequence of its own establishment. They are women who describe themselves in an ambivalent position within their own Palestinian nationalist narrative, an overwhelmingly masculine construct that fails to acknowledge their valuable contribution to sustaining this nation over time. They are inside their own homes, but outsiders inside their homeland.

The women I interviewed are all now confined to the old city centres in Lyd and Ramleh, where they have built new homes and

raised their children in the absence of men, who were persecuted by the Israeli forces, taken captive or became refugees. Among these ghettoized ruins, these women built houses for themselves and restored their families and communities. Here, in their own homes, these women tell the silenced story of the events of 1948, keeping these experiences alive for the generations to come. Thus the home is a place that is both private and public, in which women take the principal role. This is the private home as a political space: a site of the remembered past, a site of commemoration; a site of ongoing controversy.

In the face of Zionist denials of responsibility for what happened to Palestinians in 1948, these women continue to hold the State of Israel to account and seek recognition for their experiences. They challenge the methodical erasure of their history and memory as the State of Israel literally bulldozes these into oblivion with its continued policies of demolishing Arab homes. They also challenge Zionist delegitimization of their homeland, constituting a home at home, by insisting on their rights of entitlement to land, both on an individual basis and at the collective level.

In all of this, the personal life stories of these women acquire additional layers of meaning in relation to the discourses of feminism, human rights, citizenship and nationalism. While home refers to the private realm – those spaces of intimacy, shelter and family life – this does not exhaust its meaning. For there is also the 'home country' and 'native place': the home as a public space marked by politically loaded questions of belonging and as imagined communities (Huttunen, 2005: 179).

# Conclusion

Through the course of this research, I was astonished at the depth of meaning these women gave to events in 1948. Although my family experiences had offered me some insight into the significance of the events, only in the process of analysing the interview transcripts did I realize just how deeply affected these women were by what happened to them at that time. The story of the strenuous objections I encountered in my exchanges with Professor Ronen from Ben-Gurion University about my use of the term 'Nakba' (among other things) also put a spotlight on this particular historical event. This likewise served to heighten my awareness of the importance of 1948, in particular its continued relevance for understanding the current conflict.

Listening to the life stories of these women was profoundly revealing. As their words indicate over and over again, their experiences of 1948 are among the most significant of their lives, in relation to both their life histories and their contemporary realities. These are stories of great trauma and massive destruction. But they are also stories of survival, resistance and endurance. Against overwhelming odds, these women talk about how they struggled to rebuild their family lives, their homes and their communities.

As the life story methodology demands, I began this book with a reflexive discussion of my own situatedness: the family stories that offered initial motivation to undertake this research; how these stories fit into the context of the discourse of Palestinian nationalism; and the extent to which my own life experiences factored into defining the scope of this project. I next discussed the relevance of the life story methodology, specifically how useful it is for eliciting information from the interviewees – a group of elderly Palestinian women who are largely illiterate. Not only did I seek to record these stories for the insight and knowledge they provide, but I also wanted to document them in written form by way of commemoration. By and large, these voices are silent in the public domain. In keeping with the reflexivity that is embedded in this methodological approach, I completed this description of the overall context in which this project took place by explaining the initial reaction to my use of the term 'Nakba'. These forceful objections raised questions about academic freedom and the production of knowledge within power relations fraught with tensions.

My narrative then shifted focus to the stories of these women. Three common themes emerged from the interviews. These provided the central organization for this book: language, body and home. In terms of language, the women I interviewed use terminology and phrases derived from the private and public spheres of their lives, depending on the memories they talked about. Sometimes their words reflected the dominant discourse (albeit in ironic ways) and sometimes their language demarcated complex sites of resistance – in relation to both hegemonic Zionist narratives and the prevailing masculinist discourse of Palestinian nationalism.

Next I considered the descriptions of the female and male body that these women depicted in their conversations with me, looking at how they differed through time. These stories presented the gendered body as complex and contradictory. What became most apparent was their sense of the female body as a success story – strong, able, the bearer of life. However, this was not an unbridled success: the female body was also spoken about in terms victimization and violence. In

contrast, their construction of the male body was more problematic. These were representations of the male body as mostly a victim of political and historical circumstance, unable to protect and defend effectively.

Unsurprisingly, these women have an immensely complex and sophisticated conception of home. This ranges across stories about their private family homes, their sense of being at home in their communities, and their understanding of their homeland, Palestine. This is a conception of home that is burdened with contradictions and heavy with symbolism. It is at once lost and sometimes regained, but always a place of commemoration; a site of birth and death; a place of fear and lack of safety, as well as security, warmth and a sense of belonging; equally private and public.

Based on the foregoing text, it is clear that the women I interviewed are active agents in society and history. Even at the peak of traumatic crisis, and living through ongoing social and political fragmentation of Palestinian communities since 1948, they were and are able to act and resist both state and patriarchal domination. They also were, and continue to be, able to challenge the masculinist intellectual narratives that define Israeli and Palestinian nationalism. They do so in order to make sense of their lives and those of their families, as well as the broader communities to which they belong.

As active agents, these women make valuable contributions to the constitution of knowledge, specifically in terms of the ways in which they remember and seek to commemorate historical events. These are not only representations of the past, but are also inextricably linked to the construction of the present and the future. However, like many women from the margins, they are exiled from history: their stories are largely untold; they are silent and absent. Therefore this book has sought to document the experiences of these women in order to create a more comprehensive and inclusive account of reality. This is crucial.

Told in their own words, these women's experiences serve as a means for better understanding 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.

As Palestinian women, their stories are both similar to and differ from the Palestinian national narrative. As Israeli citizens, their stories are also different from and opposed to the Zionist national narrative. As women, their stories are distinct.

Perhaps the greatest significance of these stories is not what they say about past events, but what they potentially offer to the present and the future. The knowledge residing in these stories and the life experiences of these women provoke a series of essential questions. How does 1948 structure, impact on and define the conflict in Palestine/Israel? When the perspective of this all-important experience is taken into account, are the current paradigms for interpreting and resolving this conflict adequate? Do the prevailing dominant discourses fully address the root causes of ongoing violence and oppression? What is missing from these contemporary political discourses? How can the various proposed solutions that both entirely overlook events in 1948 and largely exclude women, their experiences and perspectives, ever hope to achieve a lasting and just peace?

# Notes

## INTRODUCTION

1. It is problematic to take 'women' as a unified category of analysis. Women, like men, constitute a widely diverse range of people. Therefore my treatment of the category 'women' throughout this text must be understood from a strategic perspective oriented to documenting these as-yet unrecorded experiences in order to correct a historical imbalance. Importantly, the women I interviewed – with little or no formal education, and often illiterate – also lack the means to make their voices heard. They must no longer be ignored and silenced.
2. See also www.cbs.gov.il/reader/?MIval=cw_usr_view_Folder&ID=141; accessed 30 May 2010.
3. Importantly, however, this claim is limited by a lack of corresponding research into male collective history against which to contrast the female collective memory that emerges here.
4. www.ynet.co.il/english/articles/0,7340,L-3769908,00.html; accessed 2 June 2010.
5. In its present form, the bill is entitled 'Proposed Foundations of the Budget (Amendment – Prohibited Expenditure) Law, 5769–2009'. For more information about the bill, see Report 3 *Mada al-Carmel* 6, 2010 www.mada-research.org.
6. The article appears under the title 'Minister of Education Gidion Sa'ar to the Follow-up Committee on Arab Education: You lost the war you must accept the consequences in all fields', *Kul-alarab* 1131, 28 August 2009.
7. Tzipi Livni, 'National Aspirations of Israel's Arabs Can Be Met by Palestinian Homeland', *Ha'aretz*, 11 December 2008, www.haaretz.com/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=1045787; accessed 27 May 2010.
8. *Ha'aretz* is regarded as the newspaper of the middle and upper classes, intellectuals, the left wing, as well as those who engage closely in policy decision-making in Israel.

9. *Ha'aretz* altered its practice from the former 'Philistines' to 'Palestinians' when the editorship of the newspaper changed in early 2008.
10. For more detail, see Samuel and Judges in the Bible: Genesis 26; Judges 13–16; 1 Samuel 4–31; 2 Samuel 1–23; 1 Chronicles 10–20; and 2 Chronicles 26–28.
11. The era of British rule in Palestine is broadly referred to in scholarly work as the 'British Mandate'. In the context of the Palestinian issue this use is problematic. On 2 November 1917, before British forces had occupied the whole of historical Palestine, the Balfour Declaration was issued, acknowledging the region as the national homeland of the Jewish people, who at the time constituted a tiny minority in Palestine. Occupying British forces instituted the mandatory system, wherein indigenous people, ostensibly incapable of autonomous rule, would be prepared for self-governance and sovereignty. In such a system, the local residents were given internal and cultural autonomy while the British would control all other aspects such as economic and foreign affairs. The Balfour Declaration refers to Jews as a 'nation' or a 'people' but to the indigenous Palestinians simply as 'non-Jewish or communities'; from the outset, the 'mandate' implicitly was not intended to apply to Palestinians but to Jews.
12. www.palestineremembered.com/.
13. Israel is also called 'Jacob', and the twelve tribes from which the Jewish people are composed are the sons of Jacob–Israel.

## ONE

1. Ezzedeen al Qassam was a Syrian who arrived in Haifa because he was fleeing the death sentence conferred on him by the French on account of his participation in the revolt against the French in Syria during 1919–20. In Haifa, he was active in organizing resistance against Imperial British Rule and Zionism in Palestine. He was killed by the British in Ya'abad with twenty-five of his followers in 1935.
2. My father owned a machine gun, for which he paid half the price. The other half was paid by Hanna Ilias, a landowner from el Bi'aneh village; my father guarded Hanna Ilias's land and agricultural property.
3. Later, in Chapter 4, I elaborate the meaning of the term 'Arab Israeli'.
4. This is the name of the researcher.
5. A *maqam* is a tomb for a holy person.
6. The village stood on a slightly elevated hill in the eastern portion of the plain of Acre. It was attacked and captured in June 1948 (Khalidi, 1992: 22).
7. Throughout the book I refer to patriarchy as not inherently gendered; it reflects instead all forms of domination, exploitation, violence and abuse. These forms of patriarchal relation can be found in the family, in nationalism and in globalization.
8. He is known after his mother's name, not that of his father. Her Uncle Ahmad also was known after his mother's name. He was known as Ahmad Shiekha.
9. Sa'sa was situated on a rocky hill in the heart of the Upper Galilee Mountains. It was at the intersection of a network of roads that connected it to neighbouring

villages and urban centres, including Safad. Two massacres were committed at Sa'sa by Hagana forces in 1948. In 1949 Kibbutz Sa'sa was established, preserving the Palestinian name of the village.

10. Dayr al-Qasi was also on a rocky hill in the centre of western Upper Galilee, about 5 km south of the Lebanese border; its total population, according to the Mandate census of 1945, was 1,420 Muslims and 880 Christians. The village was occupied by the Israelis on 30 October 1948 (for more information, see Khalidi, 1992; Morris, 1987; and palestineremembered.com).
11. Fawzi al-Qawuji was the commander of what was then called the Arab Liberation Army, which was supposed to protect Palestine and the Palestinians from attack by the Zionist brigades in 1948.
12. My grandmother was born in Suhmata, a village situated on the top of two hills. Suhmata consisted of Muslim and Christians residents. In 1948, the Golani Brigade occupied the village and expelled its residents to refugee camps in Lebanon. However, some residents remained in Palestine, but became internally displaced refugees. For more information, see Khalidi, 1992; Benny Morris, 1987; and palestineremembered.com.
13. It is important to note that no one in my mother's family refers to themselves as a refugee. This is my term for referring to them, which I shall elaborate in Chapter 4.

## TWO

1. http://excavations.haifa.ac.il/html/html_heb/Ramla_Urban_Plan.pdf. I consider the British act in moving the capital from Ramleh to Lyd to have a subtle and symbolic meaning. Ramleh was built by Muslims in the eighteenth century, while the city of Lyd has a Roman history (i.e. European), although it also has an ancient history. The symbolic meaning is that 'We Europeans are back to rule the region.'
2. www.palestineremembered.com.
3. The alternate spelling of the name of the city of Lyd is in its Hebrew form because it appears in a quotation.
4. The snowball technique is a quantitative research method used to contact difficult-to-reach populations for interview-based research. A key contact introduces the researcher to other potential interviewees, who then do the same. As a result the research builds a social network within the research field.
5. More information about the villages these women came from may be found in Walid Khalidi's book *All That Remains* (1992), and on the websites www.palestineremembered.com; and 'Zochrot', www.zochrot.org/index.php?lang=english.
6. Alias name: Um Aziz. Before 1948 lived in Wadi Hunayn; lived in el Majdal before 1948; today lives in Lyd; interviewed on 21 October 2003.
7. Alias name: Um Fathi. Lived in Yaffa in 1948; currently lives in Ramleh; interviewed on 19 January 2003.
8. The real name of Aysheh Zakot, who lived in Isdud in 1948; currently lives in Ramleh; interviewed on 12 October 2003 and 30 May 2004.

9. The real name of Raiefeh Karkar, who lived in Ramleh in 1948; currently lives in Lyd; interviewed on 2 March 2003 and 16 November 2003.
10. Ispir Munayyir is a resident of Lyd and was an eyewitness to the city's fall in 1948. He wrote a book titled *Lydda during the Mandate and Occupation Periods*, published by the Institute for Palestine Studies in Beirut in 1997.
11. The real name of Um Nasri, who lived in Lyd before 1948; currently lives in Ramleh; interviewed on 19 April 2002 and 4 September 2003.
12. The real name of Salma el Hafi, who lived in Lyd before 1948; currently lives in Lyd; interviewed on 15 October 2002, 13 October 2003, 4 November 2003, 4 January 2004 and 6 June 2004.
13. Alias name: Um Adnan. Lived in Lyd before 1948; currently lives in Lyd; interviewed on 15 October 2003.
14. The term 'Hajjeh' signifies an honorary status indicating that a woman has fulfilled the fifth pillar of Islam by making a pilgrimage to Mecca.
15. Alias name: Um Ismael. Lived in al-Majdal in 1948; currently lives in Lyd; interviewed on 16 October 2003.
16. Every year on 16 November the Christian community celebrates the feast of Saint George in Lyd. The Muslim community also participates in the public celebration, except for the religious prayers. Today the celebration is known as the Lyd Celebration, or Eid Lyd. According to Fayeq abu Maneh, one of the interviewees, changing the reference to the holiday from 'Saint George's Holiday' to 'Eid Lyd' is a tribute to the cooperation between the Christian and Muslim communities of the city, which worked together to rebuild the church.
17. The real name of Hanieh Khalil Awadieh, who lived in al-Majdal in 1948; currently lives in Lyd; interviewed on 6 October 2003.
18. The real name of Haliemeh el Naqib, who lived in Lyd in 1948; currently lives in Lyd; interviewed on 4 November 2002, 22 January 2003, 23 January 2003 and 31 May 2004. On 23 January 2003, we took a tour of Lyd together.
19. Alias name: Um Dieb. Lived in Kafr 'Ana in 1948; currently lives in Lyd; interviewed on 20 July 2004.
20. For more information, see Adalah (the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel), *Challenging the Constitutionality of the Discriminatory Nationality and Entry into Israel Law*, Adalah Briefing paper, March 2005.
21. Alias name: Da'seh. Lived in Lyd in 1948; currently lives in Lyd; interviewed on 11 August 2004.

**THREE**

1. For more information about the Kreitman regulations, see: http://cmsprod.bgu.ac.il/Eng/Units/kreitman_school/Important+Information/regulations.htm; accessed 12 May 2010.
2. The term 'Hebraize' was used in the original proposal, which explains its presence in this text.
3. For more information on Academic Monitoring in Israel, see: www.israel-academia-monitor.com/index.php?new_lang=en&userid=3112.
4. For information on the Nakba bill, see: www.mada -research.org/UserFiles/file/PMP%20PDF/PMR6–eng/pmr6–eng-final-final.pdf.

## FOUR

1. Alias name: Um Mhimad. Lived in Lyd in 1948; currently lives in Lyd; interviewed on 15 September 2003.
2. Jamal Salameh is a Palestinian activist from the al-Dar Association in Ramleh.
3. Buthaina Dabita is an architect from Ramleh and is the director of what is known as the Mixed Cities Project of the organization Shatil, which is a training centre for social change. For more on Lavie's racist statements against Palestinians in Ramleh, see: www.adalah.org/eng/pressreleases/pr.php?file=08_10_24.
4. The real name of Um Omar el Far, who lived in Lyd in 1948; currently lives in Lyd; interviewed on 15 October 2003.
5. The real name of Fatmeh Abed el Hadi el Fararjeh, who lived in Zakariyya before 1948; now lives in Ramleh; interviewed on 16 August 2004.
6. 'The Meaning of Palestinians' Nakba'. Qustantin Zurayk was a prominent Arab intellectual who was born in Damascus in 1909 and died in Beirut in 2000. A historian, he is considered to be among the most important theoreticians of Arab national philosophy.
7. It is worth focusing briefly on these Zionist impulses, which have all but erased the term 'Nakba' from the political consciousness of everyday discourse. This explanation follows in the spirit of the Balfour Declaration (2 November 1917), where Palestinians were considered as non-Jewish communities and therefore divided into religious groupings rather than defined in terms of a collective political or national identity. That is, Zionist efforts to suppress use of the term 'Nakba' likewise serve to dismantle any sense of collective Palestinian identity that might emerge under the umbrella of this term. Following the pattern of a circular and self-reinforcing logic, in turn this justifies Zionist claims that there is no collective Palestinian identity.
8. See Ismail Shammout: www.shammout.com/oil-ism5.htm.
9. Some kept silent despite their knowledge, offering passive agreement; others actively supported Zionist violence. Moreover, this pattern of support for the State of Israel continues today.
10. Thus all those live on the land become subjugated to the owners – Jewish women and all Palestinians as Arab Israelis.
11. For example, in the Nakba of the Baramika, a prominent Persian family who gained influence and power during the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad in the eighth century were extirpated, imprisoned and their property confiscated. For more detail on el-Baramika, see Hassan, 1964: 164–75.
12. Granted this perspective is also endorsed in Palestinian nationalist narratives. I discuss below the real innovation of this choice of words.
13. *Khawaja* is a colloquial term that refers to foreigners, usually men; e.g. Westerners such as the British and French, but also Turks and sometimes foreign women.
14. In the history of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad ordered his followers to migrate to Ethiopia and then later he and his followers migrated to Medina, where he established a new religion and state, freeing Mecca from its idolatry.
15. See Morris, 1987, who discusses the 'question of the infiltrators'. He links the

massacre in Kfar Qassem, a Palestinian village in Israel, with the war against the 'infiltrators', which, he claims, preoccupied the security forces and primarily the Border Patrol for many years after 1948. Also see Rosenthal, 2002.

16. Alias names: Alice and Fotin. Lived in Ramleh in 1948; currently live in Ramleh; interviewed together on 2 November 2002 and 12 October 2003. (NB Fotin is Alice's sister-in-law; she refused to be formally interviewed, but nonetheless attended both interviews and took part in the conversations.)
17. Tawfiq Zayyad is a Palestinian poet from the city of Nazareth.
18. Alias name: Um Usif. Lived in Ramleh in 1948; currently lives in Ramleh; interviewed on 20 July 2004.
19. For more information, see: www.ror194.org/index.php?id=227; accessed 13 May2010.
20. www.ror194.org/index.php?id=262; and www.ror194.org/index.php?id=268; accessed 13 May 2010.
21. The Emergency Abandoned Property law of 1948 allowed the Israeli state apparatus to sell off Palestinian property to the Jewish National Fund and the Israeli Land Administration. This legislation was replaced by the Absentee Property Law, passed by the Knesset in 1950 and amended in 1951, 1956, 1958, 1965 and 1967. The law appoints a custodian of absentee property to the property of refugees, including real estate, currency, financial instruments and other goods. It also allows for the rental of such property, as well as release and sale.
22. What second and third generations after the Nakba are saying also merits research in order to compare and contrast their experiences with the experiences of these women who lived through the Nakba.
23. During the British era the currency was the Palestinian lira.
24. An extensive chain of department stores founded in 1947 by Histadrut, the Israeli trade-union organization.
25. She means that she used to work non-stop, day and night.
26. According to Ted Swedenburg (1995), Palestinians transmit and commemorate memories of the *thawra* of 1936–39 and constitute their collective memory despite Israeli attempts to erase it. While women were marginal in his research, he argued that some upper-class women participated in the 1936 revolt. Women in the villages played more active roles in the *thawra* from within the private sphere. When the British discovered the importance of the private sphere, they started to invade homes and ruin the crops, oil and wheat (Swedenburg 1995; Peteet 1991).
27. Alias name: Sara. Lived in Summil el Khalil in 1948; currently lives in Ramleh; interviewed on 16 August 2003.
28. A dunum is an area unit equivalent to approximately 1,000 square metres.
29. According to these women, if after twenty-eight years of renting the land, tenants could not pay the taxes and release the land, it became state property.

**FIVE**

1. Alias name: Rashideh. Lived in Ramleh in 1948; currently lives in Ramleh; interviewed on 15 August 2003.

2. The term *khawaja* combines two meanings that denote people who are foreigners and strangers. It is a reference to Turkish, British or English people and then later Jews. In these specific contexts, the word signifies the other, the stranger. It is normally used to refer to men, but sometimes also women.
3. For a discussion of various rape incidents during and after the war of 1948, see Morris, 1996: 192–8.
4. A *ghalabia* is a kind of traditional dress for Arab men, including Palestinians.
5. Alias name: Um Isa'a. Lived in Lyd in 1948; currently lives in Lyd; interviewed on 16 October 2003.
6. 'LEHI' is shorthand for the fighters for the freedom of Israel known as the Stern Gang, a terrorist Zionist Jewish group active during the era of British rule in Palestine.
7. Conducted and facilitated by Professor Dan Bar-On and Professor Sami Adwan in Beit Jala in 1999.
8. 'Hajar' is also the name of Hagar, the Egyptian wife of the prophet Abraham.
9. The *jilbab* and the *hijab*, plain coat-like coverings, are forms of Islamic dress designed to conceal most of a woman's body, except her hands and face.
10. A *dashdash* is a type of cloth that was used to cover the head, face and neck of a woman.
11. A *shanbat* is a transparent white cloth with which women used to cover their faces.
12. A *kab* is a cloth with which young women cover their bodies; it is most often black.
13. A *malaya* is a cloth with which older women used to cover their bodies.
14. A *burnus* is a cloth similar to what is used today as a head covering.
15. Omrah is a minor pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina performed by Muslims. It can be undertaken at any time of the year and is highly recommended, but not obligatory for all Muslims, unlike the Hajj, which is mandatory at least once in a Muslim's lifetime.

## SIX

1. Based in Lyd, the Loram Company is responsible for urban development in both Lyd and Ramleh. Their primary method of operation is to purchase Arab homes, demolish them and then build public housing. Stories related to this practice are further elaborated towards the end of this chapter.
2. A *maqam* is a shrine of a saint or prophet, those who are called *awliat Allaa el Salhin* (people of God). These popular religious sites are spread throughout the cities of Lyd and Ramleh and have different names, such as domes (*qibab*), shrines (*adriha* or *zawaya*). According to sociologist Halim Barakat (1993), these places provide mediation between ordinary believers and God, which official religion has rendered too remote and abstract; they tend to constitute a highly personalized and concrete alternative for common people.
3. For similar patterns of identity between a family and a neighbourhood name among Arab families in Haifa, see Agbaria, 2001: 302–3.
4. However, this was not an exclusive way of naming neighbourhoods. For

example, some of the women interviewed mentioned the 'Armenian neighbourhood' in Ramleh and the 'Western neighbourhood' in Lyd.

5. Palestinian communities are now fragmented and divided on the basis of class, religion, place of origin and those who have collaborated with Israeli authorities (mainly from Gaza and South Lebanon).
6. *Khawabi* are large clay vessels for storing produce in different seasons.
7. Fatmeh Abed el Hadi is referring to the attacks on Gaza that took place in 2003, not the attacks that started in December 2008.
8. This phrase was only used by the women I interviewed. The six men I spoke with never used it.
9. There is a contemporary dispute between the Palestinian residents of Lyd and Ramleh over this issue of Lyd's resistance in 1948. During the interviews, one way that this was expressed was in terms of competing claims about the number of pre-1948 structures that have been destroyed in both cities.
10. *Kawashin* is the plural form of the word *kushan*, a colloquial term derived from the Ottoman era used to refer to an official registry document of property ownership.
11. This is an expression in Arabic that means 'the event was disastrous for us'.
12. Because her skin was white.
13. Al-Nabi Rubin is a Palestinian village located 15 kilometres west of Ramleh. In 1948 it had a population of 1,600 people, according to Khalidi's book *All That Remains*. In May 1948, the village was completely destroyed by the Jewish Zionist Brigades. Its people were dispersed and became refugees. Annual celebrations to commemorate the prophet Rubin, known as the Al-Nabi Rubin festival, took place until 1948. The festival combined religious ceremonies and economic activities, in addition to leisure time for the city and village residents in the area. The mosque and shrine remain standing.
14. Recall that Amidar is the Israeli public housing company operated by the State of Israel. Founded in 1949, it is a primary provider of subsidized and rent-controlled housing. Its major stockholders are the Jewish Agency, the Jewish National Fund and the State of Israel.
15. Recall that a dunum is an area unit equivalent to approximately 1,000 square metres.
16. *Mabarim* are precious bracelets made of the finest gold and twisted in the shape of rope.
17. Here, a note refers to an informal confirmation from the owner that the property will be sold to the buyer.
18. *Haiaiai* are precious bracelets in the shape of a snake and made from the highest-quality gold.
19. Abir Zinati is the first Palestinian female hip-hop singer from Lyd. She writes both the lyrics and the music for her songs of political and feminist protest.
20. Also from Lyd, Tamer Naffar is a young male Palestinian hip-hop singer and author, who composes and sings protest songs.
21. www.adalah.org/eng/pressreleases/03_09_04.html; accessed 25 February 2010.

22. Shalhoub Kevorkian, 'House Demolitions: A Palestinian Perspective' (2007), www.topicsandroses.com/spip.php?article272; accessed 26 August 2010.
23. For further information, see: www.arabhra.org/hra/Pages/PopupTemplatePage.aspx?PopupTemplate=22; accessed 25 February 2010.
24. Ta'ayush is a grassroots Arab–Jewish partnership movement of Israelis and Palestinians working together to end the Israeli occupation and achieve full civil equality through daily nonviolent direct action. For more information, see: www.taayush.org/?page_id=61.
25. Municipal elections are one mechanism through which Palestinian families can obtain the building permits necessary for them to construct houses legally. That is, their votes for candidates are conditional on their getting these permits, along with other essential services (they are often deprived of electricity, water, garbage collection and so on).
26. Benny Regev was the Mayor of Lyd when I conducted these interviews. Consistent with his aggressive policy of demolition, on 16 March 2006 *Arab Week* newspaper reported the demolition of four houses in the Snir neighbourhood of Lyd belonging to the Abu Sha'aban family (Hasan, 2006).
27. Ali Waked, 'Arab MKs: Ramla Mayor racist, should resign', online news source: www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3334463,00.html.

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# Index

# PALESTINIAN WOMEN

'A powerful and much-needed oral history of the Nakba from the "forgotten community" of Palestinian women who live on in Israel. Kassem not only gives these women back their voice, but bravely helps us to understand through her own difficulties as an academic why Israel wants their silence to continue.'

**Jonathan Cook, author of *Disappearing Palestine***

'This is the first book to systematically analyse the life stories of Palestinian women in Israel, highlighting the important formative effect of the events of 1948. It should be read by students and scholars of Palestine and Israel as well as all those who seek alternative solutions for peace with justice.'

**Nicola Pratt, editor of *Women and War in the Middle East***

'Fatma Kassem's extremely moving, interesting and well-written book adds to existing historical accounts of the Nakba by documenting the gendered memory and narrative history of a previously silenced population. Her own family history and personal experiences within Israeli academia are also crucial to this important book, as they tell us a lot about the politics of knowledge production and the micro-politics of the Israeli state.'

**Professor Nadje Al-Ali, chair of the Centre for Gender Studies, SOAS**

Palestinian Women is the first book to examine and document the experiences and historical narrative of ordinary Palestinian women who witnessed the events of 1948 and became involuntary citizens of the State of Israel. Known in Palestinian discourse as the Nakba, or the Catastrophe, these events of sixty years ago still powerfully resonate in contemporary Palestinian-Jewish relations.

Told in their own words, the women's experiences serve as a window for examining the complex intersections of gender, nationalism and citizenship amidst ongoing violent political conflict. In narrating these stories, Palestinian Women argues that the realm of memory is a site of commemoration and resistance.

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