

Israeli and Palestinian Traditional Narratives of Their History

by Paul Scham (originally prepared in 2003)

TRADITIONAL ISRAELI NARRATIVE (1882-1949)	TRADITIONAL PALESTINIAN NARRATIVE (1882-1949)
<p>a) The legitimacy of the Zionist enterprise of returning Jews to Eretz Yisrael is based on Jewish descent from the ancient Israelites. The Jewish people has inherited their right to the land, religiously, legally, and historically. Jews have always looked and prayed toward Zion (Jerusalem), never relinquished their relationship to the land, and have always maintained a presence since ancient times, despite expulsions. Jews were treated as foreigners and persecuted wherever they were during their long Exile.</p> <p>b) Zionism was an authentic response to the persecution of Jews over millennia around the world. Jews did not come as colonizers, but rather as pioneers and redeemers of the land, and did not intend to disrupt the lives of the current inhabitants of the Land of Israel. All land for Jewish settlement was legally bought and paid for, often at inflated prices.</p> <p>c) The Arabs of Palestine were not a national group and never had been. They were largely undifferentiated from the inhabitants of much of Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, with no authentic tie to the Land of Israel. Many only came for economic opportunity after the Zionist movement began to make the land fruitful and the economy thrive. In all the years of Arab and Muslim control from the 7th century, Palestine was never a separate state and Jerusalem was never a capital.</p> <p>d) Zionist diplomacy legitimately sought a Great Power patron since Herzl, and found one in Great Britain. True, Britain had its own imperial agenda, but this does not detract from the righteousness of the Zionist cause. The Balfour Declaration was ratified by the League of Nations, constituting a statement of international law approving a Jewish homeland in Palestine.</p> <p>e) The riots of 1920, 1929 and 1936 were instigated by unscrupulous Arab leaders for their own nefarious purposes, particularly the Mufti of Jerusalem, Hajj Amin Al Husseini. The "Palestinian" population had increased rapidly through immigration of Arabs who were attracted by Zionist economic successes, and the Arab population's living standards rose rapidly during this period. The British frequently stood aside when Arabs murdered Jews.</p> <p>f) The British, who had been initially supportive of the</p>	<p>a) Judaism is a religion of revelation, like Christianity, and has no inherent tie to a particular land. Jews are not a nation but rather a community of believers. In any case, any Israelite presence was a short period in the long history of Palestine. Ultimately, religious myths, without presence and possession, are incapable of creating an ownership right. Palestinians are in fact, descendants of all previous inhabitants, including Israelites. Those Jews living in Palestine and the Muslim world before 1882 were well treated by Muslim neighbors and rulers.</p> <p>b) Zionism was a European colonialist enterprise like many in the late 19th century and was a European ideology superimposed on the Middle East. Moreover, it is an ideology of expansion directed towards robbing Arabs of their ancestral land. Arabs were systematically expelled by Zionist settlers from the beginning.</p> <p>c) The ancestors of today's Palestinians (Canaanites, Jebusites, and others mentioned in the Bible) were there before the Israelites, as shown by both biblical and archaeological evidence. Palestinians have lived continuously in the land since then. Certainly by the 1920s and likely much earlier, there was a Palestinian identity and nationality that differed fundamentally from other Levantine Arab peoples.</p> <p>d) The British foisted Zionism on the Palestinians beginning with the Balfour Declaration as part of their imperial strategy, with no right whatsoever in international law, and this was illegally ratified by the League of Nations. "He who did not own gave a promise to those who did not deserve." Zionists worked hand in glove with Britain to subjugate the Palestinian people.</p> <p>e) All the disturbances were justified and spontaneous revolts by the Palestinian people against the British/Zionist alliance and increasing immigration. The increasing Jewish immigration, facilitated by the British, created the resentment that led to the revolts. The British backed the Zionists, who were responsible for and had provoked the disturbances, and punished Palestinians harshly and illegitimately.</p> <p>f) The British were always pro-Zionist, except when</p>

<p>Zionist enterprise through the Balfour Declaration and the early mandate, began to backtrack early, as reflected in the splitting off of Transjordan in 1922, the Passfield White Paper of 1930, and many other incidents. They definitively repudiated the Balfour Declaration with the White Paper of 1939, and were unabashedly pro-Arab after that point.</p>	<p>occasionally forced otherwise by Arab pressure. They conspired with the Zionists to destroy Palestinian leadership in the 1936-39 revolt, thus making it impossible for Palestinians to prepare for the coming war with the Zionists. The White Paper of 1939 had no effect as it was not enforced. The British deliberately trained Zionist soldiers during the 1936-39 revolt and World War II.</p>
<p>g) The Zionist movement accepted the UN partition resolution of 1947 in good faith. War was forced on the <i>Yishuv</i> (Jewish national community) by the Arabs. In self-defense, the <i>Haganah</i> (later the Israeli Army) took over more land than had been allotted in the Partition Resolution and was justified in holding it, as it would have inevitably become a base for attacks on Israel.</p>	<p>g) The UN partition resolution of 1947 was illegitimate, as the UN had no right to give away the homeland of the Palestinians. The Palestinians cannot be blamed for trying to hold on to what was rightfully theirs. Compromise was out of the question. The Jewish leadership never genuinely accepted the idea of partition; in any case, expulsion (transfer) was always the plan.</p>
<p>h) The <i>Yishuv</i> was numerically vastly inferior to the combined Arab population; it bordered on a miracle that Israeli survived the war (“the few against the many”). The War of Independence was fought primarily against the Arab armies from 5 states. Jews realized they would be massacred if they lost, and fought with absolute determination to prevent another Holocaust. Arab atrocities proved they had no other choice.</p>	<p>h) The Jews had planned for the war, had organized politically and militarily, had strong support abroad and were in a much more favorable position when war came. Their armed forces outnumbered all the Arab armies. Palestinians had no infrastructure or military training, and were attacked and massacred repeatedly by Jewish gangs. Arab “aid” consisted primarily of attempted land grabs by other Arab countries of Palestinian land.</p>
<p>i) The Palestinians were not expelled. They fled, in most cases, because they were ordered and cajoled by their leaders and the Arab states, in order to make room for conquering Arab armies. In many cases Jewish officials pleaded with the refugees to stay. The Israeli decision to prevent refugees from returning was justified, as otherwise Israel would be destroyed by a hostile Arab internal majority. Ultimately, the responsibility and blame rests with the Arab leadership for rejecting the partition resolution.</p>	<p>i) Beginning soon after the adoption of the partition resolution in November 1947 the Zionists began to expel Palestinians from their homes, almost certainly according to a plan (Plan <i>Dalet</i>). Deir Yasin was a planned massacre that succeeded in stampeding Palestinians to leave. The <i>Nakba</i> (Catastrophe) was planned and carried out as ethnic cleansing, reminiscent of the Holocaust. The Zionists recognized that a Jewish state could not exist until most Arabs were expelled, and history proves this was the plan that was carried out.</p>
<p>j) The refugee issue was artificially kept alive by the Arab states, which deliberately used the refugees as pawns against Israel and forced them into refugee (concentration) camps. The real reason for the continuation of the conflict is the refusal of the Arab states to recognize Israeli’s existence. Israel has repeatedly offered peace, but not at the price of its own destruction, which has been the Arab goal since 1948. The “Right of Return” is a measure invented in order to destroy Israel as a Jewish state, and will never be accepted.</p>	<p>j) The Palestinian people have never ceased to protest against the illegality and immorality of their expulsion, and Palestinians continue to identify themselves as belonging to their real homes in Palestine. The Arab states have repeatedly betrayed the Palestinians and only grudgingly gave them space in refugee camps. There can never be a settlement without Israel recognizing its guilt and providing appropriate redress, including the right of all Palestinians to return to their homes enshrined in Resolution 194. Palestinians in other Arab countries are as much in exile as anywhere else.</p>

*Revised version from “*Shared Histories: A Palestinian-Israeli Dialogue*”, edited by Paul Scham, Walid Salem and Benjamin Pogrund. This version © 2009 by Paul Scham pscham@umd.edu