



## Concept Paper for the Fifth Annual Conference of Historical Studies: The Palestinian Nakba in Arab Historical Writing

The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies will devote the fifth meeting in its series of the Annual Conference of Historical Studies to studying Arab historical consciousness of the *Nakba*. “The Palestinian *Nakba* in Arab Historical Writing”, which will be held in Beirut in April 20-21, 2018, will be specifically focused on exploring the Arab approach to the Palestinian *Nakba* from a historiographical perspective. The choice of the year is deliberate, with 2018 marking 70 years since the events which irrevocably changed Palestine, the Palestinians and the wider Arab region.

Conference participants are invited to examine how Arab historians approached the events of the *Nakba*, focusing on both the methodological and epistemological aspects of historiography; exploring how the events of the *Nakba* shaped the historical sources; and eyewitness testimonies and personal memoirs, all of which form the primary sources of historical research. Crucial to these proceedings will be the question not only historical sources, but also ideological and mythologizing imperatives, shaped the Arab historical narrative surrounding the *Nakba*. Conference participants are expressly invited to explore the extent to which “non-traditional” historical sources and archival materials—including personal testimonies and journalistic reports—have contributed to historical writing on Palestine.

Additionally, the proceedings will cover the spatial and temporal contextualization of the historians studying the *Nakba*, taking in how the subjectivity of historians impacted on their narration. In sum, the conference will explore the methodology of Arab historical writing on the *Nakba* and the historical awareness of that event epistemologically and methodologically. In order to fully realize these aims, the conference will also accept papers which address Western and Israeli academic historiography of the *Nakba* from a comparative and critical perspective.

A full understanding of the themes presented at the meeting must include the writings of Palestinian and other Arab memoirists contemporary to the events of the *Nakba*. This includes Palestinian historians like Mohammed Izzat Darwazeh, Akram Zuaiter and Aref Al-Aref. It also includes the work of Hajj Amin Al-Husseini, Fawzi Kaoukji, Musa Al Alami, Mohammed Tarek El-Ifriqi, Emile Al-Ghoury, Khalil Al-Budeiri, Izzat Tannous, Abdulhamid Al Sayeh, Awni Abdulhadi, Bahjat Abu Gharbieh, Hussein Fakhri Al-Khaldi, Rashid El-Hajj Ibrahim, Dhu al-Kafil Abdullatif and Ahmad Shuqeiri. In addition, one finds the

memoirs of the leading officers of the “Holy Jihad Army” and of the Arab Salvation Front, some of which have been published in book form or through the *Journal of Palestine Studies*. A later generation of Palestinian historians did not live through the *Nakba* directly but were able to immerse themselves with contemporaries of the *Nakba*, including Abdulwahhab Al-Kayyali, Bayan Noueihed Al-Hout, Anis Sayegh, Kheiria Qasmia, Rashid Khalidi and others. Most recently, a new and rising generation of Palestinian historians based largely in the West who, with the added benefit of access to Western and sometimes Israeli archives, have been able to assess the works of their predecessors in a new light.

At the present time, no authoritative, coherent Palestinian or Arab narrative of the *Nakba*—whether official or otherwise—can act as a counterweight to the dominant Zionist narrative of events. This is paralleled by, and mirrors, the similar lack of access which Palestinian and other Arab scholars enjoy to any official state archives dating to that period in contrast to Israeli researchers’ relatively free access to archival material. One consequence of this situation is that while an official Israeli narrative has been subject to scrutiny and critique, the inaccessibility of any Arab archives dealing with the Palestinian *Nakba* have only served to complicate the work of Arab historians further. Many of the Arab works tackling the *Nakba* could easily be classified as “literary” or even “dramatized historical” writings, rather than professional historical scholarship. One notable exception to this trend is Mohammed Hassanein Heykal’s *Thrones and Armies (Al Uroosh w al-Juyosh)*, Cairo, 1998) which stands out among Arab works for the remarkable success the author had in accessing Egyptian military archives. Yet the presumed inadequacy of official Arab archives, or difficulties associated with access to them, is not in itself a justification for the lack of an Arab narrative. The trend towards “New History” demonstrates the possibility of creating a coherent historical narrative without the need for a robust archive.

Arab historians have been forced to operate within this reality, relying on what little they can salvage of official documents. Palestinian scholars have been particularly active in this regard, chiseling away at the available materials and trying to analyze trends in social and political history. Despite the absence of a complete, official archive, these Palestinian historians have been able to make use a large number of memoirs and on oral historical sources in addition to sociological and economic records available. They have also lent added weight to the history of specific Palestinian localities, with the resurgence of the histories of Beer Al Sabe (Beer Sheba), Gaza, Asqalan (Ashkelon), Jerusalem and Nablus. These localized histories allow for the creation of a granular, microhistory approach to the study of the *Nakba*.

How did Arab historical writings treat the dispossession of the Palestinians and the transformation of the Palestinians into refugees? Arab historical narratives of the Palestinian *Nakba* seem to be caught

between one version of events which views the exodus of the Palestinian people as an unexpectedly hurried and unplanned affair, carried out under the promise of a swift return by Arab rulers. A second version has come to see the dispossession of the Palestinian people as the result of a predetermined plan carried out against them. This latter version is corroborated by the documented "Dalet" plan to clear the Palestinians from their land.

An important 1959 article by Walid Khalidi was pivotal in the unraveling of this narrative. In it, Khalidi uncovered important features of the Dalet plan, which pre-dates the State of Israel, and which shows how the Zionist leadership wielded the tool of civilian massacres in order to frighten the Palestinians into leaving. This in itself raises another question: for those historical narratives which did not take the Dalet Plan into account, can their outlines accommodate the existence of a premeditated plan for massacres of Palestinian civilians? Would a detailed description of massacres of Palestinians suffice to understand the aims, functions and conceptual underpinning of Dalet? This leads us to the question of competing Israeli and Arab historical versions of the Dalet Plan, particularly with regards to specific incidents such as the massacre at Deir Yassin.

It serves the purposes of this conference well to understand modern Arab historiography of pre-Nakba Palestine, to help contextualize the growth and development of Arab historical knowledge. Tracing this development would begin with the earliest modern Arabic history of Palestine, authored by Omar Saleh Barghouti and Khalil Tawtah in 1923. One vital task of this conference will be the emphasis of Arabic language sources which historicize Palestine, and particularly those which followed the Great Revolt of 1936 and which narrated its events. Of special regard here will be *The Jihad for Arab Palestine*, written by Omar Abounasr, Ibrahim Najm and Amin Aqel in Beirut in 1936, and Issa Al-Safri's *Arab Palestine: British Mandate and Zionist Colonialism*, published in Jaffa in 1937. Yousef Haikal's *The Question of Palestine: Analysis and Critique* was published in the same year and city.

Finally, the organizing committee welcomes particularly submissions based on doctoral theses and other academic dissertations which are based on a careful reading of Arab, Western and Zionist sources regarding the *Nakba*, provided that these are adequately adapted for the purposes of the conference.

The following themes are intended as a non-exhaustive list of possible topics for discussion during the proceedings. The Conference Organizing Committee reserves for itself, however, the right to modify these themes in line with submissions which meet the broad academic objectives of the conference.



1. Arabic historical sources on the *Nakba*: archival material, contemporaneous reports, personal memoirs, interviews and oral history, in addition to earlier works of history. Participants are encouraged to explore what gaps there may be in this record, and how its nature has impacted on the academic quality of the Palestinian history of the *Nakba*. Participants are also encouraged to explore novel sources related to the documentary nature of the historical record.
2. The problematic of history and memory: how memoirs, journals and oral history fit into historical scholarship. Within the conference, one panel will be devoted to studying the question of oral history and its contribution to the history of the *Nakba*. The conference asks participants to explore how the historiographical perspective can be used to uncover those areas of the historical record which have yet to be fully understood and remain not entirely documented.
3. The histories of Palestinian localities and the relationship of these local histories to professionalized academic history.
4. The methodological shortcomings of Arab professional histories of the *Nakba*, and the aspects of the *Nakba* left out by any such writings.
5. A historiographical critique of the Zionist official-military academic narrative, adopted by the History Bureau of the Hagganah. How did this Bureau narrate the historical events of the *Nakba* and create a structure out of them, and to what extent did the Hagganah manipulate the historical record? How does the Zionist self-image present itself in a nationalized Hagganah-approved history of the Palestinian *Nakba*? This theme extends also to cover Israel's "New Historians".
6. How did contemporaneous Palestinian historians approach the *Nakba*, and what evidence is there of an evolution of historical writing when the present-day generation of Palestinian historians is taken into account?
7. A historiographical survey of the Palestinian Cause, and particularly of the *Nakba*, as these are presented in the official curricula of Arab state sponsored schools, particularly in the Arab East.



Papers that investigate any changes to these curricula in the wake of the series of peace agreements signed between Israel and a number of Arab countries are expressly welcomed.

8. The problematic posed by the *Nakba* and collective consciousness of the *Nakba*; the relationship between the narrating of history and the formation of historical consciousness; and specifically how historical consciousness affected the creation of a *Nakba* narrative. Included within this theme are papers which focus on historical writing and even historical literature, as well as papers which examine stereotyped depictions of the Jew in relevant Arab literature as well as the reciprocal stereotyped depictions found in Zionist literature.
9. The Arab fighting forces and political factions active in Palestine as seen through the lens of Arab historiography. Specifically, how the history of actions undertaken by the Arab Salvation Army and the Holy Jihad Forces shaped the historiography of the crucial, early turning points of the Palestinian *Nakba*.

## Deadlines and Dates to Remember

Researchers interested in taking part in this conference are notified of the following deadlines:

- An abstract/research proposal, no more than 700 words in length, together with an up-to-date curriculum vitae of the author, should be submitted no later than September 30, 2017 and addressed to the Conference Coordinator at the following email address:  
[history.conf@dohainstitute.org](mailto:history.conf@dohainstitute.org)
- Authors are notified of the Academic Committee's decision to accept, accept with modifications, or reject a given proposal within a week of its submission.
- Completed drafts of accepted proposals must be submitted no later than February 28, 2018. Authors must ensure that their completed submissions meet the requirements set by the ACRPS for the submission of academic papers, which are available online.
- The Academic Committee will notify all authors of the final decision to accept, accept with modifications or reject their draft papers no later than March 15, 2018.