



The Palestinian Narrative

Possible Pathways and Envisioned Tools for Maximizing International Solidarity

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PROGRAMME:

Mayrun

National narrative is an important tool for affirming rights, or for establishing the foundation of a people's existential relationship with their homeland. It is a key element in affirming the reality of any nation's connection to the land within the framework of national belonging. Through narratives, a people's identity is shaped, along with its various representations and manifestations, and it includes a heritage in its many forms; art, folk, culture, and expressions of emotional attachment to the land.

For Palestinians, their historical narrative does not focus only on the right to possess the land. Rather, their narrative is framed within the struggle against the Zionist entity which later became Israel. Palestinians present their narrative as a counter-narrative to the Zionists, and as a means of refuting the lies Israel use as its historical foundations. Palestinians do not only see themselves as victims of injustice within the context of the colonial conflict, but also as people with rights they need to self-determine.

In this sense, the Palestinian narrative presents itself through the truthful historical account, not only through chronology and individual stories, but through being presented within the broader context and the connection to the land. It is also an expression to show the injustices inflicted upon the nation by Israeli settler colonialism, and its historical account of deliberately ethnically cleansing the Palestinians. These injustices are historically framed with the 1948 context, when Zionist movements uprooted Palestinians from their land, through forced displacement, armed force, and military occupation of what remained as the land of Palestine: the West Bank and the

Gaza Strip.

The centuries that followed were accompanied by various forms of violence practiced against Palestinians, not only to deprive them of their right to self-determination, but also to uproot those who remained in these areas.

As stated by multiple international reports, as well as the International Court of Justice, the world directly witnessed the Israeli Governments' crime of genocide in the Gaza Strip after 7th October 2023. It represented a qualitative shift in Palestinian thinking in terms of the content, direction and forms of expression of the Palestinian narrative, especially through digital tools and platforms.

The strength of the Palestinian narrative following the genocide, did not only depend on the ability to tell the story, rather on the strength of facts supported by evidence, credibility and international legitimacy. This strength reinforces hope for achieving justice and peace in the region. Moreover, it shows that the power of the story and image can be an effective tool in the struggle. Yet despite the clear strength of the Palestinian narrative, it faces major challenges. Israel's propaganda through media and political power, and the strong support it receives from some major states, create obstacles to the Palestinian narrative. In addition, the Palestinian narrative sometimes suffers from internal variation because of political divisions among the different Palestinian factions.¹

This paper seeks to open a dialogue and a discussion to enable Palestinians, especially youth, to engage widely and accurately in presenting the Palestinian narrative of their national cause, their issues, suffering, hopes and aspirations. It explores multiple pathways that improve their ability to reach a global audience.

This paper also presents multiple pathways for enriching and strengthening the Palestinian narrative and the historical right to the land, through presenting the Palestinian story in diverse forms. The paper sees that maximizing the use of popular heritage and national folklore, alongside youth initiatives, strengthens the ties of the different emerging components of Palestinian generations. It also seeks to move from the intra-Palestinian level to the global level in order to strengthen international solidarity with the Palestinian people and their cause.

The Concept of Narrative Identity

Narrative identity, whether for an individual or for a historical group, is defined as the identity that remains itself through change. It is the space in which narrative and imagination interact. In this sense, the identity becomes the identity that a human being acquires through the ways the narrative functions, and the foundational experience that brings together historical and fictional narration. Human life therefore becomes more understandable when it is interpreted through the stories people tell. Then, living narratives become understandable when human beings apply their own narrative models drawn from history and imagination. These narrative models give coherence and harmony to nations' identities. For example, in autobiography, where the writer seeks to give their identity a reasonable and coherent form.²

"Narrative identity" is based on the idea that every individual possesses their own self, and regenerates this self through an owned narrative that is constantly renewed. Here, the issue transforms from an objective story, to a subjective one which the person tells about themselves, as both a writer and reader of a life that is their own. Accordingly, personal identity is formed through the narratives it produces and those it continuously integrates. When a person narrates, his/her self is transformed through the narratives transmitted by tradition or literature, which constantly leads to the reconstruction of their whole of personal history.

Human existence is an existence entangled in narrative. Narration is one of the fundamental tools for understanding the own self and the other; "Our connection to the world is controlled by narration; it can only take place through it. The world and the story in which we are involved intersect. The world exists only in the stories we tell. It exists in stories in which the human being is an essential party, whether as an actor or acted upon."³

Hence, the narrative identity appears dynamic and fragile. It is neither stable nor fixed, but is always vulnerable to losing stability because of imaginative variations. It is the result of a search that is never-ending, always under construction and reconstruction. It therefore bears witness to the unstable balance between possessing the self and losing it.⁴

Narrating is a means of producing narrative actions as interwoven components of incidents, events and characters that carry meaning. It is a form of expression, while the narrated content is the substance of that expression. The two are inseparable aspects which without them, no narrative discourse can be formed. Universal narrative models therefore contain the concept of narrativity within all forms of discourse, from scientific discourse to the discourse related to cooking recipes. Here it becomes possible to recover previous human activity situated within particular contexts, through narrative frameworks that include all possible forms of action, and apply them to «familiar» situations.⁵

This does not make the action individual, as it may appear on the surface. It expresses a state of interaction between the acting self and the social environment that receives this action, evaluates it, drives or encourages it, or obstructs its occurring. Individual memory is not truly individual unless it is part of a broader memory. In other words, narration helps us place our limited individual experience in time within a broader and more comprehensive memory, called the collective memory, or the "collective consciousness".

1 *"The Palestinian Narrative in Confronting the Israeli Narrative in Light of Al-Aqsa Flood," Arabi21, accessed June 2026, 1.*

2 *Paul Ricoeur, Time and Narrative, translated by Saeed Al-Ghanimi, Vol. 3, Dar Al-Kitab Al-Jadeed United, Beirut, 2006, p. 251.*

3 *See: Idris Al-Khadrawi, "Building Narrative Identity", Al-Kalima Magazine, "Building Narrative Identity".*

4 *Ibid.*

5 *See: Othman Mashawra, On the Concept of Narrativity and Its Components.*

Narration, in its simple sense, as stated in the tongue of the Arabs, carries various meanings that stem from its linguistic root, which refers to continuity or sequence in speech. If a person says «sarada al-hadith» or narrated the conversation, meaning that a person narrated something in sequence, and «fulan yasrudu al-hadith sardan» is when someone listens to and conveys speech well. In Western critical thought, narration corresponds to the term narratology, which roots back to the word narrate, meaning to tell, recount or narrate. The term narrative, as an adjective, is translated as "the narrated" or "the recounted". In a more modern critical term, narration transfers an event from its real-life form into its linguistic form. Narratology is a relatively modern term that entered use in France under the influence of structuralism, where it refers to the theoretical study and analysis of narrative. Tzvetan Todorov is considered to have coined the term in 1959, forming it from "narrative" and "logy", meaning narrative and science. It is the field concerned with the features of narrative discourse in terms of style, structure and meaning. Narration, as the primary material of this field, is understood as a linguistic system that carries an event or a series of events in an imaginative form. It is the art of organising these elements as an artistic form structured by internal relations, rules and forms that govern the work of narration, moving from its Arabic root, which denotes organisation, to its modern concepts.

Source: Othman Mashawra, On the Concept of Narrativity and Its Components.

Distinguishing Between the story, the Narrative and History

The story, the narrative and history represent three different levels for understanding the Palestinian question. The story relates to the moment, or moments, in which the Palestinian Nakba (the social and political transformation of the Palestinian people) emerged. It functions as a symbolic story that seeks to produce meaning around the occurrence of the Nakba while answering questions like: How did it emerge? Who was responsible for its occurrence? And what were its consequences? By its nature, the story is selective. It is usually written in a symbolic or semi-mythic language that grants legitimacy. It is not required to be neutral, but it is required to possess symbolic coherence and the ability to unify collective memory. National history, by contrast, is a critical, documented and scholarly field of knowledge. It deals with facts through their multiple sources, allows for contradiction and is subject to a methodology of research and continuous review. It does not seek to produce a ready-made political meaning, but rather to understand what happened as it happened, with all its complexities, successes and failures.⁶

The Narrative here, falls within an intermediate and dynamic position between the national story and the national history. It is neither the moment an issue is born, nor is it an archive of facts. Rather, it is a constantly renewed interpretive framework that links the past with the present and the future. It explains how Palestinians understand themselves today, while shedding light on their suffering, and gives meaning to their struggle and aspirations. The national narrative emerges as an attempt to create meaning: the meaning of shared belonging and the meaning of the tragedy endured by the Palestinian people. It is a living product of a three-way interaction between space, people and time, forming a unifying framework that all Palestinians carry. In this sense, the national narrative is not an end product, but something that is alive and built on the relationship between the past and the future.⁷ The Narrative is therefore not a story to be told or an archival history of events, but an intellectual and epistemic structure that produces meaning, and determines whose voice is heard, who is marginalized, who is revered and who is criminalized.⁸

⁶ See: "The National Narrative: Another Approach", *Al-Rai newspaper*.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ See: Ghania Malhis, "From the Genocide in Gaza to Rebuilding the Global Narrative: Palestine as a Centre of Meaning: How Do We Move from Diagnosis to Implementation?"

Components of the Palestinian Narrative⁹

In the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict¹⁰, the narrative and the story occupy a central role in shaping local, regional and international public opinion and the international guiding policies. Presenting the components of the Palestinian narrative here is intended to open horizons for understanding the foundations and points of strength which Palestinians build their narrative on. The Palestinian narrative rests on a number of components:

First, historical Palestine is the homeland of the Palestinian people in all their cultural, social and religious diversities; Muslims, Christians and Jews. They have been living in it for thousands of years, during which they were subjected to many invasions and occupations, yet they resisted these occupations and remained steadfast. Palestine is not the homeland of any other people.

Second, the Zionist movement is part of European colonialism, that occupied Arab lands, including Palestine, and placed this occupation as the instrument that served its own interests. In this context, the Balfour Declaration is a crucial part of this instrumentalisation, despite the invalidity of this promise issued by Britain. Britain had neither the right nor the authority to make such a promise, because the land was not Britain's to give. At the time, the Arabs formed the overwhelming majority of Palestine's population and owned the majority of its land. The Zionist movement was a European movement foreign to the land. In this context, the Palestinian story rejects any link between the Holocaust suffered by the Jews during the Second World War and the right of Jews to a homeland of their own. Palestine had zero connection to the Holocaust, and it cannot under any circumstances be made responsible for protecting Jews from massacres if this comes at the expense of Palestinian existence.





Third, the Palestinian narrative is based on the understanding that responsibility for the Palestinian tragedy lies with Israel, Britain, France, and Arab regimes. Palestinians also carry their own responsibility as a result of their divisions and weakness. The occupying power at that time, Britain, helped Jews migrate to Palestine in large numbers.

Fourth, Palestinians see Israel as directly responsible for their Nakba in 1948, the "catastrophe", meaning the loss of their homeland to the Zionists, or the birth of Israel, and the creation of the Palestinian refugee question. Palestinians were forced to live as refugees in camps in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and in exile in neighboring countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Egypt. The Palestinians who remained in their villages and towns were subjected to Israeli control, and they were treated as second-class citizens. They were placed under military administration and emergency regulations, their lands were confiscated, their movement was restricted, and many of them were forced to remain internally displaced and were prevented from returning to the villages and cities they were displaced from.

Fifth, Palestinians believe that the Partition Resolution issued in 1947 by the United Nations was a major historical injustice. It granted a large part of their country to «foreigners» owning a small part of the land, who had no right to it, and their number was far fewer than the indigenous population. Moreover, the Palestinian rejection of the Partition Resolution does not justify the response of the terrorist armed Jewish groups, which effectively began the 1948 war and ethnic cleansing, as they carried out armed attacks against unarmed and unprepared Palestinian villages and towns, before the arrival of the Arab armies on 15 May 1948.

Furthermore, the terrorist Jewish groups would not have accepted the partition plan in any case. Rather, they were determined to expand the borders of their desired state and “ethnically cleanse” the areas they wanted from as many Palestinians as possible. Their war plans, military operations, tactics, the use of artillery against civilians in villages and towns, massacres such as Deir Yassin, wartime propaganda, including the spread of rumors about imminent Zionist attacks and the terrorizing of the Palestinians with total annihilation of the population, were all intended to force the indigenous population to leave their homes and lands.

Sixth, Palestinians believe that their uprooting from their land was deliberate and it broke the international law and United Nations resolutions, particularly UN General Assembly Resolution 194. Palestinian refugees and their descendants have the legitimate right to return to their original homes and properties, or to receive compensation if they choose to do so. Palestinians also believe in their legitimate right to resist the Israeli occupation by all means necessary, including armed resistance, as long as this is in accordance with international norms and international law.

Seventh, Palestinians believe that the military occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, with all the illegal policies, including land seizure, settlement construction, the suppression of Palestinians by forces, and the impunity given to settler attacks, are aimed to ethnically cleanse Palestinians from the land. The most recent strategy for this is the Israeli Governments' crime of genocide in the Gaza Strip, the displacement of Palestinians in the West Bank, and the ethnic cleansing of Jerusalem, all illegal under international law.

Components of the Palestinian Narrative

Palestine belongs to its people: Muslims, Christians and Jews.

The Zionist movement is part of Western colonialism, and the Balfour Declaration is invalid.

Britain, France and Israel are responsible for the tragedy of Palestine.

Israel is responsible for forcing Palestinians into displacement, and refugees have the right of return.

The Partition Resolution is a form of injustice against Palestinians, as they were the majority of the population and owned the majority of the land.

Palestinians have the legitimate right to self-defence and to resort to all forms of resistance.

Palestinians are continuously subjected to ethnic cleansing in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

9 See: *Seeing Through the Other's Eyes: The Historical Narrative of Palestinians and Israelis, What Fosters and What Hampers Sustainable Peace Education?*

10 The term "conflict" will be used throughout this paper to refer to the Israeli occupation of Palestine. In other words, the Israel-Palestine situation is understood as Palestine being subjected to Israeli, Zionist, settler colonialism.

Narrative Pathways and Tools Used

The Nakba and its effects on the Palestinian people represent a defining moment in the construction of the Palestinian narrative, which is grounded in national identity and in the effort to bring together a diaspora scattered across separate communities with little social, cultural, political or economic connection. These communities were marked by helplessness, loss and insecurity, in addition to poverty, hunger, anxiety and fear of the future.

The idea of return became central to Palestinian concern, alongside the rejection of policies of refugee integration into Arab states. Refugeehood and displacement shaped contemporary Palestinian cultural identity, as Palestinians in refugee camps play a prominent role in this process. The refugee experience strengthened Palestinians' sense of solidarity of preserving identity and existence. This helped build the collective memory as a substitute to the land that had been taken from them.

Palestinian memory is passed from generation to generation with the support of writers, poets and political elites who worked to develop collective consciousness and shape Palestinian identity based on national memory. This memory carries the intense emotions, tears, grief and pain over the loss of the land. This memory helped build an imagined identity that was able to free Palestinians from feelings of helplessness, weakness and inferiority, while also strengthening their refusal of humiliation and subjugation. It helped them become part of a more cohesive community sharing the same destiny, values, traditions and goals. This gave Palestinians a sense of social security and helped preserve their survival in the face of Israeli policies of erasure, assimilation, attempts of exclusion, and the constant threat to their existence.

Pathways Directed towards Palestinians in Palestine and the Diaspora

Many initiatives have been established to address Palestinians, mainly in the diaspora, within the framework of unifying or consolidating the narrative, including the following:

Associations for Reviving Social Ties:

Initiatives to establish associations linking the people of depopulated villages and towns across different communities. These initiatives have contributed to preserving the Palestinian narrative and identity while rebuilding social ties with refugees. This has been done through associations bearing the names of the depopulated villages and through social networks that recover and preserve memory and revive heritage. Museums that introduce the villages and artistic groups that preserve Palestinian folk culture were established. However, the growth of these associations depends on the capacities of its people, and on the availability of their financial support.

Reviving Heritage and Folk Culture:

Artistic groups, such as dabke groups, traditional singing groups and theatre groups established by national institutions, including Palestinian factions, popular unions and cultural associations in different parts of the world: have contributed to expressing Palestinian culture and national identity as a unifying framework for Palestinians, while also seeking to draw attention to Palestinian heritage.

Initiatives Connecting Palestinians with the Land, such as “We Were and Still Are Here”:

The “We Were Still Are Here” initiative contributes to documenting Israel’s theft of Palestinian lands, homes, and properties, through visual documentation of the Palestinian story. It does so by building connections between Palestine before the Nakba and Palestinian refugee generations or Palestinians themselves who were there in their childhood or early youth. In this way, Palestine moves from a place in memory, an old photograph, a document or a newspaper report, into a new documented image alongside the oral history carried by the Palestinians who have been scattered across a vast diaspora around the world.

Pathways Directed towards the International Community to Build Solidarity with the Palestinian Cause

There are many Palestinian initiatives directed towards the international community and towards presenting the Palestinian narrative, including the following:

Engaging with Foreign Politicians and Parliamentarians: These initiatives involve engaging with international politicians and parliamentarians in order to introduce the Palestinian cause, in light of the current developments, to present the Palestinian perspective. Palestinian civil society organizations undertake direct and digital communication, whether by visiting the European Parliament and members of the US Congress, or by submitting petitions by email to present Israeli violations and raise awareness of Palestinian issues. These aim at encouraging positions that may influence policy change of governments.

Online Youth Initiatives to Introduce the Palestinian Cause: In recent years, technical and digital tools, information technology, artificial intelligence and online platforms have been used to enable young people to tell their personal stories and experiences. These tools can help focus on marginalized voices, and build a new generation capable of influencing other societies through local and global discussions. These efforts aim to challenge misconceptions about Palestine, showcase creativity and skills, build bonds of communication with other societies, or introduce the Palestinian heritage, such as traditional food. Examples include:

“Dagon - Flavors of Palestine” initiative, which uses culinary arts in a mission to reclaim Palestinian narratives through food.

The “International Palestinian Airport” website, which presents, in a cynical way, the apartheid, movement restrictions, and hardships Palestinians face while moving between cities or travelling abroad.

Conclusion

The Palestinian experience shows that there are many tools that can be used to build and consolidate the Palestinian narrative among Palestinians. These tools help shape the narrative even when Palestinians themselves are scattered and fragmented across multiple environments. This is to connect Palestinian generations, especially youth, with their homeland. The same applies to tools used to present the Palestinian stories and rights grounded in documented history and lived reality. However, these pathways and tools still require further development in order to strengthen connections and maximize intra-Palestinian and international solidarity, especially as most of them were built by individual initiatives and rely on self-funding and irregular donations. These tools should not rely on crisis or be based on reactions to the brutality of the Israeli occupation, as happened, for example, after October 2023.

As this does not detract from the value of these initiatives, on the contrary, initiatives should be based on showing the Palestinian diversity and plurality to open wider horizons for action. At the same time, coordination mechanisms should be developed between similar initiatives in order to maximize the benefits and ensure continuity. In this context, the outcomes of the “Mayroun” workshop organized by RO’A Center for Political and Strategic Studies from 1st to the 4th of April 2026, which brought together a number of young women and men from different Palestinian regions, resulted in a unique and diverse initiative that aims to strengthen and introduce new pathways towards reimagining the Palestinian narrative.

Proposed initiatives:

The “Network of Associations of Depopulated Villages” initiative is based on creating a coordination network that brings together associations concerned with depopulated villages. It aims to exchange expertise, increase the effectiveness of their efforts, and develop ideas related to their roles and documentation tools concerning the life of these villages, at the level of tangible or intangible heritage, such as collecting historical documents for the properties of the people, redrawing the maps or 3D modelling their villages.

An initiative to bring together Palestinian and non-Palestinian graffiti artists to express Palestinian tangible and intangible heritage, based on historical facts, and translated to different languages.

The “Visual Representation for Building Memory” initiative is based on developing Virtual Reality 3D models to recreate depopulated and destroyed villages and based on oral accounts, linking personal narration with visual representation.

The “Inclusive Platform” initiative is based on building a framework or a platform that brings together Palestinians from different regions where they can share resources and ideas.

The “Memory and Place” initiative, “Building Touring Networks”, aims to document the relationship with place, including villages, homes, land and trees, in order to connect individual memory with collective memory. The experience of the “We Were and We Still are Here” initiative can be built on and expanded, especially in the territories occupied in 1948, through multiple groups implementing this initiative and by providing logistical and technical support for Palestinians who wish to visit their families’ properties in different cities and villages. This could be done through the creation of a website that enables communication and provides models for such visits.

The “Palestinian Narrative Platform” initiative is concerned with the Palestinian narrative in multiple languages. It documents the Palestinian narrative and its components, and provides documentation and analysis of social and cultural transformations within Palestinian society across its different communities. It also includes training materials or proposes regular online training courses.

The “Station or Laboratory” initiative would provide logistical support for developing ideas and facilitating initiatives in the field of lobbying, advocacy and global influence campaigns, especially through online and digital tools, with a focus on foreign languages.

The “Soil” initiative is based on collecting soil samples from Palestinian villages and cities occupied in 1948 as a symbolic expression for the displaced people’s connection to place.

The “Gatherings” initiatives include the possibility of holding meetings or “camps” in Palestine and abroad for immersive shared experience and for raising awareness among younger generations about the Palestinian narrative and the tools that can maximize its use in strengthening international solidarity.

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2026