

# Resisting Oblivion: Historiography of the Destroyed Palestinian Village of Lubyā

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## Abstract

*The following article “Resisting Oblivion” is part of a long research on a Palestinian demolished village, Lubyā, and its historiography before and after its demolition in 1948. This article is part of a forthcoming book, due to be published in both Danish and English in Denmark this year. The article is based mainly on the oral accounts of the elderly generation from the village – 700 people were interviewed – and archival documents, pieced together to produce this microcosmic piece of modern Palestinian historiography, and to show the power of past memory accounts in shaping the lives of people, even after fifty-four years in exile.*

## Résumé

*L'article qui suit, intitulé « Resisting Oblivion » (« Résister à l'oubli »), fait partie d'un long projet de recherche sur un village palestinien démoli, du nom de Lubyā, ainsi que sur son historiographie avant et après sa démolition en 1948. L'article est inclus dans un livre qui paraîtra bientôt et qui sera publié au Danemark cette année en danois et en anglais. L'article repose principalement sur le témoignage oral de la génération d'anciens du village – 700 personnes furent interviewées – et sur des documents d'archives reconstitués élément par élément, pour produire ce microcosme de l'historiographie palestinienne moderne et pour montrer la capacité des comptes-rendus du passé, tirés de la mémoire, d'influer sur la vie des gens, et cela même après cinquante-quatre années d'exil.*

*There is no greater sorrow on earth than the loss of one's native land.*

— Euripides, 43 B.C.

## Why Lubyā?

**T**he idea to research Lubyā's history began stirring in me long ago while I was still living in a refugee camp in Lebanon. In 1948, my parents and thousands of others from Lubyā and the surrounding villages in the Tiberias district arrived at Wavel Refugee Camp, in Baalbek, Lebanon. Like other Palestinians who were expelled or otherwise forced to leave their homes and villages during the 1948 war in Palestine – an experience known to Palestinians as al-Nakba or “the catastrophe” – my parents refused to settle in “proper” houses, hoping that they would soon return to their home in Palestine. Although they faced extremely cold weather when they first arrived, they preferred to live in tents distributed by the Red Cross. My father's wife, her son, and many other refugee children died that year.

For more than five decades, resolutions concerning the right of return of Palestinian refugees have shelved in the archives of the United Nations. Every year the same resolutions affirming the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes, mainly UN General Assembly Resolution 194,<sup>1</sup> have been voted on and passed unanimously, with the exception of a single state that votes against them – Israel. Protests have not helped; the result remains the same. The “temporary status” of Palestinian refugees has seemingly turned out to be “permanent.”

A Palestinian child born in Wavel Refugee Camp soon begins to pose the normal, if naive questions: Who am I? Why are we refugees? Why are we not allowed to attend

military classes in the Lebanese schools? Why do we live such a transitory life? Why does father refuse to buy a refrigerator, television, or washing machine, commenting that it will be easier, when the time comes, to return home without these cumbersome belongings? Why don't we have the same rights as the people we live among – the right to work, the right to a nationality or a passport? Why do the authorities close the gates of the camp and prevent us from leaving every time an official guest from abroad comes to visit the historical ruins of Baalbek? Why are we treated differently even though we speak the same language and share a common history? Where do we originally come from?

It was all these questions; the stories about Lubyia recounted by my parents and relatives; the discriminatory policies of the authorities, and my long life of forced displacement from one country to another, that motivated me to visit Lubyia in 1994. The visit became possible only after I had obtained Danish citizenship. For the first time in forty-three years, I was finally able to carry my own official passport, a document that gave me official status. Even with that status, however, I was forbidden to write the name of Lubyia, my place of origin, in my passport. (In my refugee documents, my place of birth reads: Lubyia-Tiberias). For the Danish authorities, Lubyia had ceased to exist; they could only agree to write Tiberias, refusing even to include the word Palestine. Nevertheless, the passport enabled me to finally visit my homeland; but only as a tourist and not as a local or a citizen.

That first visit was followed by a second one on which I was accompanied by my parents and a Danish television crew, in order to film a documentary about Lubyia's history. The documentary was entitled "Den Faedrene Land (Our Ancestors' Land)" (31 March 95), and was followed by a working paper on the more than one thousand Lubyians currently residing in Denmark.<sup>2</sup> The documentary and the subsequent working paper became the foundation of a much larger research project about Lubyia based on seven hundred interviews with refugees from the village.<sup>3</sup> In addition to a narrative report, the project includes more than one thousand pages of pictures, maps, and film on Lubyia. A future exhibition about Lubyia will comprise the entire research material, including a reconstruction of a model of the village as it was before 1948, along with agricultural tools, genealogical trees, embroidery, household articles, costumes, maps, etc. Danish and German ethnographic museums, among others, have already agreed to host the exhibition in 2004.

### ***Fieldwork: The Research Process***

My relationship to Palestinians, both personal and public, which arose from my work within the Palestinian trade

union movement and other institutions, has given me the opportunity to be in daily and direct contact with most Lubyians all over the world. Therefore, the usual difficulties that face ethnographers at the onset of their anthropological research, to directly reach to the crux of the matter, did not apply to me. My Palestinian origin, my involvement in the Palestinian cause, and my long stay in Europe provided me with a dual vision, placing me between the Oriental culture in which I was born and brought up, and the Western one in which I have lived for the past twenty years. I can also say that my knowledge of, and contact with, those Lubyians who remained in Israel, as well as with the "others" who have occupied the village and obliterated its geographical and historical narrative, could be considered as my "first contacts" with my new horizons and my new field of study.

The information and experience I accumulated during almost ten years of working in grassroots organizations in Lebanon, Jordan, and Europe were vital to this research. In addition, I spent fourteen months living as a participant-observer among Lubyians in Israel and Jordan, and later on an additional nine months in Syria, Lebanon, Gaza, and the West Bank. Innovative and diverse approaches were necessary to cope with the widespread network of Lubyians, from Gaza and Ramallah in the Palestinian self-rule areas, to Deir Hanna, Nazareth, Umm al-Fahm, and al-Makr in Israel. The network also stretched from Irbid and Amman in Jordan, and Wavel camp, 'Ain al-Hilwe, Bourj al-Shimali, and Bourj al-Barajneh in Lebanon, to Lubyians in Berlin, Denmark, and Sweden.

Although there is a pattern of a common historical narrative and plight that traverses this wide spectrum, the responses to the questions were at times as different as the geographical locations in which the respondents live. Interviewing Lubyians in Denmark is different from interviewing those in Israel, or in Jordan. Therefore, the social situation and personal status of the interviewee, as well as the political situation in the country in which he or she resides, played a vital role in the narrative. To overcome some of these obstacles, earlier taped information was compared with new material; and, in some cases, meetings would be held bringing together two or three of the interviewees.

Different psychological factors, such as fear and insecurity, also played a vital role in the narrative, especially in countries where Palestinians face discrimination, whether in Israel or in some Arab countries. While recalling their past, present fears were a dominant factor in the interviews. An interview with a Palestinian who visited his village, Lubyia, in 1994, for example, resulted in his being barred from ever returning because of what he said in the interview. These feelings complicated the interview process. Only when assured of anonymity would the interviewee

start to speak, and only a few consented to their full name being given. This was not a problem for the Israeli officers interviewed for the project. They spoke with confidence and without reservation. Unlike their Palestinian counterparts, they were not afraid to speak of the past.

Exile and life as refugees have left a heavy toll on Lubyans in terms of oppression and marginalization, in both their private and public lives. Without the elderly, modern history would lack its foundation, namely the social history of the oppressed, the marginalized, the exiled, the “others,” and the defeated. The victors write most modern history; thus, it can never relay the “truth” or the “reality” in all their aspects. The untold history, which is that of the conquered and the defeated, should therefore be studied independently within its own socio-historical context. When I met refugees from the village of Safsaf in ‘Ain al-Hilwe camp, for example, a teacher from the village gave me a list of all those who had been killed in the massacre in the village. The names on the list outnumbered the figures in the diary of Yosef Nachmani, a prominent member of the Haganah and director of the Jewish National Fund office in Tiberias, published in the most recent book by Israeli historian Benny Morris.<sup>4</sup> It was the job of the “others” to write their own version of history themselves; this kind of account could be classified under the broad modern terminology of “opposition literature.”

### ***“Memory Is a Battlefield”***

Fifty years of displacement and exile have not obliterated Lubyans’ history, neither from the minds of its inhabitants, nor from the minds of those who uprooted them. The stream of memories about bygone days still flows through the minds of Lubyans’ older generation; men and women in their sixties, seventies, and eighties still reminisce about their past, both for their own sake as well as that of their children. The latter still pass on, more or less accurately, those same stories and traditions to their own sons and daughters. In the words of Swedenburg, “Memory is a battlefield.”<sup>5</sup>

While the recounting of historical and social facts and anecdotes changes from one generation to another, the main stream of memories and images of the past – even though these images are no longer as crystal clear as they were before the diaspora – still dominates, until today, the subconscious, as well as various aspects of the lives of present day Lubyans, old and young alike. The image of the past, the “common sense,” to use Gramsci’s words, is “ambiguous, contradictory . . . multifarious and strangely composite”<sup>6</sup> in the minds of the new generation. But that is not the case for the older generation whose memories are still coherent and reliable. Although time and displacement are vital factors to be considered when reconstructing the past,

these have not dimmed the villagers’ recollection of their history prior to 1948.

For teenagers, the middle-aged, and the elderly alike, Lubyans is an identical central image, a theoretical and subconscious point of reference, a cultural framework and a past and present mental image that shapes, inspires, and impacts their personal lives today. In the late sixties, they joined in their hundreds what was then a promising Palestinian revolution; ninety-two of them died since its onset in 1965. Again in the late eighties and early nineties, their dreams ended in frustration and despair with another wave of displacement and exile to various Arab, Scandinavian, and other European countries, a new generation of children, ironically, reliving the experience of their uprooted parents.

Nevertheless, and even in the diaspora, whether in Denmark, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Germany, or Israel, the common foundation upon which their present lives were built, as well as their “concept of the self,” continues to be nourished by that central image. Their past history became the basis on which their plans for the future were based, in spite of half a century of time and distance from their land of origin. Reminiscences, eyewitness accounts, recollections of events, and collective historiography, based on lore and traditions, became the chief source of inspiration for the elderly and the cornerstone of the young generations’ identity.

Of all the hundreds of Palestinian villages, Lubyans was recreated in Wavel Refugee Camp, a camp in Lebanon named after a British officer. For the refugees, ‘Ain al-Hilwe in Lebanon, Yarmouk in Syria, Baka’a Camp in Jordan, and, later, the suburbs of Berlin, Copenhagen, and Stockholm all became substitutes for Lubyans. In their exile after 1948, Lubyans continued to establish different societies, committees, and clubs to deal with the serious and urgent problems that arose among them.<sup>7</sup> The former identity of Lubyans, which was strongly connected to their village, continued until the late 1960s when it began to be replaced by a new national identity, which emanated from their strong support for the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). With time, the patriarchal identity also started to wane, but was not entirely obliterated.

After the evacuation of the PLO forces from Lebanon in 1983, a new wave of emigration among Lubyans started, especially following the Sabra and Shatila massacres. That is when the religious identity started to edge the national one and dominate inside the refugee camps, as well as to gain ground in the Arab countries and abroad as a valid national movement. Mosques and religious clubs were established in all the communities where Palestinian refugees are now living, whether in Germany, Denmark, Sweden, or

anywhere else. Thus, the modern Palestinian identity became a mosaic of several moral commitments, or a multiple foci of identities, such as regional, Arab, religious, familial, tribal, and various national loyalties that often overlapped. Defining identity, therefore, is becoming more and more complicated and controversial, especially when all the factors mentioned above, to which should be added tradition, customs, culture, and history, converge to form both a construct and a process of identity, to use Anthony Smith's definition of a modern nation.<sup>8</sup>

Wherever they lived, "Displaced Refugees" was the broad category under which Lubyans, like other refugees, were identified. Documents bestowing citizenship providing asylum, or just the required identity cards for alien residents, were taken for what they were, practical tools to facilitate daily life. In reality, however, and through their shrouded memories, whether fresh or withered, they were still attached to this piece of land called Lubyia and to its history. Never mind that it was erased from the map; it still existed, albeit in ruins, both in its past physical form, in the remaining debris of wells, caves, the cemetery, and the olive and cactus groves, and as mere mental images of its past social, cultural, and historical life.

### ***Memorial Landmarks of the Past: The History of Lubyia as Told by Lubyans***

By any account, Lubyia was a small Galilee village. In 1945, 2,730 people lived in Lubyia. Nevertheless, Lubyia was the largest village in the district of Tiberias during the period of the British Mandate in Palestine (1922–48). Lubyia was totally demolished in 1948 and its inhabitants uprooted and dispersed to as many as twenty-three countries, some within Palestine itself and others in nearby countries or in other far-flung places. Before its destruction, this village had its own vibrant history, its gentle culture, and its intricate social network.

It amazed me to realize, while interviewing a number of elderly Lubyans, that some historical events, such as Salah al Din's (Saladin's) battle of Hittin in 1187, as told by the Arab Muslim historian Ibn al-Atheer and the detailed description of it in the diaries of a teacher from Lubyia, as well as the death of Damascus Governor Suleiman Pasha in Lubyia (1743) and Napoleon's march through the village on his way to besiege Akka (Acre), are events that they enthusiastically recounted as part of their own personal heritage. Abu Sameeh al-Samadi, who lives in Yarmouk camp near Damascus, is one of them; he has managed to assemble a private library that fills the walls of three rooms in his house. The library contains detailed documents from old Arabic manuscripts that recount different historical events that took place in and around Lubyia.

Such strong awareness of one's heritage, when interlinked with a state of permanent exile, helps to strengthen the individual's psychological and mental balance, as well as his ability to cope with the refugee experience and huge loss suffered that nothing can compensate for. It is also a struggle to preserve the history of the self against the ravages of time and forgetfulness. Moreover, it is a spiritual piece of bread by which refugees manage to overcome and surpass their dilemma and the hardships of exile, and ultimately find the resilience to rebuild their shattered lives in a refugee camp. Abu Sameeh got his high school degree when he was over fifty years old. His library is visited by many researchers looking for documents about Arab and Islamic history. He has also written several small booklets about historical figures as well as a long interpretation of the holy Kor'an. Less than one hour after I entered his home, all the relevant books that mentioned Lubyia, directly or indirectly, were piled up in front of me. To my astonishment, my name and that of my brother were there as part of a detailed genealogical tree of the family, going back to the seventh century and to Caliph Ali's sons, Hassan and Hussein.<sup>9</sup>

Another elderly man, Karzoon, who also resides in Yarmouk camp, woke up one night and started drawing the village of Lubyia on a piece of paper until he had drawn all of its houses and marked down the names of all its inhabitants. At the end of the interview he said to me: "Excuse me if I have missed two or three names which I am not quite sure about, but I will write them in the new version of the map." When I gave him an aerial photograph of Lubyia taken by British forces in 1945, before the village was demolished, he held it as he would his own child and silently wept and kissed it. As he placed it beside the map he had drawn, it was very difficult to distinguish between the "imagined" Lubyia he had drawn from memory after fifty years, and the real one.

A third example of the strength of memories is the case of Abu Majid; he recounted to me, as if by rote, all the historical events that took place in Lubyia in the past two hundred years. He remembered who arrived first and who followed, as well as all that happened in and around the village. He talked for hours, and when I had no more cassettes to tape on, he said to me, "If you are tired now you are welcome to come back tomorrow." More than twelve hours of taping over a two-week period had not tired him out. The people who come to listen to him highly enjoy the emotional way in which he recounts the history of the village; his narrative is interspersed with singing and entertaining episodes from the lives of the people of the village. On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of al-Nakba, many newspapers and radio stations interviewed him, and when at times he could not remember certain dates, there

was always Abu Sameeh standing on guard, ready to immediately correct him.

The five historical events that elderly Lubyans most vividly remember and most often recount include:

1. *The battle of Hittin that took place on the fields of Lubyia in the year 1187*

The name Lubyia appears as early as the Middle Ages as the battlefield where the European Crusaders were defeated on 4 July 1187. Although named after the heights of Hittin, the actual battle was fought on the land of Lubyia. After this decisive battle, other cities fell to the Muslim forces, one after the other, including Jerusalem, which fell on Friday, 2 October 1187. Lubyia was well known for its water resources, as was nearby Hittin. Salah al-Din, the Kurdish Muslim leader, had established his headquarters south of Lubyia, in Kufr Sabt, where he could clearly observe the battle. Actually, when the Crusaders no longer had access to the water sources of Lubyia, Hittin, and Tiberias, they surrendered after losing a fierce final battle that weakened the power of their attack. The Crusaders had attempted during the battle to reach the large reservoirs in both Tur'an and Lubyia, but found them empty.<sup>10</sup> "Damia," one of the famous fields of Lubyia, is said to get its name from the blood which watered the fields ("dam" in Arabic means blood).

The famous historian, Ibn al-Athir (1160–1232; 555–630 hijri), described the battle as follows: "Those who saw the dead thought that there were no prisoners, and those who saw the prisoners thought that there was no one killed."<sup>11</sup> The battle plan shows the paths of withdrawal of the Crusaders and the road Salah al-Din followed to Tiberias, which he conquered on July 5, to Akka, which he conquered on July 10, and to Jerusalem, which he conquered on Friday 2 October 1187.

A teacher from Lubyia, Abu Isam, provided me with another geographical and historical reference to the battle Salah al-Din fought on Lubyia's land:

North of Lubyia is a land called al-Rik where the battle between Salah al-Din and the Crusaders took place. This is what was written by Hilal Ibn Shaddad in his book *Tarikh Salah al-Din* [The History of Salah al-Din]. Hilal accompanied Salah al-Din on all his battles, and in the battle of Hittin, he wrote in detail of the tactics Salah al-Din employed, for example, how cutting off the water supply from the springs of Hittin played a fundamental role in the victory, because the army of the Crusaders was thirsty and the weather was hot. Among the prisoners was Arnaud, leader of the castle at al-Karak (located today in Jordan), from where he used to harass the pilgrims, and once imprisoned the sister of Salah al-Din. That was the reason why Salah al-Din killed him, refusing him the mercy he granted to other imprisoned leaders.

2. *Lubyia as the birthplace of Abu Bakr al-Lubyani*

Lubyia is the birthplace of Abu Bakr al-Lubyani (Abu Bakr Abdel-Rahman Bin Rahhal Bin Mansour Al-Lubyani), a famous Muslim scholar of the fifteenth century, who taught Islamic religious sciences in Damascus. He was known as the "Fikhist and Muslim's Mufti," according to the Tarajim al-Siyar.

3. *The death of Damascus Governor Suleiman Pasha in Lubyia in 1743*

The third important historical incident was the death of the leader of the province of Damascus, Suleiman Pasha al-Atheem. He died on 24 August 1743 while on his way to Deir Hanna to challenge the dissident Dhahir al-Omar, who had refused to pay taxes to the central government in Damascus.<sup>12</sup> (Ironically, the majority of Lubyans who stayed in Israel after Lubyia's destruction are now living in Deir Hanna.) Dhahir al-Omar became one of the most powerful leaders in the area, especially after annexing Akka, Haifa, Jaffa, and the whole area around Lubyia, Safforia, Shafa'Amr, Tiberias, and 'Ajloun. One of the titles of Dhahir al-Omar was "The Prince of Galilee."

4. *Napoleon's march through Lubyia en route to Akka*

Napoleon Bonaparte's attack on Egypt and Syria (1798–1801) marked the beginning of the struggle between the French and British in the Middle East, which lasted more than a century. The successor to Dhahir al-Omar, Ahmad Basha al-Jazzar (1722–1804), succeeded in defending Akka against the French (the British sided with al-Jazzar), who succeeded in occupying Safad and Nazareth. The Ottoman forces, arriving from Damascus, occupied Tiberias and the village of Lubyia, but were defeated near Mount Tabor (southwest of Lubyia). The French burned many villages on their way through the Lubyia area to besiege Akka. Nine consecutive attacks failed to defeat al-Jazzar. (The first attack on Akka took place on 28 March 1799).<sup>13</sup> Napoleon gave up the siege, and ordered his forces to return to Egypt. It was the beginning of a new era of conflict in the region, between the emerging powers of the industrial revolution in Europe.<sup>14</sup>

5. *Lubyia and Khalil Ibrahim Azzam*

The leader of al-Jazzar's artillery forces, Khalil Ibrahim Azzam, was an officer from Lubyia; Abu Isam wrote the following story concerning the family of the officer, al-Shanashri, to which he also belongs:

The al-Shanashri family was known because of its influence in the area; for example, Khalil Ibrahim Azzam was an artillery officer in the army of al-Jazzar.<sup>15</sup> He was well known for his role in the battle of the latter against Napoleon, but later on disagreed with him and al Jazzar imprisoned his father Ibrahim

Azzam for a ransom, which Azzam refused to pay. While in prison his father met the prince Yousef al-Shihabi, then governor of Lebanon. The guards found a paper in the latter's food on which Azzam promises to free both the prince and his father from captivity. Azzam deserted and fled with a contingent of soldiers, and al Jazzar followed him to Lubyia, partly destroying the village in revenge. I [Abu Isam wrote] have been told by elderly people who were present when Lubyia was destroyed by al Jazzar forces that the villagers have always been able to communicate with each other by mimicking the sound of birds and animals so as to escape from al Jazzar's men.

### **Lubyia and Lubyians Today**

Today, Lubyia has become a "Promenade Park" named "South African Forest." Forestation of the land was financed by South African and Rhodesian donors as part of a wider strategy to erase and conceal the memory of hundreds of Palestinian villages destroyed during and after the 1948 war in Palestine. As with other villages, demolition followed by dense forestation became the best way to obliterate Lubyia's narrative and history.

The name "Lubyia," which had existed for hundred of years, was transformed to "Lavie." On 8 February 1949, Y.A. Arikha, secretary of the special committee established by the Israeli government to replace Arabic place names with Hebrew names, addressed the religious "pioneers" at the agricultural centre of the Poel Ha Mizrahi:

We have the honour of informing you that at its meeting yesterday, the names committee discussed the selection of an appropriate name for your settlement which is going to be established on the land belonging to Lubyia in Lower Galilee. After a thorough discussion, the committee decided to select for your settlement the historical place name from the Second Temple period "Lavie". . . . It is worth noting that aside from the historical considerations, the name Lavie symbolizes the revival of the Jewish people and the establishment of Israel their land.<sup>16</sup>

While the original inhabitants of Lubyia were barred from returning to their village, the new kibbutz built on land where Lubyia once stood absorbed Jewish immigrants from Britain.

The reinvention and reinterpretation of religious mythology is an ever-available tool to justify one's actions and to abolish, for pure political reasons, the heritage of others. Israeli historiographers sought to justify, through their victorious narrative, the suppression of another people's history, the razing of Lubyia's houses, and the severance of the link between a people's identity and origin, and the obliteration of its historiography. The natural response of the defeated and the repressed is to struggle to revive, reshape,

and retain the past, through reliving its social and cultural experiences, recounting its oral history through anecdotal reminiscences, and passing on songs, proverbs, and jokes from one generation to the other.

Although two generations have not been born in Lubyia, in exile their main objective is still to return one day to their original land. This was the answer given by the majority of the seven hundred young, middle-aged, and elderly people from Lubyia. What are the present and past social and historical factors and experiences that influenced this desire? Many Lubyians who had never seen their village now return to visit the village; this is possible, as it was for me, only because they are newly naturalized as Danes, Canadians, Americans, Swedes, Germans, and other nationalities. In an interview with Denmark's radio, standing amid the ruins of his house in Lubyia, an old man who had returned after forty-six years in exile said: "I will never exchange the chance to pitch a tent on the ruins of my house here with all the palaces of the Queen of Denmark . . . and if there is one wish I would want fulfilled, it would be to die here right now, where I am standing, rather than to leave this place again."<sup>17</sup> The old man, who had spent thirty years of his life in his village, had obtained from the Israeli Embassy a tourist visa valid for only one month. To obtain another, he would have had to leave Israel and apply for a new visa, which would have taken six to nine months to process, if he was lucky enough to be granted one again.

Research and statistics on Lubyia have clearly shown that the grounds on which Lubyia stood, and 93 per cent of its land, are still vacant and unused. Its fields, however, are planted for the benefit of a few hundred settlers living in Kibbutz Lavie.<sup>18</sup> According to international law and UN resolutions, all the contracts of sale which were signed and sealed by two official Jewish organizations and based on the Law of Absentees of 1950, do not legally deprive Lubyians and their descendants of their right to their property, even if they left their county to escape war and for fear for their lives. The list of the people whose land was confiscated (240 people) is a documentary witness to the rights of those concerned. There were a few people (not exceeding ten individuals, according to the interviewees) who sold their land, either by mortgaging it, or directly to one of the Jewish organizations. Documents and interviews revealed that only 8 per cent of Lubyia's land was owned by Jews during the Ottoman period and under the British Mandate.<sup>19</sup> This percentage is what the Jews themselves quoted when claiming their share during the first act of sale concluded between Jewish buyers and Abdel-Ghani Beidoun in 1886, without the direct consent of the Lubyians.

Concerning the peace process, 81 per cent of those interviewed abroad were not satisfied with the Declaration of

Principles signed between the PLO and Israel in 1993. On the other hand, the majority of Lubyans inside Israel (75 per cent) were more positive towards the eventual establishment of a Palestinian state and the implementation of the right of return. There was unanimous agreement among all generations of Lubyans, inside and outside Israel, concerning the right of return to Lubyans and the rejection of the idea of compensation. Those who were optimistic about the peace process expected a positive outcome from the negotiations between the Committee on the Rights of Refugees and Israel. The pessimistic outlook was more prevalent among the older generation than the young one; however, the hope of returning one day to their homeland overall has diminished dramatically in the last few years.<sup>20</sup>

Although they all came from the same village, the daily life of Lubyans in Israel, for example, is different from the life of those in Denmark, Jordan or Lebanon. Lubyans living in Israel were totally isolated from their families in the diaspora for the first eighteen years after the Nakba, i.e. from 1948 until the end of emergency military rule in Palestine in 1966. Prior to 1967, very few persons, not exceeding ten in total, were granted visas to visit their families in Israel. Now, however, Lubyans from the second and third generations are visiting their families as well as the ruins of their village, thanks to their new European citizenship that makes it possible for them to travel without the need for prior permission from the Israeli authorities. The majority of some five hundred Lubyans living inside Israel work in construction and still hold onto traditional family connections as the basic unit at the heart of their social network. Marriages still take place among Lubyans families, with very few exceptions to the rule.

After the Oslo Agreement, a conference that brought together Palestinians living in Israel, also called Arab Israelis, was convened to ask for the right of the refugees living inside Israel to their property. Being Israeli citizens, they are trying to achieve their goals through legal means. (A Lubyans is an elected member of this committee).<sup>21</sup>

The majority of the Lubyans who had settled in Lebanon emigrated to Europe in the past ten years. There are now about two thousand of them living mainly in Denmark, Sweden, and Germany. After their settlement in these foreign countries, the main question that still worries them is that of their personal and cultural identity. The official policies of these countries, if any, have fallen short of achieving their declared goal of integrating the refugees. Following the interviewees' accounts, the following points emerged as the major concerns and worries of Lubyans in particular, and other Palestinian refugees in general:

1. The refugees now live in a political and cultural vacuum after leaving an actively revolutionary socie-

ty to settle into a remote and detached one. This vacuum was filled with religious discourse, which produced the Islamist phenomenon, in lieu of the nationalistic atmosphere that dominated their lives in the sixties, seventies, and eighties.

2. The little information in the official Danish school curricula about the roots of the Palestinian problem and the plight of the refugees has caused tremendous frustration among the young generation. It would be very helpful to start teaching the history of Palestine in a more objective manner that would involve Palestinian students in talking about and rewriting their own history. This would also give them the chance to air their own version of events, and would undoubtedly play a fundamental role in creating a more stable social and psychological atmosphere for the young refugees and help ease their frustrations.
3. The lack of collective traditional, national, and cultural activities among the refugees is strengthening their feeling of isolation at the expense of more involvement in local European social activities. Only the young and the students have a real possibility of breaking the ice of integration, through language and direct contact. The only outlet available for the older and middle generations is the consolidation of their internal social networks. It may be true that the inclination among the refugees to live in close communities seems to be contradictory to the spirit of integration; nevertheless, it is a necessary development at this stage. It helps them fill the gap between the generations, on the one hand, and between them and the Europeans, on the other. The eventual possible disintegration of families and the weak personalities that could emerge as a result of alienation will not contribute positively to the process of integration. The few tragic episodes in which some refugees were implicated in Denmark show that a weakness in the internal social structure of the refugee family and community could result in violence towards "the others." The study I have conducted on the three tragic episodes that took place in Denmark shows the existence of deep rifts within the family unit itself, and in the relationships of those involved in the incidents.
4. The sanctity of the traditional family unit is diminishing drastically, especially among the young. The struggle between the young and their parents, under the liberal laws of Europe, pushes many refugee parents to insist on more conservative lifestyles. Religion, for example, is seen as a means of personal protection against an alien culture and against a

general tendency among the young to forge and consolidate their own characters and personal identity. Young women are generally more inclined to follow their parents' model, except in a very few cases where Danish social authorities had to give protection to fleeing Palestinian girls. Young men, on the other hand, are split between the two modes of life; the majority, 82 per cent, chose to abide by the dictates of Islamic religious practice and discourse, while a few, 3 per cent, chose to delve into the "liberal" life of European cities. (I have conducted interviews with 150 persons, both male and female, about their religious beliefs and practices.) In the Århus community in Denmark, 0.7 per cent out of two thousand Palestinians showed signs of, and tendencies towards, violence.

5. The decision by the Lebanese authorities in 1995 to prevent any Palestinian holding a Lebanese refugee document to return to Lebanon without a visa had a very negative impact on Palestinian refugees in general. (This decision was cancelled in 1999.) The impossibility of returning to their original homes in Palestine, compounded by the decision of the Lebanese authorities and the lack of any social or political structure to deal with their daily problems in exile, has created a state of scepticism and instability among the refugees. The compliments the refugees express about their host countries conceal their despair and frustration towards the authorities that close the door on their personal and collective rights. Insecurity and depression are predominant in the Palestinian community in exile. Out of approximately fifteen thousand Palestinian refugees in Denmark alone, only 6 per cent are officially registered as employed.

### Conclusion

The reconstruction, albeit on a small scale, of the structure of a demolished village, Lubyā, which is also a process of reconstructing a microcosmic piece of historiography, took almost three and one-half years to complete and has not been an easy task to accomplish. Various pieces of information were collected and pieced together like a mosaic.

Modern history, especially of the Middle East, involves many controversial issues and divergent claims by Palestinians and Israelis about the issue of land and the interpretation of historical events. Nevertheless, through my research on Lubyā I have tried to present Lubyā's history objectively, basing my conclusions on information I acquired from more than seven hundred interviews (primarily with Lubyans, but also with Israeli Jews who fought in the 1948

war), the literature on Lubyā, British Mandate documents, and Israeli archives.

The brief historical incidents, such as Salah al-Din's battle on Lubyā's fields in 1187, the death of Suleiman Pasha in Lubyā in 1743, Napoleon's march through it to besiege Akka in 1799, and the partial destruction of Lubyā by Ahmad Basha al-Jazzar as revenge for the desertion of a Lubyā officer from his army, were presented to give the reader an idea about the historical importance and the social continuity that underlies the village's history.

The past peaceful coexistence between the Palestinians and the original Jews of Palestine prior to 1948, and its implications for the future, were clearly demonstrated through interviews with Jews and Palestinians. Interviews with two former Hagana soldiers who were involved in the occupation of Lubyā, and the accounts of the main leaders of the Jewish force that occupied the village, clearly show that the Lubyans fought with all they had in terms of simple and basic weaponry against a well-equipped army supported by airplanes, cannons, and armoured vehicles.<sup>22</sup> The official story of the fall of Lubyā that appears in *The History of the War of Independence* erroneously reads: "Lubyā fell without fighting, and the road to Tiberias was open to us." Lubyā's struggle to defend itself and its existence is yet more contradictory evidence to the official Israeli story that the Palestinians left their homes following orders from Arab leaders.

Memories of these battles and their annual commemoration by both Palestinians and Israelis have acted as a historical register of events and also as an education for both peoples. The steps on the road to a permanent and peaceful solution, and the cornerstone of future reconciliation between the parties, must be built on the recognition of the facts and the events as they happened, and not on the slanted narrative of politicians and their self-interested interpretation of them. Therefore I recorded with utmost accuracy, and to the best of my ability, facts about the events that took place in and around the village of Lubyā up to the time of its demolition, as they were narrated to me.

Finally, I hope that this study fulfils a regional, national, and international need for additional historical, social, legal, political, and cultural data on the status of the Palestinian refugees. There is still room for more research on the same subject and it is sorely needed, especially since some central topics, such as cultural identity and integration, need more time to research and investigate. The issue of the Palestinian refugees was, and still is, one of the main sources of unrest in the Middle East, and without serious attempts at addressing it the circle of violence will continue unabated, not only in the Middle East, but eventually also in Europe. Out of twenty-two million refugees in the world today (according to UNHCR), five million are Palestinians.

Notes

1. UNGA 194(III), 11 December 1948. Operative paragraph 11 reads: "... refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return, and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible." Zafarul-Islam Khan, *Palestine Documents* (India: Pharos Media & Publishing LTD, 1998), 279.
2. Mahmoud Issa, *Palestinians from Lubyia in Denmark: Dreams and Realities* (Copenhagen: The Documentation Centre, 1995).
3. The project was supported by the Humanistic Research Committee in Denmark (twenty months worth of work) and the Danish Institute in Damascus (nine months worth of work).
4. Benny Morris, *Tikkun Ta'ut* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 2000). Israeli forces entered the village of Palestinian Safaf on 30 October 1948. According to Morris's description fifty-two men were tied with a rope and dropped into a well and shot. There are also reported cases of rape. Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem 1947-49* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 350.
5. Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936-1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 27.
6. See Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978), 6-7.
7. One of the donors is Hans Riesenfeld from Zimbabwe (previously Rhodesia).
8. Swedenburg, 5, quoting Alistair Thomson.
9. To what extent this map is correct, how credible it is, and what role it played in the collective consciousness of the community and the self is discussed in a special section in the larger narrative report about genealogical claims.
10. *Al-Ma'osoa 'a al-Falastinia* (Beirut: Encyclopedia Palaestina Cooperation, 1990), Vol. II, 408.
11. *Ibid.*, 511, cited from *Ibn al-Athir: Alkamil*, Vol. II, 532-37.
12. *Ibid.*, 834, quoting al-Bidairi: *The Daily Incidents of Damascus*, 42-47.
13. Mohammad Omar Hamada, *A'lam Filastin*, Part I (Dar Kuttaiba, 1985), 162-63.
14. *Ibid.*, 720-27.
15. Ahmad Pasha al-Jazzar was known in history as the man who fought against Napoleon and prevented him from taking Akka.
16. Letter by Y.A. Arikha, secretary of the "Names Committee," dated 8 February 1949, Central Zionist Archives (in Hebrew; on file with the author).
17. Quoted from the documentary film "Our Ancestor's Land," which appeared on Danish Television DR, on 31 March 1995. (The film is on file with the author).
18. Recent research shows that most of the land that belongs to the refugees is still empty or used by only 2.7 per cent of the Israeli population. For more details, see Salman Abu Sitta, *The*

*Right of Return: Sacred, Legal and Possible* (London: Palestinian Return Centre, 2000).

19. The land ownership map of 1944-45 shows that out of a total of 39,629 dunums of land belonging to Lubyia, Palestinian Arabs owned 32,895; the Jews, 1,051; and 5,683 was public property. Stein W. Kenneth confirmed in his book *The Land Question in Palestine 1917-1939* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1984), that only 2 million dunums out of a total of 26.3 million dunums, which is the estimated area of Palestine, were bought by Jewish organizations by 1948. Different sources also put the percentage of land sold to Jews since the beginning of the land purchase process at the end of nineteenth century and up to 1948 at approximately 6.3 per cent.
20. In an interview with the head of the Palestinian Refugee Committee, Elias Sanbar, he admitted that four years of negotiations with Israel ended with nothing. Palestinians had insisted on the implementation of UN resolutions, especially 194, and Israel continued to refuse to recognize the validity of those resolutions concerning the right of return of the 1948 refugees. Interview, conducted by Nuri al-Jarrah, in *al-Hayat*, nos. 12350-12451, 18 and 19 December 1996.
21. The meeting took place on 11 March 1995 in Kasr al-Salam. Representatives from twenty-nine villages participated. The elected committee is comprised of fifteen members.
22. *The Battles of 1948* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defence, 1955), 216-41. The assessment by the leader of the attack on Lubyia, Jacov Dror, however, demonstrates that the Lubyans themselves, without support from the Arab Salvation Army, and before the arrival of help from other villages, had succeeded in repulsing the first main Jewish attack on their village. According to the Israeli military assessment of the battle, Lubyia was the first place in Palestine to have repulsed the Jewish forces. Only on the third attempt, and after the occupation of the nearby cities of Tiberias and Nazareth, was Lubyia conquered after three consecutive days of shelling (18-21 July 1948).

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