

Palestinian Catastrophe: Myths Revisited

By [Ramzy Baroud](#)

Global Research, May 23, 2006

23 May 2006

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

Palestinians and their faithful supporters throughout the world commemorated May 15, as Nakba Day, the day when Israel was declared a state atop the ruins of Palestinian homes and hundreds of ethnically cleansed towns and villages, 58 years ago.

Many writers, mostly Palestinians, attempted to once again articulate a solid position, reinforce an alternative reading to an intentionally confused history, reminisce on what was lost and on the very little that remains.

The ever-lucid Ghada Karmi relived her loss, for the 58th time: “Though a child, I vividly remember the panic and misery of that flight from our home in Jerusalem on an April morning in 1948, with the scent of spring in the air. Palestine by then had become a raging battleground as Jews fought to seize our land in the wake of the 1947 UN partition resolution. My parents decided to evacuate us temporarily. ‘We will return,’ they insisted, ‘the world will not let such injustice happen!’” (KT, May 17)

Karma Nabulsi wrote in the Guardian, “Nakba day has now become a profoundly political event — unlike other cultural and social manifestations of our national identity — because it is all about resistance to the current Palestinian situation rather than enshrining past memories of victimhood.”

Both Karmi and Nabulsi, like others, revisited the past with an eye on the present: the daily killings, the land confiscation, the illegal settlements, the ongoing refugee struggle, the world’s apathy, in fact, the active Western participation in pacifying, if not subduing Palestinians and their rightful demands.

But May 15 should serve a greater function than an opportunity for personal reflection or political commentary. Indeed, for Nakba Day to attain its true merit, it should be regarded as a day when many myths have been shattered and a new cruel reality has been born.

For instance, from that day on, few would argue — save illusion-stricken Israeli historians — that the purpose of the incessant, mass-Jewish migration to Palestine in the first half of the 20th century was ultimately peaceful, or that Palestinians have ‘exaggerated’ the extent to which the British were prepared to go to make a Jewish state on conquered Palestinian land a reality.

Even fewer would contend the pathetic state of affairs in neighboring Arab capitals upon the seizure of Palestine: the lack of preparedness, the absence of genuine desire to forge a unified Arab front to fend off the gathering dangers.

Many myths of course are still buried, for their embarrassing details will stand at odds with

official Arab, Israeli and Western narratives. As apologetic as he may have been and despite his tireless, yet polite effort to spare Israel's 'founding fathers' the blame for the Palestinian plight, Israeli historian Benny Morris was painfully, yet thoroughly correct in his assessment of Palestinian and Arab affairs at the time, in his volume, the Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem: the Palestinian internal divisions, the regional power struggles between Jordan and Egypt on one hand, and Syria and Jordan on the other, the lack of a unified Arab voice to address the Western bloc, unequivocally sympathetic to Israel, and many more; all are still tabooed subjects in the official Arab narrative.

Taking advantage of official Arab failure to champion a solid narrative of their own, or at least to defend their scattered, inconsistent readings of history, Israel had the unique opportunity to rewrite the history of that period altogether, labeling genocide a 'success story' of hardworking European Jewry, who, in contrast to the ineffective Arabs, made the desert bloom. Of course, little was said of how the exploitation of Palestinian laborers, working under the most inhumane conditions, brought about the "miracle of the Jewish state".

According to that skewed narrative, Palestinians were worthless nomads, only mentioned in the context of unjustified violence and terrorism, as a hurdle in the path of Western civilization and progress: and of which Israel is the ultimate embodiment. Israelis often reverted to morally less taxing claims: Palestinians "simply didn't exist", declared former Israeli leader, Golda Meir.

If one's enemy is a non-person, one is not at fault for tormenting him or her; a non-existing being has no faculties to understand suffering or to express pain; thus the situation demands no sense of urgency or need for redress. Only within that context, it would become possible, for Israel to ethnically cleanse almost an entire nation, massacre and maim uncountable lives in the process, and yet still claim "purity of arms."

May 15 should be commemorated as an opportunity to boldly examine old and newly concocted myths — and they are plentiful — not just of 1948 and its historic context, but of every year since then, if indeed, one wishes to move beyond mere rumination and reflection.

May 15, should be a day that audaciously challenges common myths that insist on creating a shadowy, as opposed to an honest depiction of reality: is it not fraudulent to still talk of an 'Arab-Israeli conflict', if the Arab element has been reduced to beleaguered Palestinians in the Occupied Territories? How can one still speak of 'Arab-Muslim solidarity' with the Palestinians, if sick Palestinian kids are perishing in Gaza hospitals due to the lack of basic medicines as some Arab capitals squander billions of dollars on economically unviable projects? What official solidarity can one speak of, when some Arab governments refuse to meet with elected Palestinian officials, while eagerly jumping at the first opportunity to congratulate a narrowly elected Israeli government and line up for future 'summits' with its right-wing leaders?

Is it not self-deceiving (and disheartening) to still circulate such terminology in official speeches, Press conferences and media, while Palestinian refugees are marginalized and isolated in refugee camps within the borders of some Arab states (with Iraq being the most recent, tragic addition)?

Coupled with the Israeli myth of "security" — among hundreds more — aimed at usurping

more Palestinian land, and the American myth of the 'honest broker, bringing "liberty, democracy and freedom" — not withstanding Palestinians' own myths — the Middle East's prime conflict is at risk of entirely succumbing to distortions and misrepresentations.

If May 15 is of any value at all, these unremitting fables and more should be fearlessly confronted, not merely to rock the boat, but to allow for an honest and truly representative reading of the past and the present, and to practically prepare for the future. Without such clarity, there can be no 'Palestinian solidarity', in the true sense, no earnest pursuit for peace, and no meaningful justice, thus relegating May 15, as a day of defeat and despair, and that is, in my opinion, the true catastrophe.

-Arab American journalist Ramzy Baroud teaches mass communication at Australia's Curtin University of Technology, Malaysia Campus. He is the author of Writings on the Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People's Struggle (Pluto Press, London.)

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [Ramzy Baroud](#), Global Research, 2006

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Ramzy Baroud](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca