
Lead Scholars/Editors: Prof. Sami Adwan, Bethlehem University & Prof. Dan Bar-On, Ben Gurion University

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A project of PRIME, Peace Research Institute in the Middle East

PRIME’s Mission: PRIME is a non-governmental, nonprofit organization established by Palestinian and Israeli researchers in 1998 with the help of the Peace Research Institute in Frankfurt, Germany. PRIME’s purpose is to pursue mutual coexistence and peace-building through joint research and outreach activities.

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INTRODUCTION

Schoolchildren studying history in times of war or conflict learn only one side of the story — their own — which is, of course, considered to be the ‘right’ one. Teaching is often doctrinaire, its purpose to justify one side while presenting a negative portrait of the other. One side’s hero is the other side’s monster.

Research informs us that textbooks usually focus on the conflict, with its human losses and suffering, while periods of peace or coexistence between the two sides are neglected. In a certain respect teachers become the nation’s cultural emissaries and are expected to emphasize the goodness of their own side versus the evil of the other.

We believe that teachers can be trained to be emissaries for peace-building, to teach both sides’ narratives and to allow their pupils to question what they learn regarding both narratives. A peace agreement, of course, makes it easier for the teachers to do so, for in the normal course of events nations then change their educational curricula to reflect a culture of peace rather than one of war.

At PRIME we appreciate the importance of education and school textbooks in peace-building, and we are well aware that the situation between Palestinians and Israelis these days is not a peaceful one. Therefore, developing a booklet that includes the Palestinian and Israeli narratives of three important historical events - the Balfour Declaration, the 1948 war and the 1987 Palestinian Intifada - has not been an easy task.

In this project, six high school history teachers from each side worked together to develop the two narratives, which were translated into Arabic or Hebrew so the booklet could be published in both languages. Our purpose was not to criticize or to change the narratives, nor is it realistic at this stage to develop a single, joint narrative.

This booklet gives both teachers and pupils the opportunity to learn the other’s narratives. It was designed so that on each page, in between the Palestinian and Israeli narratives, there is space for pupils to write their own comments. In December 2002 the teachers who helped develop the project began teaching the narratives to their 9th and 10th grade classes.

We know that this process is not without problems or difficulties, and consider it to be an experiment in education. We will follow-up and draw conclusions about the success of the project by noting the reactions and comments of pupils and teachers. This data will enable us to recommend the future development and revision of school textbooks and teaching methods.

We regard history as an attempt to build a better future by ‘looking under every rock’ rather than rather than throwing them at each other. We hope you — teachers and pupils — will share our vision and join us in undertaking the challenge.

Sami Adwan, Dan Bar-On, Adnan Musallam and Eyal Naveh

Yousuf Tumaizi (1957-2002) was born in the village of Idna. He was arrested more than 20 times and spent several years in Israeli prisons. He had BA in education.

He became a peace activist and took part in projects and activities the object of which was to build peace, understanding and tolerance.

He died on August 19, 2002, the first day of the third seminar for this project, which he had planned to attend. He is survived by a wife and five children, the youngest just four months old at the time of his death.

From the very beginning he was a most enthusiastic supporter of this project.
The purpose of Plan Daled was to shore up control of the areas designated in the partition plan as part of the Jewish state, plus Jerusalem and the road leading to it. In the course of 'Operation Nachshon,' the name for part of the plan, the Hagana (especially members of the Palmach – the offensive arm of the Hagana) captured three villages on the road to Jerusalem, so the road was opened for a time allowing supply convoys to reach the besieged city. In the course of Plan Daled several mixed cities were also captured: Haifa, Jaffa, Tiberias and Safed. The actions of Plan Daled broke the military initiative of the Palestinian Arabs and hastened their flight from their towns and villages.

Arab refugees

During the very first stages of the war Arab residents began leaving their communities in the land of Israel. The first were those who were well-off economically (Benny Morris, The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949, pp. 51, 67). The result was a significant weakening of the entire Arab community. The Arab leader Haj Amin Al-Husseini, was in Egypt at that time. He did not oppose this development as he thought that the temporary departure of civilians would ease the way for the Arab fighting forces to win.

Most of the Jewish military and civilian leaders in the land welcomed the flight of the Arabs for political reasons (that the future Jewish state would include as small an Arab minority as possible); and for military reasons (to distance a hostile population from the field of battle). During the course of Plan Daled, Hagana forces began to deport Arabs. However, not all Arabs were deported and there were no high-level political orders to do so, although military commanders were given freedom to act as they saw fit. Thus the flight was due to deporting and frightening the Arabs, and because of their own fears without regard to Israeli actions. During the course of the war about 370 Arab villages were destroyed.

Arab armies which entered the war on May 15, 1948. The armed forces of five Arab countries totaled some 21,000 soldiers, plus 10,000 volunteers of the Rescue Army and the Holy Jihad, against 65,000 Jewish soldiers.

Events of the 1948 Catastrophe, including eyewitness reports

The results of the catastrophe, from which Palestinians still suffer, are not simple at all. The word "catastrophe" (nakba) actually expresses what happened to this nation, which was subjected to massacres about which only a little is known. There are still facts which are so dreadful that pens cannot write them. What happened to the Palestinian people is the assassination of rights, murder of the land and uprooting of human beings. This did not occur by chance.

The catastrophe was the result of continual subjugation, killing, executions, arrests, exile, and conspiracy - international and Arab - against Palestinians; it was the accumulation of ignorance, weakness and anarchy within Palestinian society which had to contend with Zionist bands supported by the British. On April 19, 1948, while attacking the Palestinian village Zir'in, north of Jenin, Palmach forces [part of the Haganah], issued a command: "With the occupation of Zir'in most of the houses should be destroyed; however several houses should be left standing as bivouac areas."

David Ben-Gurion said: "We should destroy Arab pockets (in Jewish areas), such as Lod, Ramleh, Beisan and Zir'in, which will constitute a danger when we invade and thus may keep our forces engaged."

The destruction of 418 Palestinian villages inside the green line [pre-67 Israeli border], concealing the landmarks of Palestinian life and the massacres against the Palestinian people are the best evidence for the brutality to which Palestinians were exposed. They were dispersed throughout the world.
PALESTINIAN NARRATIVE

One of the most notorious massacres was the one that occurred in Deir Yassin on April 9, 1948; more than 100 martyrs were killed and dozens were wounded. The remaining inhabitants were forced to leave the villages after they had been exposed to the most barbaric kinds of torture and immoral and inhuman practices. One of the young men of Deir Yassin village reported what he had been told by his mother:

"My mother escaped with my two small brothers, one-year old and two-years old. My aunt and their small children were also with her. When the Jews met them on the road, they wanted to kill my small brothers and my aunt's children. My mother and my aunts started to beg them and said: 'We will give you all the gold and the money we have, but do not kill our children.' The Jews did not respond to them and they killed my brothers and my cousins. They said: 'Now, go away and tell everyone what you have seen.'"