

Interview with Mustafa Abulibdeh

June 9, 2023

By Rawan Abhari

Q: How old were you in 1948?

A: I was six years old in 1948 when my family fled, on foot ,from our Palestinian village , Sabbarin, 40 kilometers south of Haifa city.

Q: Can you share your personal experiences or stories about what life was like in Palestine during the period of 1948 when Zionist forces were forcing out Palestinians?

A: During the creation of the Israeli state in 1948, Zionist militias attacked Palestinian cities and villages and destroyed more than 530 Palestinian villages. About 13,000 Palestinians were killed and more than 750,000 were violently expelled from their homes, becoming refugees

People left their homes with a belief that they will back in a few weeks' time when the Arab armies fighting Israel will decide the fate of war.

While some villages were partially destroyed, other hundreds were completely erased by the Israelis. Ours was one them

Q: What are some of the collective memories and narratives that have been passed down in your community regarding the events of 1948? How are these memories and narratives preserved and shared?

A: Jewish Irgun, Haganah and Stern Gang militias committed in 1948 a series of documented massacres and mass atrocities in a number of Palestinian villages to frighten people and drive them out. The American leading newspapers reported at the time some details of those massacres

Q: In your opinion, does the common narrative around racial justice and equity reflect the experiences of Palestinians during that time? How has this narrative evolved over the years, and how do you think it is perceived today?

A: All refugees, whether those who lived in camps or sought refuge in the homes of their relatives far from the fighting sites, or those who migrated to East Jordan, Syria or Lebanon, did share bitter memories of racial injustice, plus hunger, nakedness, cold and disease... a life of extreme cruelty that was not mitigated by relief efforts of UNRWA established by the United Nations.

This is the NAKBA, the accumulated black narrative which have become a collective national memory. Add to it "Al Awdah", the political insistence on the "right of return" and you will have what I see as the Palestinian collective memory, morality and identity.

Q: Who are considered the keepers of the memories within your community? How is the narrative of the events in 1948 passed on to younger generations?

A: Only two of our living family have eye witnessed the Nakba and hold original memories of their village. The rest are new generations who developed an amazing setups of political, cultural and moral mechanisms to keep their case alive and never forget what happened, even when the Palestinian leadership fails them. My father owned some 400dunams (100 acres) of land in Sabbarin. To this day, we still hold the official ownership documents, and will keep holding them>