

Abstract

This study presents images of Palestine in 2008 as expressed in the narratives of two groups of refugees who live in Al-Yarmouk (Syria) and Qalandia (Palestine) refugee camps. The study's aim is not restricted to presenting a social and political documentation of the Palestinian history as narrated by 82 refugees varying in age, sex, and in their social, political and cultural backgrounds only, but it also aims at examining the refugees' perceptions and understanding of the Palestinian history through a comparative analysis of their narratives. In its attempt to achieve a thorough understanding of the process of narratives' formations the study makes use of conceptual frameworks on the formation of national narratives, social imaginary and the collective processes in the construction of meaning and the way in which individuals interpret and assign meaning to past events and current experiences and how these affect their future perspectives. The study also makes use of theoretical contributions about identity transformation in colonial conditions and the dynamics of power and resistance of dominant ideologies and the concepts of alienation.

The analysis of the narratives' content led to 8 different patterns of Palestinian narratives that can be grouped to present two main images of Palestine: the reality image and the dream image. It appeared, in chapters 3 and 4 that there is no direct relationship between the location of refugeeness and the narratives' style and content. As both camps contribute to building the two images although the dreamers number in Al-Yarmouk exceeds those in Qalandia.

The reality image that appears in 47 narratives tends to reduce Palestine to one dimension, geography. The content of the narratives constituting this image concentrates on the present and current political possibilities rather than the historical past and future aims. This image is reflected in 4 patterns: the disappointed, the political realist, the imprisoned by external forces imposed by political and media discourses and harsh life under the Israeli occupation and the retreat from the historical to the daily struggle.

While the dream image which appears in 35 narratives adds a historical dimension to the geographical one to create an image of Palestine that is different from the one imposed by external colonial conditions. The narrators' interests in the collective cause are reflected in their personal plans, aims and dreams. These appear in 4 different patterns of narratives: the dreams to restore the old wonderful days, the dreamers who are searching for their Palestine, the dreamers of a better future and the angry dreamers.

Having various types of narratives reveal the different factors that play roles in the refugees lives: the location of refugeeness, generational dimension, social institutions in both Syria and Palestine, in addition to the living experiences of narrators and the effects of the continuous events and happenings on the Palestinian society starting from the direct colonial domination and the hegemony imposed by the ruling authorities, political parties and other institutions like the family, employer or donor

bodies. Another important effect is the u-turn in the official Palestinian discourse after Oslo in addition to the material and psychological conditions of refugeeness and the effects of the different political, cultural and media trends. The effects of these conflicting factors and forces in the minds of refugees appear in different levels in the narratives collected by this research.

Al-Nakba remains the common point of reference in the minds of the refugees I interviewed for this study. It was portrayed as the moment of violent uprootedness from homeland in most of the narratives. However, it turned in some of the narratives to “*Lieux de mémoire*”- *place of memory* as per Pierre Nora, where Al-Nakba became an emblem or an annual event of commemoration of the disaster in an institutional manner. The other event that appears as a tense and stressful point of reference in the narratives is Oslo Accords. Oslo accords are presented in the informal narratives of the refugees I met here as the material embodiment of the break in the image of Palestine between reality and dreams as it is seen nowadays in the formal Palestinian discourse that transformed its political project from liberation to state building.

The majority of the narratives are characterised by anger and refusal, the level of which vary among the 8 patterns of narratives that appeared in this study. Consequently, the image(s) of Palestine that are created here in their critical perspective might not be viewed as formal History, yet it represents the historical conscience of the people who participated and/ or witnessed the real moments of these historical events that are still shaping their lives and those of their descendents.