

Five Keys of Judgment- Truth or Fiction in Autobiographical and Oral History Research. The Palestinians Oral History in Israel

This article presents the problem of the scarcity and even lack of original historical documents related to the Palestinian Arab minority that remained within the borders of the State of Israel, and the necessity for historians to refer under these circumstances to autobiographies and oral history that was collected from the Nakba generation Palestinians who remained within the borders of the State of Israel. The article takes a deductive approach from the particular to the general and proposes a research tool called “Five Keys of Judgment” that supports the critical judgment work and refers to the trustworthiness of the autobiographic documents and oral history, which was already collected by other historians and researchers and now exist in the form of an audio record or written report.

Keywords: *autobiographic research; oral history; selectivity; authenticity; identity voice; language; conditions of engagement with the past; Palestinians in Israel*

Introduction

Historical sources of the Palestinians in Israel in the junction of 1948. The 1948 war was a historic event and a salient temporal point in the national narrative¹ (Berneskoetter, 2014) of both the Palestinians and the Jews. From the perspective of the Jews, it was their independence war and the gathering of the Jewish people; from the Palestinian Arab perspective this war brought upon them destruction and the *Nakba* (a term coined by the Syrian historian, Constantin Zureiq, for describing the depth of the destruction and defeat following the war)² and was the cause for the dispersion of the Palestinian people. On this war junction, writers and prose writers, journalists, intellectuals, historians, academics and others, from both the Jewish and the Palestinian side, have worked vigorously to document and commemorate their people’s history.

From a research standpoint, the first-generation Palestinian historians that were educated in the Israeli Academy, such as Butrus Abu Mannah and Kais Firro, were cautious and preferred to engage in history that does not concern the 1948 war and the Jewish-Palestinian conflict directly. However, it seems that their younger successors, such as Adel Manna, Mustafa Abbasi, Mahmoud Yazbak, and Mustafa Kabha, who were exposed at the Israeli Academy to the richness of the historic research on the Zionist movement and Jewish history,

¹Berneskoetter, F. (2014). Parameters of National Biography. European Journal of International Relations. (20-1). pp 262-288

²Zureik Constantine (1948). *Ma’na al-Nakba* (The Meaning of the Nakba). Beirut: Dar al-‘Ilm l-il-Malayin (Arabic)

have utilized the academic democratization and liberalization given to them and aspired to lead a documentation line of the Palestinian people's history, in the same way as their Jewish counterparts. They also strived to renew and fill the gaps that appeared in the writings of the Palestinian historians, those who wrote on the pre-war period, and on the events of the 1948 war itself, who they themselves witnessed. Most of these historians were exiled outside Palestine, such as Walid Khalidi, Aref al-Aref, Bayan Nuwayhed al-Hout, and others. Much of the gaps were created due to the ethnic and political identity, and social status of these historians, which caused them not to refer, intentionally or not, to certain classes, groups, and individuals that could have complete the historical picture which they have tried to restore. Over time, these Palestinian historians at the Israeli Academy were joined by other Palestinian scholars who were exposed to postmodern social and cultural approaches, and who also wanted to innovate and integrate quantitative comparative approaches based on scientific sampling.

The Palestinian historians in Israel faced a serious problem of scarcity, even to the point of lack of, primary sources on which they could rely; The Palestinian people, who remained within the borders of the State of Israel, were a people in a process of structuring and the formation of social-status and identity, whose memory of the pre-Nakba period experienced acts of banning, repression, distortion and forgetting, deliberate and not-deliberate (Kabha, 2014; Nets-Zehngut and Bar-Tal, 2014; Nets-Zehngut, 2014)³. The few Palestinians (150 Thousand) who remained within the borders of the State of Israel, were mainly fellahs (a class of farmers or agricultural laborers) or remnants of the low bourgeoisie. A large part of them was classified as "inner-refugees" because they were forced by the Jewish army forces, during the 1948 war, to abandon their villages and towns, and to move to places where the State of Israel allowed Arab settlement. The archival documents containing the correspondence between these refugees, and the Minister of Minority Affairs during the early years of the State of Israel, constitute a preliminary source that indicates that these refugees, under the threat of war, did not manage to collect their documents, certificates, pictures and most of their portable memories.⁴

Against the background of the 1948 war, the Jews became the new settlers who took over most of the lands, buildings, streets and property of the Palestinian people. This was one of the reasons why many of the Palestinians' documents and belongings were scattered and lost; another part was

³Nets-Zehngut, R. (2014). "The Israeli and Palestinian collective memories of their conflict: Comparing their characteristics, determinants and implications". *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, 20 (2), 103-121. Nets-Zehngut, R., and Bar-Tal, D. (2014). "Transformation of the official memory of conflicts: A tentative model". *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, 27 (1), 67-91. Kabha, k. (2014). *The Palestinian people: seeking sovereignty and state*. Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

⁴See, for example, Files P-931/6; G-301/82. Catalog. Prime Minister's Office – Advisor of Arab Affairs Office. State Archives. Jerusalem

confiscated by the Israeli authorities and kept in classified warehouses and archives that the researchers had no access to (Sela, 2009).⁵

The State Archives in Jerusalem revealed files that contain evidence on confiscation of Palestinian public and private libraries, mainly those of Jerusalem western neighborhoods of and Jaffa, Haifa, and other cities that were characterized by a diverse ethnic and class population and who enjoyed rich social and cultural life.⁶ The destruction of more than 26 thousand books by the order of the Custodian of Absentees Properties from 1954 (see GL-1429/5 file in State Archives) is a testimony of the loss of primary sources that historians and other researchers could have relied on.

Surprisingly and very paradoxically, the Israel State Archives and the National Library of Israel Archive in Jerusalem (along with archives of mixed cities, the Kibbutz settlement movement, Political movements, and others) after strict censorship, have released and are still releasing original documents (photos, records, letters, diaries, maps, certificates, memoirs, newspapers, notebooks, books, etc.) that belong to Palestinians and constitute primary sources for the use of Palestinian and Jewish historians and researchers.

The difficulty faced by Palestinian historians in Israel did not concern only the loss of physical resources such as land, buildings, property, and documents, but was exacerbated by the lack of memory preservation of the Palestinians, who remained within the State of Israel. With the declaration of independence of the State of Israel, it spurred the building of the state and the narrative and memory of the Jewish people, while making acts to erase, distort, and blur the Palestinian memory; In quite a few cases, the Israeli authorities almost completely destroyed the Arab buildings in the deserted villages (Kabha, 2014), implemented a policy of concealing the history of the Palestinian people from the curricula of Arabs in Israel (Mar'i, 1978⁷; Smootha, 1980)⁸, imposed censorship on the media and press (Kabha and Caspi, 2011), and the geographic and public space in all its forms was Hebraicized (File GL-22167/6, State Archive, Jerusalem), etc.

In the face of a great shortage of primary sources as described above, in the early years of the State of Israel, the narratives written by the Palestinians, and published in the press, were an important source that researchers could use for historical reconstruction. With the establishment of the State of Israel, the government under the auspices of the Histadrut (General Organization of Workers in Israel) supported the distribution of a newspaper in the Arabic language (*Al-Yaum* [Today]) that represented its voice and policy. The government also allowed the re-publish of the communist newspaper "*Al-Ittihad*" (The Union) that was first published during the British Mandate government in 1944. Slowly, after grasping the new reality, the Palestinians in

⁵Sela, Rona (2009). *Made Public – Palestinian Photographs in Military Archives in Israel*. Helena Publishers: Tel-Aviv. (two volumes: first volume – text, second volume – photos).

⁶State Archives. Jerusalem, Files GL-1429/5; G-335/38; G-271/6; G-303/17.

⁷Ma'ri, S. (1978). *Arab Education in Israel*. London, Oxford University Press.

⁸Smootha Sammy (1980). "Existing and alternative policy towards the Arabs in Israel". *Megamot* (26), pp. 7-36. (Hebrew)

Israel who were accustomed to an abundance of cultural life and newspapers sought the publication of two other magazines (*Al-Mujtama* and *Al-Fajr*).⁹ In these newspapers and magazines they published poetry and prose that were first-hand photographic documentation that provided historians and other scholars a picture of the reality of Palestinians in Israel at the intersection of the 1948 war (Touma, 1963, 1965).¹⁰ The difficulty with these sources lies in their limitation in terms of the writers' identity (usually communists or young scholars, who identified with the Israeli government) and in terms of their content that was subjected to Israeli censorship (Kabha, 2004).¹¹

The awakening of the oral history and its presence in the international research arena, the reliance of Jewish historians on oral history (e.g., Bauer, 1970;¹² Cohen, 1984;¹³ Cohen, 2000¹⁴), and the founding of oral documentation centers for the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, and other places,¹⁵ were probably the factors that drew the attention of the Palestinian historians in Israel to the use of oral history as a source to be relied on in the act of reconstructing history.¹⁶ These researchers also had (and still have) the autobiographies written by Palestinians as a primary source they could rely on.

⁹*Al-Mujtama* (The Society) was first published in 1954 and was a general literary journal without a political line. Its writers included known local Arab authors alongside with Iraqi-Jews writers; *Al-Fajr* (The Dawn) was a monthly journal that was first published in 1958. It was the organ of Mapam (United Workers Party) and it advocated the nationalism line that was represented by Gamal Abdel Nasser.

¹⁰Emile Touma (1963), "Is Arab culture influenced by Jewish society?". *Al-Jadid*, 1-2. (Arabic). Emile Touma (1965), "Has the Nakba literature reached the level of events?". *Al-Jadid*, 7-8. (Arabic).

¹¹Mustafa Kabha (2004). *Journalism in the Eye of the Storm: The Palestinian Press Shapes Public Opinion 1929-1939*. Yad Ben-Zvi: Jerusalem. (Hebrew)

¹²Yehuda Bauer has documented the escape of some 250,000 Jews from Eastern Europe to Central Europe, mainly to Germany, Italy and Austria after the Nazi defeat, between 1944 and 1948. Bauer Yehuda (1970). *Flight and Rescue: Brichah*. (Translated by Shoshana Schwartz). Moreshet and Sifriat Poalim Publishing: Tel-Aviv.

¹³Asher Cohen, through the use of oral history, followed the role of the refugees who belonged to the pioneer youth movements from Poland and Slovakia in shaping the rescue movement in Hungary during World War II. Cohen Asher (1984). *The pioneer underground in Hungary*. Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing.

¹⁴Avner Cohen documented the establishment of the nuclear reactor in Dimona, drawing on numerous documents and about one hundred and fifty interviews with Israelis and key figures in the US government. Cohen Avner (2000). *Israel and the Bomb*. (Translated by Emanuel Lotem). Schocken Books: Tel-Aviv.

¹⁵See, for example, the "Falastin fi al-Zakira" archive. Established in 2003 for the Palestinian refugees in Jordan. <https://www.palestineremembered.com/OralHistory/Interviews-Listing/ar/Story1151.html> (21.05.2020). The Nakba Archive - an oral history collective established in Lebanon in 2002. https://www.nakba-archive.org/?page_id=956 (21.05.2020).

¹⁶At the head of the Palestinian historians who have used oral documentation stands Mustafa Kabha, who established in Kafr Qara, Israel in 2006 an archive for oral documentation of the Palestinians in Israel and refugees outside it. He also published a chain of books that are based on oral history.

Between Oral History and Autobiography – Common Questions

Oral history is a practice and a research method based on collecting primary sources such as personal memoirs and commentaries through recorded interviews. As it comprises both the act of documenting (the recording) and the produced testimony (a record), it may be seen as a research method where the interviewee memory underlies in its basis, that integrates in a timely manner both practice and product (Perks & Thomson, 2015; Abrams, 2016; Ritchie, 2014; Portelli, 2009; Thompson, 2017; Shopes, 2011; Hall, 2017; Portelli, 2010).¹⁷

Looking at the relationship chain as was formulated by Alessandro Portelli (2009, p. 21) regarding oral history will help us see the commonalities between it and autobiography:

“Oral history is a work of relationships; in the first place, a relationship between the past and the present, an effort to establish, through memory and narrative, what the past means to the present; then, a relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, and between the oral form of the narrative and the written or audiovisual form of the historian’s product.”

Autobiography, much like oral history, is a biography an individual is writing (opposed to saying) about himself, his life, and events that influenced him and his surrounding, from a personal point of view. Like oral history, it also indicates the association between the past and the present, is based on memory and narrative, and produced for the relation and interpretation between the present and the past (Smorti, 2011; Ellingson, 2009; Anderson, 2001; Brockmeier, 2012; DeGloma, 2010; Walker, 2017; Polkinghorne, 2010, 1995, 1988; Westlund, 2011).¹⁸

¹⁷Perks, R., & Thomson, A. (Eds.). (2015). *The Oral History Reader*. Routledge. Abrams, L. (2016). *Oral History Theory*. Routledge. Ritchie, D. A. (2014). *Doing Oral History*. Oxford University Press. Portelli, A. (2009). "What Makes Oral History Different." In *Oral History, Oral culture, and Italian Americans* (pp. 21-30). Palgrave Macmillan, New York. Thompson, P. (2017). *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*. Oxford University Press. Shopes, L. (2011). "Oral History". *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 451-465. Hall, J. D. (2017). *Remembering: Oral History Performance*. Springer. Portelli, A. (2010). *Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories, The: Form and Meaning in Oral History*. Suny Press.

¹⁸Smorti, A. (2011). "Autobiographical Memory and Autobiographical Narrative: What is the relationship?". *Narrative Inquiry*, 21(2), 303-310. Ellingson, L. L. (2009). *Engaging Crystallization in Qualitative Research: An introduction*. Anderson, L. (2001). *Autobiography: The New Critical Idiom*. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis housand Oaks, CA: Sage. Brockmeier, J. (2012). "Localizing Oneself: Autobiographical Remembering, Cultural Memory, and the Asian American experience". *International Social Science Journal*, 62(203/204), 121-133. DeGloma, (2010). "Awakenings: Autobiography, Memory, and the Social Logic of Personal Discovery". *Sociological Forum*, 25(3), 519-540. Walker, A. (2017). "Critical autobiography as research". *The Qualitative Report*. 22(7). Westlund, A. C. (2011). "Narrative Necessity and the Fixity of meaning in a life". *Narrative Inquiry*, 21(2), 391-398. Polkinghorne, D. E. (1988). *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. Polkinghorne, D. E. (1995). "Narrative Configuration in Qualitative Analysis". *Qualitative Studies in Education*, 8(1), 5-23.

The essential difference between autobiography and oral history is the key requirement for the components of the author, subject, and narrator. For the former, the requirement state one person (Lejeune, 1975; Byram et al, 2009; Neumann, 2010),¹⁹ but for oral history, it is more than one; at least two – the interviewee, the interviewer, and it is possible that they could be joined by more than one interviewer, and more than one observer, active or passive.

Often, researchers use the help of a documenter that transcribes the recorded interview, and he joins as another participant that is involved in writing the produced composition (Perks & Thomson, 2015; Kim, 2008; Abrams, 2015).²⁰

In examining the autobiography and the document of the oral testimony, from the perspective of the participants involved in the final production, here is one of the questions that must be considered when determining the degree of reliance on these two sources: the autobiography and the oral testimony. These questions are not unique to the Palestinian researcher or case, relying on them will help any researcher who intends to rely on these two sources.

What should a researcher ask when examining the credibility of the autobiography or oral history?

In order to clarify the structure of the model I will use and discuss the autobiography and oral testimony that was provided by the American-Palestinian intellectual, Edward Said.²¹

Said began to write his autobiography at the age of 60, under the circumstances of chemical treatments for leukemia he had suffered from (**What are the motives for sharing?**). In his autobiography, he wrote on his early life in Palestine (Jerusalem), Egypt (Cairo), and Lebanon (Dhour el Shweir) and was mostly about the schools he attended (**What went into the frame of the reconstructed picture?**). Said has written his autobiography in the United States – “Out of [the] Place”, about which he was reconstructing his own history (**What is the distance between the present and the past in**

Polkinghorne, D. E. (2010). "The Practice of Narrative". *Narrative Inquiry*, 20(2), 349-370. Poster, M. (1979). *Semiotics and critical theory: From Marx to Baudrillard*. *Boundary*, 2(8), 275-288.

¹⁹Lejeune, Ph. (1975). "The Autobiographical Pact". In: Philippe Lejeune. *On Autobiography*. Ed. Paul John Eakin. Trans. Katherine Leary. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989. 3-30. Byram, M., Barrett, M. D., Ipgrave, J., Jackson, R., & Mendez-Garcia, M. D. C. (2009). *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters: Context, Concepts and Theories*. Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg, France. Neumann, I. B. (2010). "Autobiography, Ontology, Autoethnology". *Review of International Studies*, 36(4), 1051-1055.

²⁰Perks, R., & Thomson, A. (Eds.). (2015). *The oral History Reader*. Routledge. Kim, S. N. (2008). "Whose Voice is it Anyway? Rethinking the Oral History Method in Accounting Research on Race, Ethnicity and Gender". *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 19(8), 1346-1369. Abrams, L. (2016). *Oral History Theory*. Routledge.

²¹Edward W. Said (2000). *Out of Place*. Published 2000 by Granta Books (first published 1999).

terms of time and the physical-geographical distance from the reconstructed arena?). He stresses that this is part of the conflict he is living in, between his Arab world and his older age colonial world in the United States. Said also emphasizes the problematic of using the English language for events that should have been reconstructed in Arabic, something that has created according to his autobiographical testimony, an ambivalent discourse among himself, where one spoke and even was excited by the other (**What language and terminology were used?**). The writing the autobiographic book took about five years (in which terms of time and place the reconstruction took place?). Three years after his book was published, Said passed away (2003).

Said indicated that his illness was the reason the brought him to document his lost and forgotten world before it would be too late to do that. The autobiography, as he pointed out, allowed him to bridge between time and place; between his present life and his past life. Said further noted his astonishment at the number of details he had not forgotten, and the pleasure that he had from the act of remembering and writing, which supported him and held him through the difficult period of treating for his illness (**What is the personal experience during and after the reconstruction?**). In the preface to his book, Said cautions that several people that he described in his book are still alive and will likely disagree with or dislike his portrayals of them and others (**Is the testimony been exposed to criticism?**), nonetheless, he indicates that it is him and only him, that is responsible for what he recalls and sees, even though he was helped by two skilled editors who were his friends (**who is involved in writing the content and who is responsible for it?**).

A year before Said passed away, his former student, D. D. Guttenplan, convinced him to give a video interview to a common friend, Charles Glass (an American-British author, journalist, broadcaster, and publisher specializing in the Middle East and the Second World War)²² (**Who is the interviewer, what is his identity?**). This last interview with Said that was held at his home (**What details can be produced beyond the interview?**) took almost three and a half hours and included (in the first part) additional testimonies and clarifications on personal questions that were directed by Glass and that were related to Said's autobiography and the critique it received (**What is true and what is false?**). Following the publication of his autobiography, some reviews were published against Said, which questioned some of the facts he wrote and claimed that they are fiction (mainly Justus Weiner).²³ The interviewer, Glass, knew how to lead the interview in order to clarify contested points and also asked questions regarding details that didn't seem to make sense for him. For example, on the issue of Said's lack of enthusiasm for the works of the Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi, as opposed to his appreciation to the music

²²The Last Interview of Edward Said. By Brigitte Caland. Directed by Mike Dibb, Interviewed by Charles. (summer 2002). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KzorBapIIFM>

²³Justus Weiner (1999). "My Beautiful Old House" and other Fabrications. *Commentary* (September 1999). <https://www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/justus-weiner/my-beautiful-old-house-and-other-fabrications-by-edward-said>

of Gioachino Rossini at a very young age. The interviewer also asked questions regarding passes in the autobiography that needed clarification.

As is well known, the concept of trustworthiness is offered as a substitute for the validity and reliability required in quantitative as well as in traditional qualitative studies (Guba & Lincoln, 1983).²⁴ The naturalistic-qualitative inquiry looks for trustworthiness by pointing at the personal responsibility of the researcher in presenting full and detailed documentation of the research process, in specifying the selection of databases and categories, detailing the analysis procedure that emerges through cross-checking of different sources, reliance on existing literature, getting assistance from other reviewers, etc. In addition, the model presented below draws the attention to five keys that can help in examining the trustworthiness of the content of the autobiographical text or oral testimony document (written or in the record) that the researcher wishes to rely on. The five-key model is offered as a tool that assists the researcher in critically examining the reconstructed picture frame and what has been inserted into it within the autobiographical document or oral testimony.

Truth or Fiction – The Five Keys of Judgment Model

Key #1: Motives: Impact the selectivity of the borders of the reconstructed frame and what gets into it?

Key #2: Authenticity: Personal memory (wide, specific) or national memory?

Key #3: The voice of the reconstructing identity: Is it possible to separate between the voice of the present identity and the voice of the restored past identity?

Key #4: Language: What is the terminology that is being used? What does it reflect in terms of personal and collective identity and culture?

Key #5: Conditions of engagement with the past: what are the physical and technical conditions of the reconstruction? (place and time of the reconstruction, age and health status, the time distance from the reconstructed period, is it a continuous or fragmented reconstruction, is it a one-time or prolonged reconstruction, is it reflexive or reflective, are there any external intervening stimuli, etc.)

In the following, each key will be presented in detail, with an emphasis that each key cannot be dealt with effectively without understanding the background and general atmosphere of the document and without comprehensively going over the report time and again.

Content of the critical coding keys

D1. Motives: This key includes the question of the motives of the author for writing the autobiography, of the interviewee for giving the oral testimony

²⁴ Guba, E. G., & Lincoln Y. S. (1983). *Effective Evaluation*. San Francisco: Jessey Bass

and of the interviewer for collecting it (getting an answer to research questions, confirmation or refutation of assumptions, etc.); the motives are an essential source for determining the frame and content of the reconstructed picture.

An examination of an autobiographic document or oral testimony (in the form of a recording or written report) by a researcher must be accompanied by a preliminary collection of information about the identity and the social, political, and research position of the author, the interviewer and the interviewee. Autobiographies are usually written by a political elite group, intellectuals, social activists and others after they have retired and stepped out of the limelight. The lawyer, Muhammad Nimr al-Hawari (1908-1984), who for a period of time was one of the associates of the national leader, the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, was of the few Palestinians in Israel who wrote his autobiography (in 1955) about his life and actions before the 1948 war.²⁵ Al-Hawari's overt motive was a historical record for the use and utility of future generations. However, a slight search in his past would lead to the conclusion, or at least to a suspicion, that he did so in order to clarify positions and to defend himself against allegations of national betrayal after the Israeli authorities approved his return to Israel in 1950. Support of the Jewish narrative against the Palestinians and its dissemination is also a motive that should be brought to the forefront in examining the restored historical picture in Al-Hawari's autobiography. Bulus Farah was one of the activist communists during the British Mandate, and he insistently declined the partition plan of Palestine into two states, Jewish and Arab. As a result, he was barred from the political activities of the party and had to act outside it. In his autobiography he writes (p. 13): "I want to present myself as I really was, to refute what was written about and misrepresented me in other books".²⁶ Self-defense as a motive will assist the researcher to interpret and judge the truth presented by Farah from his own point of view. Palestinian intellectuals such as Emile Habibi²⁷ and Hanna Abu Hanna²⁸ chose to write their autobiographies as novels about fiction figures. This helped them to look into themselves and on their past while keeping outside the picture (Bruner, 1985).²⁹ The conclusion regarding the motive is that Habibi and Abu Hanna wanted to avoid reprimand and criticism, especially because they were active in the political and cultural arena. The researcher can thus conclude that they reconstructed and revealed only part of the truth and not the whole of it.

By stating the fact that self is the product of our telling, Eakin (1999)³⁰ suggests another motive that relates to the author's wish for self-perpetuation

²⁵Muhammad Nimr al-Hawari (1955). *Sir al Nakba* (The Secret behind the Disaster). al-Hakim printing house: Nazareth (Arabic)

²⁶Farah Bulus (1985). *From Ottoman Rule to the Hebrew State: The Autobiography of a Palestinian Communist and Patriot, 1919–1991*. Saut: Nazareth (Arabic)

²⁷Habibi Emile (1973). *The Secret Life of Saeed: The Pessimist*. Arbisk: Haifa (Arabic)

²⁸Abu Hanna Hanna (1997). *The Cloud's Shadow*. Department of Arab Culture, Ministry of Education. Nazareth (Arabic)

²⁹Bruner, J. (1985). *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

³⁰Eakin, P.J. (1999). *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*. London: Cornell University Press

and presenting his self in the way he wishes it to be seen. To that end, the author endeavors to highlight peak events of trauma, sacrifice, and heroism as he stands at their center (Gilmore, 2001).³¹ The researcher should take this motive into account when deriving his information from the texts of the narrator, and examining the extent to which the narrator or the writer is making use of the personal experience to re-create his desirable self.

The researcher needs to examine both the overt and covert motives; the motives of the interviewee in the oral testimony are similar to those of the autobiography author. He gives an interview in order to defend himself, to reveal his own personal truth, to gain prestige and reputation, or attain commemoration. Similarly, the interviewer has overt motives in the form of getting answers for the research questions and testing assumptions, and he also may have covert motives such as his will to perpetuate groups and figures, to protect against and dismiss any allegations raised against his associates, and also to promote a national narrative he is interested in. Hobsbawm (1990),³² who coined the term “national engineering”, alluded to manipulations that are a bias in the work of a contemporary historian (in our case the interviewer), particularly one whose objective is the perpetuation the national memory. For example, a historian-interviewer whose goal is to promote the escape narrative of Palestinian refugees during the 1948 war will direct questions whose answers indicate situations of Palestinians fleeing from their villages and towns without any struggle, without mentioning situations of deportation, killing, struggle and so on. The religious identity of the interviewer can focus the interview on a specific religious group, or certain religious conflict, such as, for example, the staying of the Christians from Beisan (Beit She’an) within the borders of the State of Israel, in contrast with the deportation of the Muslim inhabitants, instead of focusing on a story that tells that all the inhabitants of Beisan, whether Muslims or Christians, were deported. The academic framework is another factor that influences the interviewee choice and the questions referred to him; The presence of the interviewer in an academic setting and how it affects him impact his choice of the interviewees and the questions that he addresses to them (Ankersmit & Kellner 2013; Lorenz, 2002).³³ A researcher using the motives key can track the interviewer’s efforts to isolate the ideology and theory that motivate him, and after his use of careful dynamics of listening to the interviewee voice; Lack of such effort on the interviewer part to do so could allow his own motives to take control of the interview (Grele, 1991).³⁴

³¹Gilmore, L. (2001). *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*. London: Cornell University Press

³²Hobsbawm, Eric. 1990. Nations and Nationalism since 1780. *Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³³Ankersmit, Frank, and Hans Kellner, eds. *A new philosophy of history*. Reaktion Books, 2013. (first published 1995) Lorenz, Chris. “Model Murderers: afterthoughts on the Goldhagen method and history.” *Rethinking History* 6.2 (2002): 131-150.

³⁴Grele, R. J. (1991). Useful Discoveries: Oral History, Public History, and the Dialectic of Narrative. *The Public Historian*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Spring 1991). 61-84

This struggle of motives draws the lines and frame of the reconstructed selective picture. It also determines the area, events, and experience from the past that have been engaged.

D2. **Authenticity**: refers to the inclination or the subjective state of an individual in which he feels that he is behaving and acting in a way that is loyal to his inner thoughts and emotions despite external influences (Abulof, 2017).³⁵ The authenticity key examines the line that separates between truth and fiction, between the internal and the external, and between the personal connection and the wider collective connection (Stanley, 1992).³⁶ The difficulty in finding this dividing line lies in the fact that the narrator's selective memory is not related only to him since it is produced and maintained by broader familial, communal, social, and cultural representations (Abrams, 2016; Schacter, 1999).³⁷ For this reason, the researcher examining the autobiography or the document/recording of the oral testimony must clearly ascertain what are personal experiences and what are collective experiences. The recollections of the narrator of the military government period can indicate his own personal memory, and may also be part of a popular memory of his collective, which has been communicated to him through public discourse and the media and might have mixed with his own experience. Multiplicity and accuracy in details, as opposed to inclusive reconstruction, are one tool for assessing the authenticity of the narrator's testimony (Smith, 2014).³⁸

The researcher observing the text should consider the two approaches to the self – the first that asserts that the narrator is free to choose the content and language of his story, and the other that claims that his story is subject to his culture and its language. The tension between these two approaches that leads to a differentiation between the power of individual agency and the power of culture, between the personal story, which reflects the narrator's identity and identification, and the conformist, culturally-enslaved presentation of the story, is a matter that needs to be taken into consideration (Bruner, 1994).³⁹

D3. **The voice of the reconstructing identity** (Identity transformation, the voice of the present identity and the voice of the reconstructed past identity): Identity is the description, or in other words, the definition of existence and affiliation, and it is built according to the special state of process of time and space (Kymlicka, 1998; Taylor 1992, 1994).⁴⁰ Observing the identity definition of Palestinian autobiography authors and/or providers of oral testimony in

³⁵ Abulof, U. (2017). "Be Yourself! How Am I Not myself?". *Society*, 54 (6): 530-532

³⁶ Stanley L. (1992). *The Auto/Biographical I: The Theory and Practice of Feminist Auto/Biography*. Manchester University Press, 1992

³⁷ Schacter, D. L. (1999). "The Seven Sins of Memory. Insights From Psychology and Cognitive Neuroscience". *American Psychologist*. Vol. 54. No. 3, 182-203

³⁸ Smith, M. (2014). *Britain and 1940: History, myth and popular memory*. Routledge.

³⁹ Bruner, J. (1994). "The "remembered" self". In U. Neisser & R. Fivush (Eds.), *Emory symposia in cognition*, 6. The remembering self: Construction and Accuracy in the Self-Narrative (p. 41–54). Cambridge University Press.

⁴⁰ Kymlicka, W. (2012). *Multiculturalism: Success, Failure, and the Future*. Washington, DC: Migration. Policy Institute. Taylor, C. (1994). *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Princeton: Princeton University.

Israel is a fundamental matter that requires the attention of the researchers because the narrator tells a story about himself in a time and space where his identity carried different components than it carries in the present time. Before the establishment of the State of Israel, Palestinians' national identity was defined in two circles – Palestinian and Arab (for a small group of them their communist international identity was also part of their national identity). After the State of Israel was established, the component of the Israeli-civil identity was acquired as a new identity circle in their collective identity, and their definition of identity according to the Palestinian and Arab circles has changed. This transformation of identity has stimulated a wide research polemic that agreed that the identity of the Arabs in Israel, which has been moving between their Ethno-national circle and the civil-Israeli circle is a conflictual, divided and hybrid identity (Smootha, 1992; Rouhana & Ghanem, 1993; Peres and Yuval Davis, 1969; Rouhana, 1997; Shehade, 2019).⁴¹

Examining the narrator's position towards the State of Israel (rapprochement, alienation or crisis; Smootha, 2001),⁴² and in relation the definition of his national affiliation is something that should be taken into account when following-up the voice of the telling identity. The Palestinian autobiography authors and oral testimony providers in Israel are intellectuals who, in the words of Edward Said (1994),⁴³ can be divided into insiders and outsiders. The former fully belong to the society as it is, while the latter are exiles. There is a third kind suggested by Honaida Ghanim (2009),⁴⁴ which is the liminal identity. According to Ghanim, the Palestinians in Israel are located in a liminal space, meaning that they are neither inside nor outside. It is a space abundant with contrasts, ambivalence, and conflicts between the past and the present, between civil and political, between national and state, and between modern and traditional. Ghanim opines that in the reality of the Palestinians in Israel the liminality has turned from a temporary and transitional phenomenon, after the Nakba of 1948, into a constant and routine reality. She also argues that the Palestinians in Israel remained in their homeland but in fact outside of it, as their homeland became the state of the other and the Palestinian landscape became a ruin upon which the new state was founded.

⁴¹Rouhana, N., and Ghanem, A. (1993). "The Democratization of a Traditional Minority". In: ed. E. Kaufman, S. Abed, and R. Rothstein (eds.) *An Ethnic Democracy: The Palestinians in Israel: Democracy, Peace, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict*, Boulder, Colorado, Lynne Rienner, 163-185. Smootha, S. (1992). *Arabs And Jews in Israel*. Vol. 2, Westview Press, Boulder and London. Peres Yochanan and Nira Yuval- Davis (1969). Some Observations on the National Identity of the Israeli Arabs. *Human Relations*, 22 (3), 219-233.

Rouhana Nadim (1997). *Palestinian Citizens in an Ethnic Jewish State: Identities in conflicts*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press.

⁴²Smootha, Sami (2001). "Arabs-Jews relations in Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State". In: Ephraim Yaar and Zeev Shavit (Eds.), *Trends in Israeli society*. Tel-Aviv: Open University, 231-365 (Hebrew)

⁴³Edward, S. (1994). *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures*. Vintage, University of Virginia

⁴⁴Ghanim, Honaida (2009). *Reinventing the Nation: Palestinian Intellectuals in Israel*. Magnes Press: Jerusalem (Hebrew)

In an interview⁴⁵ I held with the communist activist, Samira Khoury (b. 1929), in April 2019, she described a scene she participated in while she was an elementary school pupil. In this scene, she and other pupils from her school in Nazareth took part in a support rally for the Mufti of Jerusalem and against the British (during the 1936–1939 Arab revolt in Palestine). Samira memorized the support slogan of that time, but it was accompanied by feelings of objection to that support. While she was telling the story, Samira could not break off from her communist identity, which she acquired after the establishment of the State of Israel and that promoted a narrative that opposed the Mufti. The interviewer in oral history can, by using in-depth questions, direct to a reflexive procedure through which the interviewee can define his identity, and even discover things about himself, which he did not know before. Although the oral interview is a golden opportunity for external intervention, with the aim of extracting more in-depth information (Abrams, 2016), the interviewer's intervention and academic and personal motives, might permeate into the interviewee's voice and bias them regards to the identity question and other questions (Kim, 2008).

D4. Language: Language represents a significant key because it reflects the identity and inner experience of the narrator and because it creates the personal, social, and cultural form of the story (Fivush, 1998).⁴⁶ Language enables us to look, in the present, on the past that no longer exists, with the use of images and terminology that belong to the narrated past, but at the same are comprehended by the (present) society to which the person is referring his story (Halbwachs, 1992).⁴⁷ For this reason, translating autobiographies and oral testimonies into other languages requires great effort, given the difficulty of rendering terminology from the narrator's cultural world into a language that does not contain such terms, only because its speakers belong to another culture. Hence, the researcher's culture and his ability to understand and interpret the terminology, that was used in the oral testimony, are critical; usually, such testimony is collected in the local (non-literary) spoken language and it reflects the unique dialect and terminology of the locals. Despite the small geographical area they reside in, the Palestinian population is diversified in terms of dialect – every collection of the population has its unique dialect. The dialect (the spoken language) in the Center or south area is distinct from that is being used in northern Israel, and it is not that rare that two adjacent villages will speak in different dialects. As a result of the 1948 war and the migration of many of the Palestinians from one area to another within Israel, their dialect also transformed. A rural Palestinian, who as a result of the 1948 war moved to cities such as Haifa or Nazareth, had its dialect, landscape, and the content world changed also. Acquiring the local dialect helped him to integrate and survive in his new place. In this transformative reality of the dialect, the interviewer can assist the interviewee to reconstruct the past in the

⁴⁵Nazareth, April 2019.

⁴⁶Fivush, R. (1988). "The stories we tell: How language shapes autobiography". *Applied Cognitive Psychology*. 12, 483–487

⁴⁷Halbwachs, M. (1992). *On Collective Memory*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

dialect and terminology of his past place (the abandoned village). The researcher that receives the recording or the written transcript of the interview or autobiography, must take caution regarding the language that was used for reconstructing the past, and determine if it includes terminology from the past world, or the present world, for describing the past.

The language being used provides the researcher information about the self-identity of the narrator (formal language, colloquial language, an open language that contains emotional descriptions, a restrained and conservative language in exposing emotions, emphasizing the self, departs of the self and emphasizing the general and so on). This self may be presented in different ways along the autobiography or the transcript/recording of the oral testimony (Renza, 1977).⁴⁸ To track the inner and outer coherence of self-presentation through language, a researcher can use the three characteristics provided by Charlotte Lind (1993): continuity of the self through time; relation of the self to others; and reflexivity of the self. These three characteristics allow the identification of the self-story both in the autobiography and the oral history, although the first characteristic is more salient in oral history.⁴⁹

The researcher should also take into account that the language of revealing the truth is related to gender characteristics, to the nature of the personal experience, and the will to share it. Notwithstanding Palestinian men and women have both experienced the suffering of the Nakba, I realized, through the interviews, that women's testimonies were laden with emotional terminology compared with men who inclined to state facts. The women were also willing to share detailed information even though it involved humiliation and personal suffering, while the men seldom shared details of humiliation and suffering. It may be that the source of this restraint is linked both to culture and gender – to the masculine image that supposed to protect women and children, the home and the land, and in fact failed to do so in the circumstances of the war and refugeeness (cf. Bauer et al, 2003).⁵⁰

The language can also serve the narrator to protect him against future threats and revenge, from being criticized and/or prosecuted following the revelation of details from the past. Through the use of language, the narrator can conceal names, and at the same time, he may indicate other clues that can lead to the truth he wants to reveal. The researcher will need to base his interpretation on this fact and search for the truth by cross-checking the clues with information from other sources.

D5. Conditions of engagement with the past: (time, place, health status, time distance from the recounted past, continuous or fragmented reconstruction, one-time or prolonged reconstruction, external stimuli, personal experience, interviewer intervention).

⁴⁸Renza, L. A. (1977). "The Veto of the Imagination: A Theory of Autobiography". *New Literary History*, 9 (1), 1-26

⁴⁹C. Linde, *Life Stories: The Creation of Coherence* (Oxford, 1993), p. 3

⁵⁰Bauer, P., Stennes, L., & Haight, J. (2003). "Representation of the Inner self in Autobiography: Women's and Men's use of Internal States language in Personal Narratives". *Memory*, 11(1), 27-42.

The engagement with the past in autobiographies is accomplished along prolonged time, where the story can be updated and organized to produce a single consolidated and continuous memory. This is not the case in an interview, which is in most cases a one-time event, fragmented by the interviewer questions and depends on the extent the interviewer is resolute.

Creating an appropriate atmosphere that allows for easy recall, is a prerequisite for voicing and hearing the narrator (Abrams, 2016; Grele, 1991).⁵¹ The Palestinian interviewees who witnessed and could recall the events of the Nakba – the 1948 war – are today over 80 years old (and many of them are over 90 years old). Specifying the time and place of the interview (in the interviewee's home, nursing home, or the real arena of the reconstructed past, i.e. the deserted Palestinian village) and the health status of the interviewee would help future researchers to judge the conditions under which the interview was held. These details would also need to be derived, by the researcher, from the autobiography of the narrator. The events of the Nakba took place 73 years ago, and the question a researcher would have to ask himself is whether the told memory is a truth or a fiction?

Daniel Schacter notes that the reason why interviewees and old autobiography writers (such as the Nakba generation) still have strong unfaded memory is that their memories are unique and charged with great emotion. In addition, the telling and retelling of their stories over and over again is being a mechanism for reconstruction, formation, and long-term preservation. According to Schacter, temporary memories fade over time, get lost or are mixed with similar memories. Based on Schacter, the Nakba generation, those Palestinians in Israel for whom the Nakba was a significant event that was told time and again to friends and family, managed to preserve it and restructure a personal story for it. So, for example, did the author Mohammad Ali Taha from the abandoned Palestinian village of Mi'ar. Mohammad, who was born in 1941, reconstructed in his autobiography (2017) precise details of names and events that occurred during the 1948 war. However, given his young age at the time of the events (7 years old) this fixation of memory was not achieved only as a result of Taha's efforts alone, but with the support of the whole collective, who repeatedly told and added details to the story. This memory fixation mechanism as mentioned above is described in Thompson's (1991) book, *Memory and Remembering in Oral History*.⁵² The conclusion is that Taha, along the time, updated and shaped his story, despite his young age, and despite the fact that the scene of the story (the deserted village) has changed in shape and name.

The act of recalling details that have blurred or faded is an untrained action, and it is not an extraordinary experience for the narrator. In judging the credibility of a story, which lacks references to collective events, a historical researcher should take this fact into account. In addition, the researcher may encounter references to events in the reconstructed story which do not make

⁵¹R. Grele (1991). *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History*. New York

⁵²Thomson, A. (1991). "Memory and Remembering in Oral History." *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*. DA Ritchie (ed.), Oxford

sense. The recommendation for the researcher is to judge that this memory is a fiction. At the same time, the researcher must try to understand the source of the fact fabrication. The concept of False Memory Syndrome (FMS) was introduced by Peter J. Freyd as an idea that a person strongly believes in but is objectively incorrect. The reason for this belief may derive from traumatic experiences, which cause him to make up false facts as a means of distraction and overcoming these experiences (Gilmore, 2001).

Stephan Rose⁵³ compares the telling of a narrative to a mechanical model of retrieval of an event from deep memory, reopening it, fine-tuning it, and restoring it back to deep memory. The process of recalling, updating, and fixation following the storytelling is a neurological, social, and psychological process influenced by the personal experience and popular memory that is distributed through the media and public discourse (Smith, 2014). Alongside the popular memory, the interviewer might intervene with the rising memory, and in extreme cases of affection for the interviewee (Yow, 1997),⁵⁴ the interviewer could even bias the testimony so that it presents the interviewee in a positive light.

To conclude this section, let me note that it is not the responsibility of the historical researcher to act as a psychoanalyst who finds failures in a person's memory as a result of the conditions of the reconstruction or other motivations. The role of the researcher, as mentioned above, is to discover the authentic details, taking into account the conditions in which the story was produced and the personal experience of the narrator, in order to back up his judgment as to whether the story is fiction or truth.

Conclusions

The present article dealt with the particular case of the Palestinians in Israel, in which the reliance on the historical reconstruction depends very heavily and even exclusively on oral history and autobiographies as only two historical sources. Nevertheless, examining the credibility of the autobiographies and documentation of the oral history of the Palestinians in Israel does not deviate from the research critical approach in referring to the autobiographies and oral history of other individuals, groups, collectives, and peoples. The present article provided a model, which is a critical examination tool, whereby the researcher can determine the extent to which he relies on the autobiographical and oral testimony documents he examines.

⁵³Ros, S. (1993). *The Making of Memory: From Molecules to Mind*. University of Michigan Anchor Books.

⁵⁴Yow, V. (1997). "Do I Like Them Too Much? Effects of the Oral History Interview on the Interviewer and Vice Versa". *The Oral History Review*, 24 (1). 55–79.