



The Transformation of Palestine

**Palestine and the Palestinians
60 Years after the “Nakba”**

**International Symposium
Berlin, March 8 and 9, 2010**

Berlin, March 4, 2010

The historic event of the formation of Israel had, however, far-reaching consequences not only for the Jewish people and the *yishuv*, the Jewish community in the British mandate territory of Palestine, but also for the Arab-Palestinian people. Around 800,000 Palestinians had to leave their home during the 1948-49 war either because they were driven out or forced to flee. 170,000 stayed in Israel, became citizens of Israel and, with approx. 1.3 million, have become a minority in the Jewish state over the last 60 years. Since then, the refugees of the *Nakba* ("catastrophe") and their children have lived in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, in the Arab states of the Middle East and scattered throughout the entire world. Their numbers are estimated to be at least 4 to 5 million. Their day-to-day realities could hardly be more different. 2.4 million have lived for more than 40 years under Israeli occupation in the West Bank, 1.4 million under Israeli siege in the Gaza Strip, millions more live in the countries of Jordan, Lebanon and Syria next to Israel. In 2008, the UNRWA counted a total of roughly 4.6 million Palestinian refugees (this figure was 914,000 in 1950). Only a small percentage has managed to integrate. Others have started new lives, most of them in the Arab Gulf states, in Europe and North and Latin America.

The geographic and social fragmentation of the Palestinian people is essentially a result of the conflict in the Middle East. But a wide variety of other change processes – economic, social, gender-specific, political - have affected the societal development of the Palestinians over the last few decades and shape the reality of their fragmented existence. Because the political-diplomatic efforts for a peaceful solution to the Middle East conflict are still dominated by the decades-long debate over a two-state solution which also finds its legitimacy under international law in the 1947 UN partition plan, it is time to take a closer look at the Palestinian people and their development, which is characterized by many contradictions, development over the last 60 years. Within the framework of a final status agreement, the goal will not just be to find a viable solution for the people living in the historic region of Palestine. The right of Palestinian refugees to return has been the subject of numerous UN resolutions. Thus, the extremely different realities of refugees will also be analyzed and their prospects for the future discussed.

Conference Website and Dossier:

<http://www.boell.de/worldwide/middleeast/middle-east-conference-transformation-of-palestine-8680.html>

First Session:

Diversity in Unity?

Fragmentation of the Palestinian People and the Fight for Unity

Guiding questions:

The geographic and social fragmentation of the Palestinian people is essentially a result of the conflict in the Middle East. Which historical change processes have the Palestinians experienced as a result of urbanization and industrialization, modernization and globalization? To what extent is their social structure affected by the conditions and consequences of the Middle East conflict? How did a wide variety of other change processes – economic, social, gender-specific, political - have affected the societal development of the Palestinians over the last few decades and shape the reality of their fragmented existence? How do the different environments that Palestinians live in affect their political ideas? Millions of Palestinian refugees still live today in refugee camps and insist on their right of return guaranteed under international law. Within the framework of a final status agreement, the goal will not just be to find a viable solution for the people living in the historic region of Mandate Palestine. The right of Palestinian refugees to return has been the subject of numerous UN resolutions. Thus, the extremely different realities of refugees will also be analyzed and their prospects for the future discussed. What is the social reality of Palestinian refugees in the Arab states?

What is the UNRWA – the *UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East* – doing? What are the reasons for the successful/unsuccessful integration of refugees? How did the *Nakba* shape the Palestinian social, political and cultural life? Is the PLO still today the "legitimate representative of the Palestinian people"? Does the PLO as a Palestinian umbrella organization still play a role in uniting the Palestinians?

Conference papers:

Michael R. Fischbach: The Impact of the 1948 Disaster: The Ways that the Nakba has Influenced Palestinian History

John Ging: 60 Years of Partnership for Palestinian Rights: UNRWA and Palestine Refugees

Further links:

- About the work of UNRWA: <http://www.unrwa.org/index.php>

- Statistics of the Palestinian Refugee Population:

- [Total registered refugees per country and area](#) (as at 30 June 2008)
- [Total registered camp population](#) (as at 30 June 2008)
- [Statistics of family size](#) (as at 30 June 2008)
- [Number of registered refugees](#) (1950-2008)

- Michael R. Fischbach, Palestinian Refugee Compensation and Israeli Counterclaims for Jewish Property in Arab Countries, in: *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 38, no. 1 (Autumn 2008), p. 6 <http://www.palestine-studies.org/journals.aspx?id=10105&jid=1&href=abstract>

Second Session:

Domination and Deformation – Living under the Occupation

Guiding Questions:

2.4 million Palestinians have lived for more than 40 years under Israeli occupation in the West Bank, 1.4 million under Israeli siege in the Gaza Strip (since 2006). How did the exodus of 1948 and 1967 change the socio-economic and political structure in the Palestinian territories? How did the reality of the occupation shape the social and political fabric of life in the territories? What role does the occupation policy play in the development of an independent Palestinian economy? Is there a trend in their society toward Islamization and/or pluralization? What role do the traditional family and clan structures play today? How did the relation between 'inside' and 'outside' leadership change? Do traditional, conservative and religious concepts of society jeopardize the hard-won emancipatory progress against occupation and male domination? What are the effects of Israel's policy of separation?

Conference papers:

John Ging: Predicament of a Different Order: Palestine Refugees under Occupation

Dr. Samir Awad: The Transformation of Palestine

Further links:

- more information on the humanitarian situation in the Occupied Territories is provided by the *UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Help in the Occupied Palestinian Territories*:

<http://www.ochaopt.org/>

- more information on the humanitarian situation in Gaza you will find in the latest report of international aid organizations 'Failing Gaza: No rebuilding, no recovery, no more excuses',

<http://www.medico.de/media/report-failing-gaza-englisch.pdf>

Third Session:

On the Waiting List? Democracy in Palestine

Guiding Questions:

The so called Road Map (2003) is calling for a 'a democratic Palestinian state', a 'strong parliamentary democracy' with 'free, fair and open elections' and democratic reform of the institutions. Did the development of a democratic society make any progress after the elections in 2005-2006? What about the democratic developments within the Palestinian movements and factions? What are the difficulties of institution building under occupation? What kind of impact do traditional family and clan structures have on the democratic development? What is the likelihood of the development of democratic and civil structures in the conditions of occupation and political divisions in Palestine? What is the role of civil society organizations in the territories? What are the differences between the First and the Second Intifada from a democratic point of view? Are there differences between a western styled democracy and Palestinian visions of a democratic state? Where are the most urgent needs for democratizing the Palestinian society? What about the role of women and women's organizations in the democratic process? Do Palestinians envisage a multiparty democracy for the future as mentioned in the Roadmap? International organizations are supporting the development of democratic structures in the territories. Did the external democracy promotion help to make progress?

Conference papers:

Further links:

- MUWATIN: Muwatin, The Palestinian Institute for the Study of Democracy, was founded in January 1992 to promote the study and development of democracy in Palestine and in the region.
<http://www.muwatin.org/about/about.html>
- *Nathan Brown*: The Green Elephant in the Room: Dealing with the Hamas Party-State in Gaza web commentary, June 2009 <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=23225>

Fourth Session:

Fighting in and for the Holy Land? Secularism and Religion in Palestine

Guiding Questions:

Did Islam play a role in the Palestinian liberation movement? Since years we are witnessing a growing influence of Islam and Islamist movements in the Arab world. Is there a trend in the Palestinian society toward Islamization as well? Does Islamization and/or pluralization shape the future of the Palestinian society? What are the reasons for the rise of Hamas and how does the future look for inner-Palestinian conflicts? Is Hamas primarily a national resistance movement or an Islamic movement? Is the rivalry between Hamas and Fatah a fight between Islamist and secular forces and diverging concepts of a Palestinian state? How does religion and religious debates play into the rivalry and division? How does the Palestinian Basic Law define the relationship between religion and state institutions, secular law and sharia? Is the Charta of Hamas still relevant? Is anti-Semitism an integral part of the Hamas ideology? What does Hamas's record in governing in Gaza tell us about its pursuit of an Islamic agenda? Are there any chances of bridging the diverging views during the process of national dialogue?

Conference papers:

Nicolas Pelham: Ideology and Practice in the Legal System in Gaza under Hamas

Nathan Brown: Religion and Politics in Palestine: Debates about Islam and the Hamas-Fatah Schism

Further links:

- *Muriel Asseburg*: [Conclusions: Dynamics in political Islam and challenges for European policies](http://www.swp-berlin.org/common/get_document.php?asset_id=6022), 2009 http://www.swp-berlin.org/common/get_document.php?asset_id=6022
- *Nathan Brown*: Palestine: The Schism Deepens, web commentary, Aug. 2009 http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=23668&zoom_highlight=Palestine+The+schism+deepens

Fifth Session:

The Vision of a Palestinian State - Palestine, the Arab States and the International Community

Guiding Questions:

The vision of a Palestinian has changed over the decades. And the international attitude towards building an independent viable Palestinian alongside Israel has changed as well. What is the reason for these changes? What are the prevailing conceptions of a Palestinian state today? Two-state- versus one-state-solution? Who is opposing the vision of a Palestinian state? Who does support this vision? What should be the central elements of a future Palestinian state? How do the Arab states view the Palestinian state? The international community has expressed its support for the two-state-solution many times. What is necessary to implement this solution?

Conference papers:

Zachary Lockman: The Palestinians, the Arab States and Israel

Further links:

- *Muriel Asseburg*: [Euro-Mediterranean cooperation and protracted conflicts in the region: The Israeli-Palestinian predicament](http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/10Papers-01.pdf#page=15), September 2009, <http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/10Papers-01.pdf#page=15>
- *Muriel Asseburg*: Obamas zweiter Anlauf im Nahost-Friedensprozess, Unilaterale Ansätze der Konfliktparteien sind keine Alternative, SWP-Aktuell 2010/A 12, February 2010 (only in German) http://www.swp-berlin.org/en/common/get_document.php?asset_id=6794
- *Nathan Brown*: Palestine and Israel: Time for Plan B, Policy Brief, Feb. 2009 http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/palestine_israel_planB.pdf
- *Nathan Brown*: After Abu Mazin? Letting the Scales Fall From Our Eyes <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=24131>