

# The Palestinian Digital Archive between Anarchy and Anti-Method:

## A Critical View

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*“The archive is always a place where authority resides.”*

Joyce Patrick<sup>1</sup>

*“There is no archive fever without the threat of this death drive, this aggression and destruction drive”*

Jacques Derrida<sup>2</sup>

Upon the launching in 2011 of Birzeit University’s digital Palestinian archive, numerous theoretical and practical issues arose. Its goal was to assemble various scattered, forgotten or hidden materials, transforming them into a digital archive destined to re-narrate through their details, the daily lives of Palestinians and their manifestations, in the process recovering the voices of the martyrs and refugees and those silenced by occupation and held hostage and made absent by imperialism. We are here dealing with two problematics: the first, conceptual one, relates to the “archive fever” that has spread through Palestine, the confusion thus created regarding the quality and nature of archiving, notably by the reification of archives as sites of authority and power in the minds of researchers. The second issue is a subjective yet critical one, challenging imperialism and presenting a post-archival, subjective view of the digital Palestinian archive. We thus question the legitimacy of the digital Palestinian archive and its success in recovering the Palestinian narrative, dispersed when it is not denied in the imperial records and those of the occupier.

In so doing we posit a vision different from the aim of the archive itself, disassembling, though precisely with a view to judging the ability of the archive to assemble. In order to manage such a project, we go through three stages. First of all, we examine “the policy of making the archive,”

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Joyce, “The Politics of the Liberal Archive,” *History of the Human Sciences* 12, 2 (1999): 38.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 90.

presenting the argument between the general and the particular and justifications for the violence of both the particular and the general. Secondly, we deal with those confused moments in the conceptualization of the archive. Thirdly, we engage in a subjective review, reading the digital archive in a post-archival, postmodern light, finally presenting a clear but critical vision of Birzeit's digital Palestinian archive after five years.

### **Creating the Digital Archive At Birzeit University**

Some years ago, Beshara Doumani describes the spread of Derridian "archive fever" among the Palestinians, whether in Ramallah or in London or in San Francisco or Haifa or in Beirut or in Riyadh. Individuals as well as groups sought to interview the elderly, find pictures, letters, clothing and folksongs, scanning manuscripts, and so on.<sup>3</sup>

The reasons are evident to anyone living, breathing and thinking under occupation. While it is true that there is an increased critical attention devoted to archives in many parts of the world, in Palestine the motivation for this spread of archive fever is located in the continuously escalating policies of the occupation. Driven into their last redoubts by decades of revolt, repression, colonization, parcelization, expropriation and expulsion, people feel more than ever that their very existence is under threat and that not only their identity but their very existence is under serious threat. The struggle for the land has motivated the Palestinians to transform their concept of the archive. The past no longer delimits the temporal boundaries of archiving. Rather it is the present which carries out this task. For Palestinians, in a word, archiving has become viewed as a matter of life and death. In Doumani's words, the Palestinian views himself and his homeland as being a "species endangered by extinction."<sup>4</sup> For him, the focus has moved from Palestine to the Palestinians. We would frame the process differently, since the land (of Palestine) is still essential to Palestinians, most notably the refugees, who have always epitomized the cause. True: society, family papers, oral history, social life and culture in all its forms have become inseparable parts of the archive, or rather they *present* the archival base for a historical narration. But this presentation, in its presence, now englobes time *and* space. And so the focus, while

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<sup>3</sup> Beshara Doumani, "Archiving Palestine and the Palestinians: The Patrimony of Ihsan Nimr," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 36 (2009), 3-12.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

focusing on the Palestinians, continues to emanate from their real and imagined space: Palestine.<sup>5</sup>

The digital Palestinian archive at Birzeit University is part and parcel of this fever. It began its adventure five years ago. At the time and until now, the purely discursive existence of a Palestinian national archive (as well as a national museum) meant that Birzeit University needed to assert its presence as an expression of the absence of an authoritative official institution pushing towards a unified or at least coherent reading of the narrative of self, a reflection of Palestinian identity. With the launch of its archive, Birzeit (and others in its wake) claimed a key role as protector of the Palestinian memorial narrative. In so doing it implicitly negates the possibility of presenting an image of comprehensiveness and centrality, coupled with the exclusionary vision these would entail. There can thus be no claimed modular preference. Thus Birzeit's archive, in addition to preserving original and irreplaceable materials and sources from loss, destruction and theft (common occurrences in modern and contemporary Palestinian history) calls for more archiving, more archives, and welcomes the simultaneous growth of (unachievable) completeness and (ineluctable) contradiction. The many thousands of documents are vetted and published on an electronic website, in keeping with the traditions of the third millennium, for simple consultation by researchers and all others: secrecy is rejected, and so nothing with such a claim, most notably official Palestinian government documents (that is, those dating from the post-Oslo period) are never included. The information is offered for free, rejecting the commodification of memory.

In seeking to achieve these objectives, those responsible for the project were faced with fundamental questions regarding the nature of archives and the policies as well as politics of managing them. The special Palestinian phenomenon of loss and longtime secrecy, as well as pure ignorance of documents available meant that one was obliged to proceed in an unprecedented manner, rejecting a research-design, rationalistic approach to questions arising. There is a Palestinian; there must be at Birzeit an archive. Beyond that, nothing is taken for granted. Truly archaeological excavations needed to be undertaken, in the quest for archival materials, with no preordained definition of what they consisted of.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

What should be preserved? What constitutes a document? Was one looking for picture, voice recordings, texts? Answers to these questions may appear to be technical but they are not and have never been so. They have truly philosophical implications, particularly in an era where technology has largely taken control of choices in what Martin Heidegger calls “the age of the world picture,” when what is shown is taken actually to constitute, to *be*, and not simply to *represent*, reality.<sup>6</sup> Archival reality is overdetermined by the continuous imperial control to which Palestine is subjected. This is why the archive project was in its choices subjected to an inductive approach rather than a master plan. In other words, the procedure adopted constituted a theory of practice, not a practice of theory. In a sense, general rules derived from a proliferation of individual choices (of documents). There was no consideration given to contending archival theories, in terms either of preferred choices or internal organization. If theories were to apply, this would happen later in the process, so that the archive would avoid becoming hostage to the idea that “practice makes perfect while the theory makes theorists”.<sup>7</sup>

Birzeit’s digital archive was not to be reduced to a mechanism for ordering particular types of documents, and thus for implementing theories. In a most certainly political move, although one entailing the anti-authoritarian decision *not* to decide, anarchy became the archival (dis-)order of the day, as opposed to the barked central ordering of so many national and other archives. Be it noted that Birzeit is not unique in making this choice. One prominent example of developing through stages of practice rather than being the slave of an overarching theory or method is the Canadian archive, which *in its beginnings*, rejected theory and developed based on practices observed in the British and European archives.<sup>8</sup>

The collective action of the archival team was thus based to the extent possible on avoiding support for a theory or even a narrative regarding what is to be collected, before it has even been collected. Internally, as illustrated on the archive’s front page, a certain yet minimal degree of order appears in the form of iconic guides for the casual visitor (although keywords are the main entrance to data). These icons reflect the priorities, even the values of the society, since they

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<sup>6</sup> Martin Heidegger, “The Age of the World Picture” in *Heidegger: Off the Beaten Track*, Martin Heidegger (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 57-85.

<sup>7</sup> John W. Roberts, “Practice Makes Perfect, Theory Makes Theorists,” *Archivaria* 37 (Spring 1994): 111.

<sup>8</sup> Ian E. Wilson, “A Noble Dream: The Origins of the Public Archives of Canada,” *Archivaria* 15 (Winter 1982-83): 21.

were chosen in an arrangement and a sequence selected by the archivists themselves<sup>9</sup>. More than ten thousand materials were collected and uploaded (in addition to further thousands not uploaded, mainly because they were obtained by Birzeit scholars in Istanbul from the archive and are Ottoman-era and Ottoman-language documents) including manuscript, printed, audiovisual, pictorial and filmic.

Without exception, these were found thanks to contacts of Birzeit field workers and researchers to civil society institutions and individuals, and repeated meetings with them, in the quest for copies of documents pertaining to the Palestinian present and past. Subjective and labeling difficulties came in the form of the ongoing dialogue of the particular and the general, in that violent moment of manipulating the particular and making it fit, naked, into the general. At this moment, and despite everything, the document is separated from persons and subjective or even random events, in order to become a spokesperson of the collective “I” whose self has been removed. The need for such violence stems from the defense of Palestinian identity embodied in the lives and memories of individuals. The dialogue of the particular and the general thus came to present a nontechnical vision of what has been collected by way of written and audio-visual materials. With time, however, the general and the particular began to reconcile, since, from the second year of the archive project, the particular displayed a new openness to the general, and most of the numerous, initially reluctant individuals agreed to give us requested documents, or took the initiative and brought them to the archive for digitation.

### **The Birzeit Digital Palestinian Archive: A Post-Archival Reading**

The slow process of transformation described above begs the question: how can the Palestinian archive be understood? The adoption of an anarchic method should not yield to the supposition that the universalistic, theoretical void intentionally left standing gives rise to a form of absurdism. To the contrary, the digital archive is a response to imperialism, and a discourse of power countering imperialist discourse. The sublime goal which the Palestinian archive seeks may be represented as a vision opposed to the image of the Palestinian subjected for decades to the disfiguring methodologies and processes practiced by the Zionist archive. Understanding, or

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<sup>9</sup> Brien Brothman, “Orders of Value: Probing the Theoretical Terms of Archival Practice,” *Archivaria* 32 (Summer 1991): 81.

at least coming to grips with this finality is best accomplished by disassembling imperialism and its nature. Cast in a postmodern light, the image of the archive matures; the documents do their own talking about themselves. Michel Foucault displaced the *concept* of the archive, removing it in large part from the *purview* of the archive as traditionally defined. The archive, for him, is not merely the sum of collections of historical documents produced by a culture; nor is it the institution which accepts to store these texts. It is first and foremost the very “law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events...it is *the system of its enunciability*.”<sup>10</sup> The archive is one of the tools of authority and subjugation, a major one at that.

The recent literature on archiving is thus distinguished from previous ones. The boundaries surrounding the archive have been breached; they have exploded. The field is no longer reserved for archivists. Interest in the phenomenon (now seen as a process, not a place) has greatly developed, spills over from mere guardianship of past heritage, travels far beyond library walls, refuses to remain the prisoner of preserved materials. Rival interpretations of the word “archive” pit historians, critics, philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, politicians and others against one another.<sup>11</sup> Questions related to what the archive is, how it works, and methods of its formation have all challenged researchers to answer them for a long time. This is what is meant by Jacques Derrida with his statement that “nothing is less reliable, nothing is less clear than the word “Archive.”<sup>12</sup>

With this generation of thinkers, power and resistance appear everywhere. This is suggested, among others, by Derrida in *Archive Fever – A Freudian Impression*, in which he shows that the archive was moved from a place for keeping the manuscripts to the circle of conflict and violence. “What is at issue here, starting with the exergue, is the violence of the archive itself, as archive, as archival violence.....It has the force of law, of a law which is the law of the house (*oikos*), of the house as place, domicile, family, lineage, or institution. Having become a museum”. He adds that “There is no political power without control of the archive, if not

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<sup>10</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 129.

<sup>11</sup> Marlene Manoff. “Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines”. <http://dspace.mit.edu/bitstream/handle/1721.1/35687/4.1manoff.pdf>, 9

<sup>12</sup> Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, 90

memory.”<sup>13</sup> Control here means not simply the archive’s standing at the crossroads to control the past. The matter goes beyond this to control of present and future.

The archive appears, in the light cast on it by Foucault and Derrida, as an arena for war and not merely a place to preserve documents. The archive wages battles with other archives. According to Derrida there is a conflict between “the motive of death” and the motive of “archiving.” This resembles the battle that Foucault mentioned between discourses. “The production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality.”<sup>14</sup> Thus discourse does not move in a free space but rather through procedures of exclusion: prohibition, division and rejection, conjoined with the will to truth.<sup>15</sup>

Birzeit University’s digital Palestinian archive project thus came to express conflicts of power and refused to be “a negative storehouse of old things.” The discourse of the Palestinian archive was born as a part of the fever of the Palestinian archive and as evidence of the ability of Palestinians to respond to the discourse of the imperialist and the processes of exclusion and marginalization intrinsic to the discourses on Palestinian existence in the Zionist archive. This type of conflict is depicted by Ann Stoler as the illusion of the archives of the colonialism. The colonial archives as she said “were both sites of the imaginary and institutions that fashioned histories as they concealed, revealed, and reproduced the power of the state.”<sup>16</sup> She illustrates how colonialists portray themselves as sources of knowledge, whereas they are in fact part and parcel of the colonial project, and do not offer a convincing picture of what happened and happens in reality. She therefore calls for moving from the archive as a source to the archive as a topic.<sup>17</sup> The imperial archive was, as she says, “both the supreme technology of the late

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 4, note 1.

<sup>14</sup> Michel Foucault, “The order of discourse”, In *Untying the text: a post-structural anthology*, ed. R. Young (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul ,1981), 52.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 52-56

<sup>16</sup> Ann Stoler, “Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance”, *Archival Science* 2, (2002): 97.

[http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/41825/10502\\_2004\\_Article\\_5096461.pdf?sequence=1](http://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/41825/10502_2004_Article_5096461.pdf?sequence=1)

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 87.

nineteenth century imperial state and the telling prototype of a postmodern one, predicated on global domination of information and the circuits through which “facts” move.”<sup>18</sup>

Proceeding from this starting point, the Palestinian digital archive project is to be seen as the subaltern’s response to the technology of Zionist imperialism. This recalls Stoler’s account of histories of resistance “from the bottom up,” that might locate human agency in small gestures of refusal and silence among the colonized.”<sup>19</sup> The digital archive contributes to the movement of writing history from below, gathering documents in the search for a reverse reading. If we are to call the moment of forming the archive as the moment of the violence of the general against the particular, here comes violence against the imperialist authority whose condition is that the general be absent so that it talks to itself. We cannot see the Palestinian archive in isolation from resistance against attempts to make absent the Palestinian past and present, which are practiced by imperialism. This past and present become private memories, rather parts of novels having no collective voice.

### **Does the Subaltern Speak?**

Does the digital Palestinian archive at Birzeit refute or at least challenge Gayatri Spivak’s conclusion that the subaltern does not speak? First of all, it needs to be remembered that each one of the archival documents has a history which stretches out before and also after reaching the virtual steps of the digital archive. Chronicling documents is a dynamic, never-ending process. Archives are born again, imagined again, reinvented. And this applies to documents existing from ancient times.<sup>20</sup> It applies then all the more to the digital Palestinian archive, born and imagined again, and reinvented more than once. This happens in the context of the ongoing battle linked to the presence and policies of the occupation, an engine of death for Palestinian records, and the Palestinians’ engine of preservation, their archives, whose finality is the resurrection and protection of memory. In the second part of this chapter, we try to show how in many ways the Birzeit archive, for one, does provide, sometimes a forum, sometimes a voice giving shape to the dilemmas and yearnings of a suppressed but not a subjugated people.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>20</sup> Terry Cook, “Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth: Postmodernism and the Practice of Archives”, *Archivaria* 51 (Spring 2001): 35.



## **Living Examples in Birzeit's Archive**

How does Birzeit University's digital archive challenge the near absence of agency on the part of the subaltern as proclaimed by Spivak? In this second part of the chapter we attempt to answer that question. We do so by presenting some of the documents regrouped in the archive, pertaining to the Palestinian people's collective destinies over a long century, thus restoring them to life. What we discover is a rich and complex narrative of events traversed by Palestine in the modern and contemporary era. Very significantly, the archive does not claim to be the only imaginable one, nor does it strive to occupy such a position. What it does proclaim is the importance of saving Palestinian documents and pressing them to speak of themselves without becoming the prisoners of a complex classification system which would establish a hierarchy of values and meanings to the documents included, and thus to the archive itself. Hence the choice of a very general form of classification which reflects the philosophy of the archive, a type of proclaimed anarchy, an attempt to present a strong picture of the history of a people which, in its daily struggles to exist, lived and continues to live the very anarchy of the international system, mirrored in the archive itself.

Many Palestinian institutions, both official and non-governmental, have worked on retaining and archiving documents, even before the creation of the digital archive at Birzeit University. Their results were impressive, and important documents were thus collected in a rather short time. The problem was their unavailability and their dispersion, which strengthened our determination to create the digital archive. In this way, the documents are not only preserved but also made available to a broad international audience. By presenting a critical view of Birzeit's rather anarchic digital archive, we hope here to give an integrated image of Palestine itself.

Palestinians have good knowledge of their history. The archive's browser relies on that knowledge to offer them its contents, and keywords, linked to a subject index, open it to the rest of the interested world. One cannot pass judgment on the archive by simply skimming through a few documents, or because of technical problems that are easily overcome. This is in fact and will always be, by definition, an incomplete archive. It now approaches twenty thousand documents, and the number will never cease to increase.

No comprehensive critique of those thousands of documents can be attempted here, although, along with four of our graduate students<sup>21</sup> enrolled in the refugee studies course offered by the Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute of International Studies, we did in fact go through most of them.

An important observation is that in moving through the archive one might well fall upon materials one absolutely did not expect, such as the 1925 law on the regulation of tobacco, or the Miss Palestine contest held in the 1960s. Some (but few) of the documents may appear only remotely linked to significant events. Others have problems of sound, sharpness or clarity of image due to the quality of their uploading or to their quality at the source. In certain cases material has been indexed but can't be found, or the labels do not correspond with content. But once again, these cases are few and far between, and what cannot be corrected can be discarded.

In this part of our argument, we will concentrate on certain parts of the archived materials to be found, not through browser-driven keywords, but through icons designating Palestinian personalities, social life in Palestine, maps of historical Palestine, personal documents, radio materials, refugees and migrants, and Palestinian newspapers.

### **Prominent Palestinian Personalities**

The following personalities are listed in this category: Sam'an Daud, Awni Abdel Durra, Mohammed Awad, Wael Hijazi, Yousef Abu Durra, Khalil El Sakakini, Abdul Kareem Shaker Al-Alami, Akram Zeitr, Amin Al-Husseni, and Abdul-Qader Al-Husseni.

One problem arises regarding the placing of certain documents under a given category. An example is Abdul Kareem Al Alami, assistant manager of social affairs in the division of refugee affairs, Jerusalem. Should this personality not have been found in the refugee and migrant category, given that the documents demonstrate the significance of his work in serving refugees? Or should they remain where they are, under the rubric of Palestinian personalities? It all depends on the perspective of the reader, viewer, researcher, in other words, the consumer of the documents of this digital archive. At any rate, part of its significance is to show that, contrary to stereotypical renderings whereby only the international staff of the International Committee of the Red Cross or the UN, Palestinians played a prominent role in providing relief and assistance to victims of the *nakba*. At any rate the photographs he took during his work and his field trips

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<sup>21</sup> Nawal Zghayar, Ola Tamimi, Raneem Al Azza, and Rana Abu Hijleh.

between camps and food distribution centers, even as he provided assistance. Those photographs are reminiscent of the more recent ones taken by the Commissioner General of the United National Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) when visiting the devastated Palestinian refugee camps in Syria in 2013.

They may also wonder at the absence of many people famous for their struggle against the British, such as Mohammed Jamjoun, Fuad Hijazi, and Atta El-Zeer, as well, more generally, as the absence of the peasants who joined and drove the revolution and thus played an important part in the history of the country. The educated elite plays the principal role here, certainly because the materials are available regarding these people, since they themselves wrote and theorized the revolutions and uprisings, and were not simply militants and activists struggling for freedom and independence.

The importance of these photographs and documents lies in helping non-professionals in the field of history to rediscover the Palestinian social, cultural, economic, and political life before the 1948. Nonetheless, greater efforts should be made to search for documentation on the details of everyday rural life. Each and every peasant has her or his own version of events, his or her own story to tell, which together add up to a mosaic of Palestinian society and identity. After all, peasants, at the beginning of the mandate in 1922, formed 70% of the population.

Browsing through the photographs in this section reminds us of Sarah Graham Brown's work on "Palestinians and their Society 1880-1946", and the works of Walid Khalidi "Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians 1876-1948". Photography, one discovers again and again, is a powerful tool in the recovery of the past

### **Social Life**

Documents on social life include sub-categories such as customs and traditions, social issues, and the Palestinian family, are connected linked to those concerning historical personalities. This connection may have been made by coincidence, or perhaps because of the chaotic structuring of the archive itself. One thing one cannot fail to notice in following the documents chronologically, is the changing role of Palestinian women. They moved away from traditional behavior, whether they came from villages or from camps. They became increasingly involved in

political processes, and their outlook is increasingly a feminist one, as shown in the archive documents.

The documents concerning social life show that Palestinian society closely resembles others in the region, such as Syrians, Iraqis or Lebanese. We are presented with a social mosaic consisting of the educated, the illiterate, city people, rural folks, Bedouins, modern, nomadic, and so on, all of whom nonetheless share their “Palestinianness.” If, for example, one confronts two photographs, one of the Collège des Frères in Jerusalem in the year 1932, and the other of the Irfan School in Nablus in 1934, it is seen that those in the first picture are closer to Europeans in their dress, while the second have more of an eastern type of dress, including the wearing of the fez (tarbush), as part of their uniform.

### **Historical Maps**

By entering the icon designating Palestinian maps in the digital archive, it is found that these tell the story of Palestinian history from Ottoman rule to the present. In particular, it is striking to see what happened to the area as a result of World War one, following the Sykes-Picot agreement and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. The role of Franco-British colonial schemes is illustrated, and the ways in which they altered existing administrative divisions within the Ottoman Empire, in which the Levant (Bilad El Cham) consisted of the province of Jerusalem, *wilayat* such as Syria, Aleppo, along with Sandjaks like Akka, Nablus, and Beirut. These maps illustrate the becoming of modern Turkey, Iraq and Jordan, as well as the campaigns of the Great War, which resulted in this recomposition.

One picture shows Palestine during the period of the British Mandate, following Sykes-Picot, the Balfour Declaration, and finally, GA Resolution 181 of 1947, to divide Palestine into three entities, with Jerusalem as an internationalized *corpus separatum*. There are also more detailed maps of the period, which illustrate internal dispositions during the Mandate, for example those of the town of Safad and its environs, or maps of the demographic evolution of Palestine in terms of numbers and distribution of Palestinians and Jews, clear illustrations of the theft of the country by those who owned a tiny percentage of the whole and represented a distinct minority everywhere. There is a picture of a historical map of Palestine after the 1948 *nakba*, and of the hundreds of villages destroyed by Israel, and of the shrinking of Palestine to the West Bank and Gaza, followed by the disappearance of even that area with the Zionist occupation of 1967,

followed (and in the rest of the country, preceded) by the intensive building of Jewish settlements in all Arab areas, isolating them from each other, as illustrated in one particular map. Another shows the deep meaning of the division of the West Bank into areas A, B and C, and the further reduction in available space due to the building of the separation wall. Another important map helps in understanding the history of the refugee question, based on the distribution of Palestinian camps, all built following the *nakba*, with the places of origin of these people.

Other maps deal with the environment, showing polluted areas and those with landfills, with their distribution over the West Bank, and locate the distribution of underground water, forests and reserves inside the Palestinian lands. Finally, there are tourist maps showing Palestinian monuments, for example that concerning archaeological sites in Bethlehem.

Through these pictures, one gains a sense of the presence of hidden concepts which form a part of the real concept of the missing Palestinian map, best represented perhaps by the maps of Palestinian sites and spaces destroyed during the 1948 occupation, and their replacement by settlements and factories. In other words, the maps collectively heighten one's understanding of changes having occurred on the Palestinian scene since the catastrophe of 1948 with the loss of Palestine.

This section is somewhat lacking in the history of Palestinian transportation and infrastructure, although there are a few maps, like that of the Gaza railroad. There should also have been more illustrations of the times and places of Palestinian population growth, through which the conditions of the people could better be traced, as well as the importance of the sectioning off and isolation of blockaded areas. Nor are there any economic maps, whether industrial or agricultural. And it would have been most useful to include British, Israeli, and other maps, which could have provided a better comparative picture of the evolution of events on the ground. In addition, some of the documents display technical problems, and there is a real need for indexes and keys to the available maps. Sometimes one looks in vain for the source of a map and even the year of its publication.

## **Personal Documents**

Here one finds a variety of pictures, some of which could well have been placed in other categories. Nonetheless they are of great historical importance and help to form a complex picture of the evolution of Palestine. Some examples:

The military situation during the 1936-1939 revolution and its significance with regard to the Palestinian struggle. This part consists of pictures of armed British soldiers walking down the streets, or repressing Palestinian demonstrations, or the picture of blown up houses and other places during the revolution, the photograph that shows maneuvers of the British Army on the Jerusalem hills in 1936, pictures of Palestinian revolutionaries with their weapons, gathered around their leaders, a photograph of Aref Abdul Razzak and Abdul Halim Julani armed and in uniform, pictures of Palestinian demonstrations, of attacks on the British military, as well as the latter's response, from blowing up houses and mosques, to detaining and imprisoning, illustrated by the photo of Palestinian detainees in the prison camp of Sarafand.

Other pictures or texts illustrate foreign relations and diplomatic efforts, such as the message from Palestinian artist Fatima Al-Mohib to the director of the United States foreign trade office warning of the British occupation and the Zionist danger, or the picture of a delegation of Palestinians in Egypt, where they had gone to discuss the Palestinian dilemma with prime minister Mustafa Al-Nahas Pasha, or that of members and leaders of the Arab delegations to the Islamic conference in Jerusalem in 1931, including Musa Kathem Al-Husseni, Hajj Amin Al-Husseni, and Mohammed Taher. The significance of these photographs lies in their illustrating the importance of Palestinian efforts in facing the Zionist danger, and the quest for Arab allies in the process. The documents also suggest, implicitly, that efforts in this regard were insufficient.

There are also photographs of academic documents suggestive of the educational situation in Palestine, especially in the years before the Israeli occupation, and the motivation to progress in this regard, in no way limited to men, as in the document showing Palestinian artist Fatima Al-Mohib getting her Bachelor's degree in medicine from King Fuad University in Egypt.

There are likewise photographs of financial documents suggesting the economic picture during Ottoman rule and British mandate, and including land ownership documents, contracts of land purchase and sale, dating back to 1918, in Meithaloun for example, or Abu Khayran's land ownership deed in the village of Iraq Al-Manshuya in Gaza District. There are photographs of

personal documents, such as Ottoman and British passports, such as doctor Jyrias Mansour's passport, as well as marriage contracts from the British and Jordanian periods.

There are photographs that identify the nature of Palestinian-British communication, especially regarding the Zionist issue and Jewish immigration. Here one might mention the Supreme Islamic Counsel's letter to the British High Commissioner, strongly protesting British policy towards Jewish immigration, and the cession of Arab land to the Jews.

Here too one needs to point to what is missing and makes it impossible, relying simply on this archive, to derive a fairly complete picture of a given problem, taking as an example, the educational map of Palestine, for which one needs to use one's imagination and rely on complementary sources. The other problem requiring mention is the difficulty one sometimes encounters in making out the meaning of the handwriting on a given document. There is also the problem with Ottoman-era documents, written in the Ottoman language, and requiring translation and transcription. In some cases, as in pictures from the 1936 revolution, one would need to identify all of the people on a given picture. But these documents form the basis for questionings that do indeed inspire researchers.

One also wishes there were a catalogue of laws issued by the Ottoman government, as well as the mandatory authorities and the Israeli occupation, notably regarding the land question and the way in which laws and their interpretation favored the transfer of property from Palestinians to Jews. There should also be a list of resolutions and international agreements related to the Palestinian issue since the beginning of the British mandate.

### **Materials from radios**

In this category one finds photographs and recordings which help to sharpen the sociopolitical image of the Palestinian community, especially after Oslo Accords. Examples are:

Photographs of the Palestinian political situation after the peace negotiations in the nineties, with sessions of the legislative council, political programs, or news broadcasts discussing negotiations, Israeli settlements and attacks on Palestinian properties. Outstanding here is the documentation of the first meeting of the Palestinian legislative council (parliament), which illustrated the institutional environment of the time, just after the creation of the Palestinian Authority. In those days, the sessions were systematically recorded, and the discussions stored in

the digital archive are most revealing. Notable here are discussions of legislative election procedures but also those governing municipal council elections, and in particular the participation of women, as with the program entitled New Horizons (*'afaq jadida*). One also gets an idea of the Palestinian cultural environment of the time, based on materials from the radio (the Voice of Palestine, *idha'at sawt filastin*). There are, by way of examples, interviews of Mahmoud Darwish, Emile Habibi, and others. Citizens' complaints regarding the cost of living, agriculture and so on, are regularly addressed to dedicated radio programs.

In this context, there are recordings and photos concerning the massacres of Sabra/Shatila and Tal al-Zaatar, and interviews with members of the Palestinian national movement, for example Suleiman al-Najab. There is a collection of photographs from the radio, and contributing to the understanding of Palestinian economy, culture and politics beginning with the 1990s. It should be noted that these materials from the Voice of Palestine are especially precious, given that they were retrieved *in extremis* following the bombing by Israel of the Ramallah transmitter in 2002, in which nearly everything there was destroyed.

### **Refugees and Migrants**

The defeat of 1948 resulted in the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and the systematic destruction of hundreds of Palestinian towns and villages. The *nakba* thus resulted in radical changes in the social formation of the Palestinians, a majority of them becoming displaced or refugees. How can we read the section on refugees and migrants? There is some risk that it could be interpreted as an illustration of the misery of an entire people, designed to evoke pity in a largely Western audience, or to attract financial and material assistance. Such western stereotypes show easterners as always living a life steeped in tragedy and lacking the essential elements of an advanced and sophisticated civilization.

But in fact this section is a very rich collection of documents and other materials, including, once again, photographs, which together paint a rather complex, not to say complete picture of Palestinian society after the *nakba*. There are pictures of settlements built on the ruins of villages, but also of life in Palestinian villages. We are shown the relations between Palestinians and Jews, especially that between merchants who engage in trade, but also the vertical relationship between colonizer and colonized. Here one could mention the interview with Ms. Zeinab Ahmad Abu-Obeida from Annaba. The destruction by Israel of archaeological, domestic,



religious and historic structures is illustrated, as in the photograph of a church in the forcibly evacuated villages of Kufar Bur'am. There are images of Palestinian refugees on the move, which tell the tale of deliberate Zionist attacks on civilians. And there are pictures of people's arrival in camps and villages, where they embarked on their new lives. The transformation of the camps is also illustrated, with the original tents, which gradually became tin structures, then concrete houses, separated by narrow alleys, in many cases unsuitable for human habitation. These developments are illustrated by hundreds of interviews, for example one with Mr. Ahmed Abdul Fattah from Dheisheh camp.

Another important area on which light is cast is that of the United National Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees (UNRWA). One is given elements regarding its relationship to the refugees, the projects and services provided, their reciprocal image of each other, the evaluation by refugees of services provided (quality and quantity). One interview dealing with such issues is that of Mahmoud Hydatid, the former director of Jalazoun camp.

Once again, and although this section has a wealth of materials, significant aspects are still missing. There is not enough from Gaza, nor from the camps in Arab countries and further afield. And the documents don't address the cultural side of this history, and thus miss the level of awareness of Palestinians. And there is little to interpret relations and perceptions of and by the international community, and the relations of refugees to the Palestinian Authority.

### **Palestinian Newspapers**

The Palestinian documents in this section are a mirror of events, and of the struggle against the British mandate as well as the increasing Zionist presence, most importantly between the time of the Palestinian revolution of 1936 and the *nakba*. Newspapers include issues of *Filasteen*, *Al-Jihad*, *Al-Difa'*, *Al-Yarmouk* and, later on, *Al-Awdeh* and the newspaper of the Islamic University. The presence of these newspapers, although the collections are far from complete, is significant in that they contribute to our construction of the present. Also of note are the issues of the official journal of the British mandate, issued twice a month in Jerusalem in Arabic. An interesting account in this newspaper is that of the issuance of the Tobacco Law in 1925. The motivation and effects of this law are of interest, particularly in a comparative analysis of British, Palestinian and Israeli laws regarding the importation, sale and consumption of tobacco.

In the attempt to gain an impression from these newspapers, a sample of each was taken, describing the Palestinian revolution of 1936, international support therefore centered in Arab and Islamic countries, the British reaction with the bombing of cities and residential neighborhoods, the detention of Palestinians and their deportation, as well as Jewish immigration to Palestine and the creation and expansion of settlements, as well as military operations carried out against the Zionists. Reports in Jewish newspapers during the mandate period, such as Ha'aretz (article published on 19 June 1936) are also to be found, and add to the panoramic description of the society. One also finds the petition submitted by the Christian communities of Palestine rejecting the British mandate and its policies favorable to Jewish immigration.

One can also deduce aspects of the economic situation in Palestine, through advertisements for airlines, hotels, tourist resorts, car rentals, offers of items for sale, together indicating the ongoing economic dynamism, the significant of trade and tourism in Palestine under the mandate. This in addition to ads from the Arab world intended for Palestinian potential clients, including advertisements for shops and hotels in Amman and Damascus, or therapeutic baths in Jordan, indicating the similarity and proximity of Palestine with Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Politically, these press reports illustrate the degree of Palestinian solidarity with anti-colonial struggles in Egypt and Algeria.

Needless to say, this section is far from comprehensive, since one doesn't find much for the subsequent period, notably that of the eighties and nineties of the twentieth century, when under Israeli occupation newspapers such as Al-Quds, Al-Fajr, Al-Nahar and Al-Anba' played a significant role in molding and reflecting public opinion; there is also no trace of Al-Itihad, Al-Ghad or Al-Jadid, published after 1948 by post-Nakba Palestinians. And there could also be more from the Zionist press dating back to mandate times.

## **Conclusion**

Our intent here has been to show how one can derive a comprehensive picture of Palestine over time, despite what is missing in the various sections of the Awraq digital archive. A series of images composing the ever-moving Palestinian kaleidoscope make it possible to draw a rather comprehensive picture, including notably the constant struggle to exist and assert oneself in the face of British and Zionist occupation and colonization. The creation of the archive and its

development helps bridge the gap between past and present, between public and private, between individual and collective memory in the social, economic, political, and broadly human fields.

Awraq does not tell the whole story, but seen in conjunction with other archives, it empowers the Palestinian narrative and shows how an archive may be constructed that is dissimilar to colonial ones of the British or Israeli variety. By building and building upon a Palestinian archive such as this one, the distortions of Israeli archives are combated, even as Palestinian memory and identity are resurrected, and refugees find their lost homeland, in the struggle against the oblivion of forgetting, what Derrida calls the death of the archive.

And so the images evoked here based on the digital Palestinian archive do not constitute all of Palestine's memories, but it contributes to the gradual construction of a comprehensive Palestinian memory composed of natural, social and economic factors, and the pace therein of the Palestinian refugee. True, it embodies an anarchic vision, but it enables a comprehensive and critical one, in which places and period can be superimposed and compared, thus correcting very partial, biased and cursory images of Palestine and the Palestinian people.

The anarchic system characteristic of Awraq actually helps in tracing a particular Palestinian discourse that avoids marginalization and exclusion and enables a particular and yet universal story regarding the connection between the people and their land, even or in particular after the 1948 occupation and expulsion, by connecting the past and the present, through memory and history. In so doing, the archive displaces the element stressed by the colonizers over the past century, and shows that conceptually, visually, and esthetically, the stranger who does not belong is the settler. It thus responds to the archival violence dealt out to the Palestinian people seeking to obliterate their presence, by tracing a Palestinian discourse which relies on a Palestinian memory bent on rebuilding and sharpening the image of the Palestinians.