

Special Feature **“Nakba after Sixty Years: Memories and Histories in Palestine and East Asia”**

Editors’ Note

USUKI Akira* and NISHIKIDA Aiko**

1. The Objective of the Symposia on the Nakba in Japan

The year 2008 was the sixtieth anniversary of al-Nakba (“catastrophe”) in Palestine. On this occasion, we organized a series of international symposia in Tokyo, Hiroshima, and Kyoto in December, 2008. The purpose and significance of holding such symposia in Japan was that we sit together and discuss Palestinian history and memories of this tragedy as the main topic and try to compare the Palestinian expulsions and dispossessions in 1948 with what happened in East Asia in the latter half of the 1940s against the historical backdrop of World War II and post-war international circumstances, in order to share common knowledge and experience in these two areas.

We held a series of symposia under the general title of “Nakba after Sixty Years: Memories and Histories in Palestine and East Asia,” but we focused on specific topics in each city where the individual symposium was organized: in Tokyo, we concentrated on Palestinian narratives on the history and memories of the Nakba in 1948; in Hiroshima, we tried to exchange tragic experiences and memories between the Palestinian refugees and survivors of Atomic bomb victims in Hiroshima, 1945, and then in Kyoto, we attempted to search for common historical threads between the Palestinians and Koreans as victims under a new international order in the Middle Eastern and East Asian contexts after World War II.

We had already organized a workshop in Kyoto University on the occasion of the UN partition plan of Palestine on November 29, 2007 as the first step of our research project on Palestine. We also have a plan to organize a session on Palestinian Diaspora in “the International Conference 2009 Islamic Area Studies” which will be held in Cairo in December, 2009. For these symposia we invited three guest speakers for each symposium and two special commentators for general comments from abroad. Other participants were also invited to make a special contribution to these symposia, and joined as speakers and

* Japan Women’s University

** Organization for Islamic Area Studies, Waseda University

commentators. Most of the presentations are included in this issue as articles; however, some of them are omitted as the presentations were delivered in Japanese and the discussions held at the time are difficult to relate accurately. We are grateful to all the participants and audiences who gathered for the symposia, and would be honored to dedicate this issue to them.

The Symposium in Tokyo

In the symposium in Tokyo, we discussed the Nakba under the title of “Nakba Revisited: Memories and Histories from a Comparative Perspective.” The tragedies of the Nakba have been recorded in Palestinian historiography and kept in mind as Palestinian memories. Palestinian memories and the history of violence and expulsion, however, have been obscured and sunk into oblivion for more than half a century in official records of Palestine/Israel history. While Palestinian narratives on the Nakba have been forced into silence in front of the Zionists’ narrative on the “Israeli founding myth,” Palestinian refugees’ narratives have been sometimes usurped or exploited by nationalist or chauvinistic discourse in order to justify the nationalist cause. Projects to exhume refugees’ memories of the Nakba began to be conducted by means of oral history, and a steady flow of works to reconstruct a new historiography on the Nakba have been produced to represent new narratives that were spun from Palestinian memories. A lot of projects for recording Palestinian villages destroyed by Zionists and for uncovering the realities of the “ethnic cleansing” of the Palestinians in the Nakba have been inaugurated. Serious studies on the Nakba as one of the fields of Palestine studies have just started. It is necessary to revisit the Nakba and discuss the issues at the time when the Palestinians are placed under such difficult circumstances.

Based on the above mentioned understandings, in the Tokyo session, light was shed upon new trend of studies on the Nakba by Palestinian researchers and scholars, comparing Palestinian narratives on the Nakba with Zionist narratives on the establishment of the State of Israel and/or the Nakba. Dr. Nur Masalha (St. Mary’s College, University of Surrey) gave a keynote lecture entitled “60 Years after the Nakba: Historical Truth, Collective Memory and Ethical Obligations.” Dr. Masalha has published lots of books and articles on Zionist and Israeli policy toward the Palestinians. We discussed how Zionists and Israelis look at and describe the Nakba from their viewpoints. Dr. Mariko Mori (The University of Tokyo) discussed a topic on “Zionism and Nakba: The Mainstream Narrative, Oppressed Narratives, and the Israeli Collective Memory.” Dr. Mori has published books on Socialist Zionist policy toward the Arabs and a history of Revisionist Zionism. In addition to the case of Palestine we also explored a new attempt to reconstruct the memories and history of Central Asian countries under Soviet rule from a comparative perspective by using the example of Uzbekistan’s struggle to seek her national identity. For this purpose, Dr. Timur Dadabaev (University of Tsukuba) spoke about a case study on Central Asia under

the title of “Trauma, Public Memory and Identity in Post-Soviet Central Asia.” After the presentations of the three speakers, the audience joined the discussion and there was a hot debate on memories and history.

The Symposium in Hiroshima

In the symposium in Hiroshima, we discussed the Nakba under the title of “Nakba and Hibaku: Dialogue between Palestine and Hiroshima.” Sixty years ago, Palestinians lost their homes and were scattered throughout the world as refugees of the tragedy known as the Nakba — the political and social upheaval following the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. First, we need to point out the reason why we selected Hiroshima, site of the atomic bombing, as our location. As we know, it has been sixty-three years since the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The number of atomic survivors is diminishing, and those still alive are growing elderly. This suggests a significant problem. We now face the challenge of recording the experiences of atomic bomb survivors in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as passing this knowledge on to future generations. The same can be said of the Nakba as well. Certainly, the Palestinian Nakba and the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki occurred at different times and places, and differ in terms of historical and political backgrounds. However, the two events share experiences of destruction and violence, as well as the challenge of keeping these memories alive in the generations to come. For this reason, it is our strong belief that in viewing the Nakba in the context of Hiroshima, and Hiroshima in context of the Nakba, as well as addressing their various issues from a shared outlook, we may find new perspectives from which to view the two experiences.

For this symposium, we invited Dr. Rosemary Sayigh to be our keynote speaker representing the Palestinian side. As a cultural anthropologist residing in Lebanon, she has long been involved in collecting oral testaments of Palestinian refugees, especially of women. She gave a keynote lecture titled “Hiroshima, the Nakba: Markers of Rupture and New Hegemonies” in which she exhibited the differences and similarities between Hiroshima/Nagasaki and the Nakba in order to connect Hiroshima/Nagasaki to the Nakba. Next, the leading sociologist Dr. Naono Akiko of Kyushu University spoke under the title “Listening to the Murmur of Voices in the Hiroshima Memoryscape.” An author of a collection of artworks by atomic bomb survivors, she spoke about Hiroshima, discussing what is meant by “memories of the bomb,” and how we as listeners can best honor the truth when hearing these testaments. Lastly, a leading expert on modern philosophy, Professor Satoshi Ukai of Hitotsubashi University, spoke under the title “Pictures, Movies and Memories of the Nakba.” He talked about what Michel Khleifi’s film *Canticle of the Stones*, an adaptation of French film director Alain Resnais’s *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, wished to relate concerning Palestine and Hiroshima, and discussed the possibility of overcoming borders to build shared memories

between cultures. Professor Ukai has himself been involved in addressing the question of Palestine for many years, and worked hard to invite Michel Khleifi, film director of works such as *Wedding in Galilee* and *Fertile Memory*, to Japan. After the presentations of the three speakers, three discussants spoke about their viewpoints on the relationship between Nakba and Hibaku, public memory and nationalism, and the problems around remembering them. Then the audience joined the discussion and there was a hot debate on commemoration, the politics of memories and the responsibility for war crimes.

The Symposium in Kyoto

In the symposium in Kyoto, we discussed the Nakba under the title of “Narrating and Listening to the Memories of Nakba in Kyoto: Dialogue between Palestine and East Asia.” There have been countless “Nakbas” in the world. The annexation of Korea by Japan in 1910, which deprived the Korean people of their national identities, was certainly a Nakba-like experience. For 36 years, the Korean people lived under Japanese colonial rule, suffering from cultural, political and economic imperialism. The forced migration of large numbers of Koreans to Japan was also the result of Japanese colonial policies, and numerous women were sexually victimized by the Japanese military, and left physically and emotionally scarred for life.

Just as Palestinians—whether they are refugees, are living under Israeli military occupation or in Israel—have been suffering from the violent consequences of the Nakba tragedy 60 years ago, the end of Japanese colonial rule in 1945 did not mean the end of the violence of a Nakba for Korean people. Those who came to live in Japan as the result of Japanese colonialism have remained in the status of “quasi-refugees,” and have been exposed to various forms of discrimination in Japanese society throughout these 60 years. However, the memories of the Korean Nakba have not been fully admitted or appreciated by the Japanese in their national history. Rather, they are repressed and sometimes negated just like the memory of the Palestinian Nakba in Israeli national history.

Japan and Israel, which exist at either end of the Asian continent, are in an alliance with each other in terms of the negation of their own criminal pasts. That Japanese colonial rule is not a “holocaust” because the Holocaust is a unique and incomparable event in human history, is being claimed by Japanese nationalists just to negate Japanese responsibility for those historical crimes. The memories of the Nakba, either the Palestinian one, the Korean one, or the one suffered by Eastern European Jews, need to be opened up to the memory of others, against the national appropriation of its memory. In Kyoto, we thought over diverse questions regarding this phenomenon through dialogue between Palestine and Eastern Asia, both of which narrate their own experiences of Nakba.

Professor Sari Hanafi (American University in Beirut), who has long been working

for the Human rights of Palestinian refugees and those living under the occupation, talked in his keynote speech about the destruction of the land and memory of Palestine which has been developing as the violence of "Spaciocide" from the Nakba until the present day. The title of his presentation was "Spacio-cide: Israeli Politics of Land and Memory Destruction in Palestinian Territory," and an article with the same title was compiled as a handout. For this issue, however, another article closer to the subject has been compiled according to the author's preference. Subsequently, there was a speech by Professor Mun Gyongsu, titled "The Origin and the Present of the Problems of Korean Residents in Japan," which illustrated the nature of the violence in the root problems of the KMJ (Korean Minority in Japan.) Both speeches revealed a historical vein connecting the two Nakbas. Then, Ms. Yeong-ae Yamashita, who has herself been engaged in activities to support "Korean Comfort Women" spoke about how Korean feminists supporting Korean ex-comfort women dealt with the issue of Japanese comfort women. Her argument exhibited the problematic nature of the colonized as they responded with a radicalized nationalism, and showed that this nationalism was also working as a sort of violence against "the other" by negating the other's memory.

At the end of the symposium in Kyoto, namely, the end of all three symposia, we held the Closing Session, in which there were general comments by the two invited special commentators, Dr. Ali Qleibo and Dr. Yakov Rabkin. There were also presentations by some young Japanese researchers who are studying themes related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Finally, Akira Usuki and Professor Yuzo Itagaki gave the closing remarks.

The closing remark on the symposia under the title of "Future of Palestine Studies in Japan" by Usuki which follows would be suitable to close this editors' note. You can find in it a reference to the significance of Professor Itagaki's academic activities for the history of Palestine studies in Japan.

2. Future of Palestine Studies in Japan

Colonialism is one of the main topics during these symposia in terms of comparison between Palestine and East Asia. Here in Japan the promotion and encouragement of Middle Eastern studies in general, and Palestine studies in particular, have been closely connected with the Japanese colonialist policy toward Chinese and Asian areas before and during World War II. Even after the war, the promotion of Middle Eastern studies in Japan continued to be related to what happened in the Middle East, such as the revolutions and wars in 1973, 1979 and 1991. Firstly, a brief sketch about the history of Palestine studies in Japan in order to bridge the gaps between the past and the present and then the future of Palestine studies in Japan will be delivered.

Frankly speaking, Palestine studies in Japan don't have a long history, since Japan's

direct relationship with Palestine can at most best be traced back only to World War I. Under the terms of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, after the inauguration of World War I, Japan declared war on Germany on August 1914 and participated in a joint operation with British forces. After the war, Japan was recognized as one of the great colonialist powers and participated in the San Remo Conference of the Allied Supreme Council in 1920, where Japan was assigned as the Mandatory power for South Pacific islands, that is, the former German colonies before World War I, while Britain was assigned as the Mandatory power for Palestine. Since Japan sought to incorporate the colonized Islands as an integral part of its empire, she mounted an aggressive economic development program and promoted immigration to those areas. Japanese, Okinawan and Korean immigrants eventually came to outnumber the islanders.

After the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, Inner Manchuria was proclaimed as an independent state, Manchukuo, in 1932, although Manchukuo was regarded as a Japanese puppet state by international society. Thus Manchuria was formally detached from China by Japan to create a buffer zone to defend Japan and its 'unofficial empire' from Soviet Russia's 'Southing Strategy.' The Japanese government also began a campaign of emigration to Manchukuo; the Japanese population in Manchukuo rose from 240,000 in 1931 to 1,500,000 in 1945 as the Japanese government had a plan to bring in 5 million Japanese settlers into Manchukuo. Hundreds of Manchu farmers were evicted and then their farms were confiscated and given to Japanese immigrant families. This Japanese immigrant policy toward Manchuria reminds us of the British policy of Jewish Zionist settlements to Palestine. For the purpose of comparing the two cases, we had an international workshop "Colonialism Compared: Japan and Israel with special reference to Korea and Egypt" at the Institute of Oriental Studies, the University of Tokyo in February, 2005.

By the way, during World War II, Japan was interested in Palestine from an ideological viewpoint, especially paying special attention to the political role of Hajj Amin al-Husayni as a religious and political symbol of pan-Islamic and pan-Asian solidarity in order to mobilize Muslims in the world under the Japanese colonialist slogan of the Greater Asian Sphere for Prosperity.

After her defeat, Japan lost her direct relations with the Middle East under the US occupation except for a few Japanese Asianist activists who continued to support the Palestine cause as the oppressed people. After the atomic bombing of Hiroshima in August 1945, the Soviet Union invaded Manchuria and declared the war against Japan. This was the direct result of the beginning of the Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union. During the US occupation of Japan between 1945 and 1950, the UN partition plan of Palestine was adopted in November 1947 and then the Nakba followed in April 1948. Since Japan had nothing to do with what happened in Palestine at that time, the ordinary Japanese people still believe that

Japan is innocent of the Palestine Question. I am sure that this understanding is completely incorrect from the historical perspective because I pointed out earlier that Japan was one of the colonialist powers that was committed to the establishment of a Mandatory system after World War I.

It is worthwhile to recollect that a book was published in 1950 under the title of "A Story of Palestine." The author was Okakura Koshiro (1912–2001), one of the advocates of the Japanese solidarity movement with the Third World peoples against colonialism. This work is considered as the first product on the Palestine Question after World War II. The people's solidarity movement culminated even among the Japanese people in the holding of the first large-scale Asian-African or Afro-Asian Conference known as the Bandung Conference in 1955. Still we had to wait until the 1970s for an opportunity to come in terms of increasing academic studies of the Palestine Question.

After the emergence of the Palestinian national liberation movement, especially after the battle of Karameh in 1968, the Japanese people began to be interested in the Palestine Question. In the 1970s, Palestine was regarded as a symbol of the nationalist liberation movements in the Third World. In the academic field, the Palestine Question became the focal point of Middle Eastern studies in Japan. The most prominent scholar is Professor emeritus Yuzo Itagaki of the University of Tokyo. He is one of the members of the organizing committee of this symposium on the Nakba. Professor Itagaki has organized many workshops and conferences. One of the most important workshops and conferences that he initiated was a big symposium on Palestine in Yokohama, the port city near Tokyo, in November 1977, and he also organized the International People's Tribunal of the Israeli Invasion of Lebanon, 1982. These two events can be considered as the watershed of the studies of the Palestine Question and the solidarity movement in Japan.

If Professor Itagaki is from the first generation of Palestine studies in Japan, perhaps I can consider myself as one of the second generation of students studying Palestine in Japan. At present we are witnessing the emergence of the third or fourth generation of students of Palestine studies in Japan. The younger researchers who presented their papers at this symposium in Kyoto are good representatives of the new generations here in Japan. We believe that these symposia are made possible thanks to the endeavors of the younger generation.

By the way, to this day there exists neither a department nor a center dedicated specifically to Middle Eastern studies and Palestine studies in all the universities and institutions of Japan. We have to establish such an academic institution as soon as possible even though its size is small. But the present difficult financial and academic situations do not permit us to establish such an academic institution specialized in the Palestine studies or even in Middle Eastern studies. Therefore we are thinking about and discussing the establishment

of a center for Palestine studies as a virtual network as the first step to achieving this purpose in order to cooperate and exchange many kinds of information through internet, not only together with scholars and researchers but also among universities and institutions in Japan and abroad. Professor Yasushi Kosugi of Kyoto University, a member of the organizing committee for the symposia, suggests that a Nakba museum should be established here in Japan. I agree with him completely, not only because we are struggling against the silencing of Palestinian voices from an academic viewpoint and against the Japanese Christian Zionist movement's initiatives to establish Holocaust museums in Japan, but also because a Nakba museum in Japan would become a symbolic forum for exchanging views and opinions and for dispatching messages to the Palestinians and the international society as a whole.

In the future, if budgets here permit, we hope to invite directors and chiefs of centers and institutions of Palestine studies all over the world in order to discuss, consult and collaborate with each other on the current state of Palestine studies. We believe that these symposia were the first step towards encouraging Palestine studies in Japan by discussing urgent topics such as colonialism and multiculturalism with Palestinian colleagues from abroad. Finally, on behalf of the organizing committee, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to all the participants in the symposia in Tokyo, Hiroshima and Kyoto.