

## PALESTINIAN COMMEMORATION in ISRAEL CALENDARS, MONUMENTS & MARTYRS

TAMIR SOREK mention of the differences between the perspectives of students from different countries. However, the booklet editors did observe a significant difference in the terms chosen by the students surveyed, depending on their location. Those from the refugee camps in Syria and Lebanon focused on the armed struggle and the Right of Return. Those from the West Bank tended to refer more to the destroyed Palestinian villages. Finally, Palestinian students from Israel focused on cultural aspects and tended more to refer to poets and authors.<sup>31</sup> This variance reflects fundamental differences in the political and educational experiences of Palestinians in different contexts; unlike Palestinian refugees or occupied Palestinians, for the Palestinian citizens of Israel, a civic-political struggle is still available as an option.

To be sure, as in other areas, since 2000 there has been a noticeable change in the way armed struggle is treated in Palestinian commemorations. Land Day 2014, for example, focused on "security prisoners" who are Palestinian citizens of Israel. Sa'ada Ighbariyya, the mother of two brothers from Mushayrifeh who took part in the killing of three IDF soldiers in 1992, was among the speakers on the podium. Flashing backward to the 1986 commemoration of the Kafr Qasim massacre in which the mayor assertively distanced his town from a similar operation (see Chapter 2), the far-reaching rhetorical change is evident.

## **EXCLUDING PALESTINIANS WHO ARE NOT ISRAELI CITIZENS**

In Chapter 2 I referred to the exclusion of Palestinians killed in the 1956 Gaza Strip massacres from the commemorations of Palestinians inside Israel. Years later, however, the Communist Party used the memory of these massacres for political purposes, but to delegitimize a political rival, and not as a unifying national myth. In the 1984 elections, when the Progressive List emerged as thefirst non-Zionist electoral challenge to the communists, al-Ittihad attacked the military record of Matti Peled, a peace activist and senior candidate of the Progressive List who had served as the IDF military commander of the Gaza Strip in 1956–1957.<sup>32</sup> The editors awkwardly tried to connect Peled to the massacres, ignoring the fact that he was appointed as military commander of the region only after they had occurred. After Peled withdrew from political life in 1988, al-Ittihad ceased to express any interest in the Gaza Strip massacres. However, this temporary mobilization of the 1956 Gaza Strip massacres in the context of inter-party rivalry illustrates that their memory has been available for political use, and therefore we must acknowledge that their omission from the commemorative repertoire of Palestinians in Israel is an active political choice.

Another prominent relevant exclusion is the massacre of thousands of Palestinians in Tal al-Za'tar (Lebanon) by Syrian forces and their allies in August 1976,<sup>33</sup> only four months after Land Day. Together with the Sabra and Shatila massacre, Tal al-Za'tar came to dominate Palestinian national history, at least in Lebanon.<sup>34</sup> The two massacres, however, certainly do not dominate the history of the Palestinians in Israel. *Al-Ittihad* extensively covered the battle in Tal al-Za'tar immediately after its occurrence, and glorified it as "the symbol of sacrifice and steadfastness."<sup>35</sup> By the second anniversary, however, *al-Ittihad* only republished a short report on the commemoration of the event in Lebanon that had been published previously in the PLO bulletin. Furthermore, Tal al-Za'tar failed to gain an embodied commemoration such as rallies or processions, and in the long term the event remained outside of the commemorative repertoire of Palestinians in Israel.

In contrast, the footprint of the Sabra and Shatila massacre in September 1982 lasted longer. Following the massacre the Land Committee decided to establish an annual memorial day. On the first anniversary a general strike was announced, three thousand people participated in a parade in Nazareth, and some smaller memorial parades took place in other villages and towns in the Galilee. A similar pattern characterized the second anniversary. From the third anniversary, the memorial rallies took place on a low scale. On the third anniversary, *al-Ittihad* reported on the general strike and mass demonstration in Lebanon, but to illustrate the participation of Palestinians in Israel, the newspaper used an archive photo that was taken right after the massacre, three years earlier. The minor memorial gathering continued until the early 1990s but since then, the massacre has been commemorated mainly textually by the press.

The difference between the relative endurance of the commemoration of Sabra and Shatila and the silence regarding the Tal al-Za'tar massacre indicates once again that Palestinian commemoration in Israel is first of all a form of protest of citizens against their state. In Sabra and Shatila Israeli responsibility was much more evident, and accordingly the event was followed by large-scale protest in Israel, far beyond the boundaries of the Palestinian public. The massacre was adopted by left-wing Jewish activists, both Zionists and non-Zionists, as a symbol of the moral bankruptcy of Ariel Sharon, Minister of Defense who planned the war, and the ruling Likud party. The hundreds of thousands of Jewish Israelis who came to Tel Aviv to protest the war following the massacre legitimized the commemoration of the massacre in the Israeli public sphere. *Al-Ittihad* explicitly mentioned this 1982 mass demonstration in an editorial

protesting the high fine imposed on an Arab boy wearing a shirt with the words "Sabra and Shatila" during the second anniversary of the massacre. This demonstration was presented as proof that protesting the massacre was a legitimate act in the Israeli public sphere.<sup>36</sup> Small-scale commemoration of the event among Jewish Israelis continued for several years, and on the fifth anniversary of the massacre, a small commemorative rally took place in Tel Aviv. Furthermore, a popular 1980s Hebrew song commemorates the massacre ("Emtsa September," written by Astar Shamir). This public legitimacy to protest the massacre is probably a major reason for its exceptional status as the only event that took place outside of Israel that was almost included in the canonized political calendar of the Palestinians inside. Furthermore, unlike many other cases of large-scale killing of Palestinian non-citizens, the victims of Sabra and Shatila are the only ones commemorated by monuments as two monuments in their memory were established in Laqiyya and Kafr Kana (see Chapter 4).

The distinction between expressions of solidarity and long-term inclusion in politicized commemoration is evident as well in the case of the martyrs of the first Palestinian Intifada. This Intifada was mostly unarmed in its initial stages, and Palestinian victims gained much attention from the Palestinian media in Israel. Newspapers counted the dead, published their photos, told their stories, glorified them, and took part in the pan-Palestinian project of myth-making. *Al-Ittihad* even dedicated a daily column to personal stories of martyrs, publishing one story of a martyr per day. The terminology used in *al-Ittihad* in this coverage was virtually indistinguishable from that used in the occupied territories.<sup>37</sup> In 1988 the conventions of at least two Arab parties, the Progressive List and the Arab Democratic Party, opened with a moment of silence in the memory of the "martyrs of the Intifada."<sup>38</sup> These immediate expressions of solidarity and sympathy were adopted by other parties, but they did not leave any traces on the Palestinian political calendar and spatial commemoration inside Israel.

Especially telling in this context are the riots that broke out in the square at the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount in Jerusalem on 8 October 1990, during which Israeli police killed between seventeen and twenty-three Palestinians. The victims were commemorated on a stone slab at the entrance to the Muslim cemetery near the Lions' Gate in East Jerusalem. Inside the Green Line, however, there is no spatial commemoration of the event, and the date was not included on the political calendar.

Significantly, however, one of the victims of the Haram al-Sharif massacre, 'Adnan Khalaf Mawasi from Tamra, was an Israeli citizen. With the prolifera-

tion of memorial monuments since October 2000, his family demanded that the Tamra local council establish a memorial monument for him. When the mayor was unsupportive, the local branch of the NDA adopted the martyr, and in 2009 the party started a campaign to commemorate him. A major argument in the campaign was that Tamra deserved to have its own martyr like other towns. The martyr's brother stated: "In the last parade in 'Arabeh [referring to the commemorative parade for the October 2000 events] I heard a conversation between the town's youth wondering: 'Why don't we have a martyr in our town?' [ ... ] and I cannot understand why the martyrs are commemorated in the other towns except in Tamra."39 Clearly, since the commemoration of Al-Aqsa Day refers to the events that occurred inside the Green Line in October 2000, "the other towns" are those towns inside pre-1967 Israel commemorating their martyrs, who presumably gain much prestige by this commemoration. The justification for building a memorial, then, was primarily the potential benefit for Tamra in the internal competition of prestige, whereas the motivation to commemorate the massacre of 1990 (as opposed to the individual martyr) is marginal.

The 1994 massacre in Hebron is another case that illustrates once more the difference between empathy and solidarity, on the one hand, and the active inclusion of martyrs in a repertoire of political commemoration. On 25 February 1994 an American-born Jewish settler entered the mosque in the Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron and killed twenty-nine Palestinians with an automatic weapon. The PNA, Fatah, and Hamas media has commemorated the event annually by retelling the story of the massacre and interviewing eye witnesses and relatives of the martyrs. Except in the first years after the massacre, the Arab media in Israel was less outspoken in relation to the massacre.

In the riots that took place outside and inside the Green Line immediately following the massacre, nineteen Palestinians were killed, including one Israeli citizen from Rahat, Muhammad Abu Jami'. A year later, *al-Ittihad* reported that the Rahat municipal council commemorated his death with a popular procession to his grave and the planting of an olive tree in the cemetery.<sup>40</sup> That same year, commemorative demonstrations for the massacre itself were reported in various locations in the West Bank (Hebron, Na'alin)<sup>41</sup> but not anywhere inside the Green Line. In Hebron thousands of Palestinians have participated in the annual commemorative prayer every year. Inside Israel, the only institutional commemoration of the event refers particularly to the martyr from Rahat. In 1998, following his family's request, the Rahat local council established a memorial pillar near the Rahat city hall to commemorate him. The text on the pillar mentions that he was martyred following the massacre in the Tomb of the Patriarchs, but there is no reference to other Palestinians killed in the massacre itself or in the riots that followed it.

If the singling out of the martyrs in Tamra and Rahat might be explained simply as local bereavement and pride and not as a marker of the socio-geographical boundaries of a trapped minority, the monuments commemorating al-Aqsa Day provide unmistakable visual representation of this socio-geographical cartography. The monument in Figure 4 is one out of ten memorials that Palestinian citizens of Israel built to commemorate the martyrs of October 2000. It is located in Jat, a Palestinian town in the Triangle. At first glance, the memorial seems to convey only an unambiguous and overarching commitment to Palestinian nationalism. The map of British-Mandate Palestine, the colors of the Palestinian flag, and the drawing of the Dome of the Rock are all well-known icons of Palestinian national identity. The red text underneath (not on the frame) reads "Palestine"; the red text in the middle indicates the monument's title: The Martyrs of the al-Aqsa Intifada. The names of the thirteen martyrs are written in black and green, and an arrow leads from each name to the location of the person's death on the map (which with the exception of one case is also the town or village where the martyr was born and raised). What is most significant about this monument, however, is its omissions. During the exact same time frame, forty-seven other Palestinians were killed by Israeli security forces in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Furthermore, the events of late September and early October 2000 were only the beginning of the al-Aqsa Intifada, in which more than 3,300 Palestinians were killed over the course of four years. It is clear that the meaningful dividing line between the martyrs commemorated on this monument and the other Palestinians killed in the Intifada is their Israeli citizenship. All the monument's martyrs were killed within the internationally recognized borders of Israel, and all but one were Israeli citizens. The exception, Muslih Abu Jarad, was a resident of the Gaza Strip who worked in Umm al-Fahm. He was among three Palestinians killed there and, thus, was included on the list of martyrs. Other victims, like Mahmud Musa'ad who died two days later and only eight miles away but beyond the Green Line, were left off the monument in Jat (and, as we shall see, every other monument inside Israel). In other words, according to this monument, the killing of Palestinians in Israel constituted a single event while the killing of other Palestinians—even though occurring on the same days—are considered as other, separate events.



**Figure 4.** Memorial monument, including the names of those killed in October 2000 inside the Green Line, entitled *The Martyrs of the al-Aqsa Intifada*, in Jat. Source: Photo by the author.

## 136 ON THE MARGINS OF COMMEMORATION

The monument in Jat is only one example of monuments built to commemorate the Palestinian martyrs of October 2000. By referring only to the victims who died inside the Green Line while ignoring the forty-seven Palestinians who were killed beyond it on the exact same days, these monuments delineate the Green Line as the relevant boundary for political identification. Even the familial monument commemorating Hasan Bushnaq in Kafr Manda, which refers to the victims as martyrs who died in the al-Aqsa Battle (indicating solidarity with the uprising of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip), includes only the thirteen victims who died inside the Green Line. In other words, even a private monument, which is relatively free of the pressures applied on a state-dependent municipality, and even when the text explicitly expressed solidarity with Palestinians elsewhere, still creates distinctions between Palestinians in Israel and other Palestinians.

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF OMISSION

The significance of this phenomenon is two-fold. First, the culture of martyrological commemoration among Palestinians in Israel is related to the emergence of a political identity with strong affinity to the Palestinian struggle outside Israel but with distinct characteristics and agendas. Palestinian martyrological commemoration inside Israel, from the massacre in Kafr Qasim to October 2000, is part of a struggle for civic equality, and therefore Palestinians who are not citizens are usually excluded from it. The Future Vision Documents, published by Arab intellectuals and NGO activists in Israel in 2006 and 2007, reflect this political orientation: Israel within the Green Line is considered a *fait accompli*, but its character as a nationalizing Jewish state is challenged.<sup>42</sup> The exclusion of other Palestinians from Palestinian commemoration inside Israel is exclusion from the process of the public politicization of death, not from emotional sympathy or national solidarity. It does not mean that Palestinians in Israel are "less Palestinian" or are indifferent to Palestinian victims. This exclusion does mean, however, that internal boundaries among Palestinians, created by the separation imposed by different political realities, are very meaningful and shape diverse collective imaginations and diverse forms of struggle.

Second, Palestinian commemoration inside pre-1967 Israel is part of an attempt to confront, as well as to dialogue with Jewish citizens and the Israeli state. Muhammad 'Ali Taha, the Nakba and Steadfastness Committee chair, unambiguously acknowledged that the Nakba commemoration project aimed to target both Palestinian and Jewish-Israeli audiences.<sup>43</sup> While Israel denies its responsibility for Palestinian suffering, when the victims are Israeli citizens the denial becomes more complicated since it contradicts both Israel's claim to sovereignty and its aspiration of being considered a liberal democracy.

The exclusion of Palestinian non-citizens and themes of armed struggle are aspects of cautious commemoration practiced by Palestinians inside Israel. This caution necessary partly due to the strict official and unofficial surveillance imposed on Palestinian commemoration in Israel. The mechanisms of this surveillance and its historical development are the topic of the next chapter.