

THE PAPER TRAIL OF A LIBERATION MOVEMENT

By Hana Sleiman

In March 1986, a lieutenant named ‘Isa from the Algerian military accompanied Samih Shubayb, head of the Archives and Documents Section at the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Research Center, to a Palestine Liberation Army (PLA) base in the Algerian desert. Lieutenant ‘Isa pointed to rows of white boxes covered with tents and said, “This is the Palestinian archive.”¹ Little did he and Shubayb know that the collection of documents would still be there, its contents unknown and inaccessible, nearly three decades later.

The PLO’s Executive Committee established the Research Center on 28 February 1965, shortly after the organization’s establishment in May 1964. Founded under the PLO’s first chairman, Ahmad Shuqayri, the Center served as the organization’s official knowledge producer and record keeper. In addition to its knowledge production function, the Center had a mandate to “collect old and contemporary documents relating to the Arab-Zionist conflict, continue collecting documents emanating therefrom, and organize

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means of benefiting from these documents.”² This article is an inquiry into the curious fate of the PLO Research Center’s archive. It reconstructs how this archive was lost, and tells the story of why it was never repatriated. It highlights Israel’s seizure of Palestinian stores of documents, and the Palestinian leadership’s abandonment of their own records. It also addresses the ramifications of this archival loss for writing Palestinian history. In analyzing these ramifications, the article turns to the archive established under the Palestinian Authority (PA) in the wake of the Oslo Accords.

On 13 September 1993 PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin signed the Oslo Accords. The ensuing process established the limited writ of the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and Gaza, under the auspices of the PLO leadership that had returned from Tunis.³ A process of institution building followed and, in 1994, the PA established the Palestinian National Archives as its official storehouse of records.⁴ This article interrogates the difference between the pre-1993 archive and that of the quasi-state. It explores the distinction between two archivally constructed Palestines and the metamorphosis of the national movement from a liberation project into a state-building enterprise. The article reveals the stakes of silencing one archive and championing another in shaping the boundaries of the production of modern Palestinian history.

The first section of this article discusses the literature on the modern archive, looking closely at the creation of liberation movement archives. The second section tells the story of the PLO Research Center archive from creation to loss. The third and final section places the loss of the Research Center archive and the creation of the Palestinian National Archives in the context of the institutional shift from the PLO to the PA. It is beyond the scope of this article to analyze the histories of the PLO and the PA in their totality or the overlapping web of actors, power constellations, and alliances that have defined each institution over the course of half a century. Instead it will focus on those internal dynamics and transformations that are relevant to the story of the Research Center archive.

Archive, History, and Power

The archive has a capital “A” . . . It may represent neither the material site nor a set of documents. Rather, it may serve as a strong metaphor for any corpus of selective forgettings and recollections.

Ann Laura Stoler⁵

This article does not deal with the PLO Research Center archive as a set of documents that contain historical truth about the PLO. It rather interprets the archive as an institution of validating knowledge, what Ann Laura Stoler refers to as a system of collecting and forgetting that provides the documentary basis for certain truth claims.⁶ The article analyzes the journey of the archive against the backdrop of the archival turn, an analysis of the archive not as source but as subject. Stoler explains that archive-as-source is the traditional view of an archive as an institution from which documents, and thus evidence and truth about the past, can be extracted. Archive-as-subject reads the archive as a site of state ethnography, analyzing its composition and the ensuing knowledge produced as manifestations of state power. Stoler advocates a reading of the archive that looks at the making of documents as a process of fact production, and at the use of archival material as a process of fact consumption. The archive not only records, but also produces, certain realities that form the basis of “carefully tended histories.”⁷

Liberation Movement Archives and the Production of History

The very construction and maintenance of national archives is premised on a particular understanding of the relationship between archival production and history writing, one aimed at the legitimation of systems of power. States have understood the archive’s central role in delimiting the boundaries within which histories are constructed, and have thus sought to control the archive. Liberation movement archives, although drastically different in their conditions of production, play an equally ubiquitous role in shaping historical narratives. The construction of the PLO Research Center archive informs the analysis of liberation movement archives in three ways.

First, although it is not typical of liberation movements to keep archives, the PLO did.⁸ In “Documenting South Africa’s Liberation Movement,” Brian Williams and William K. Wallach reflect on the politics of recording and preserving the archives of the movements involved in the South African liberation struggle.⁹ They argue that liberation movements tend to not keep archives due to a combination of state repression and preoccupation with mobilizing the rank and file—thereby rendering secondary any effort to document history. Those records that did make it into the Liberation Archives ended up there by “luck or serendipity or as an afterthought.”¹⁰ The fact that the PLO kept an archive can be explained by a set of enabling factors surrounding the organization’s creation. The PLO’s initial establishment in 1964 by the Arab League as a formal institution, and not as clandestine revolutionary cells, allowed the institutionalization of its activities and the establishment of a research center and archive.¹¹ The fact that the PLO envisioned and materialized its archive prior to the radicalization of the PLO under Arafat starting in 1969 allowed for the curious coexistence of *al-thawra* (the revolution) and the institution of the archive.¹²

Second, the PLO’s diaspora-based organizational structure facilitated its ability to keep records. In the case of the South African liberation movement, operating underground hampered the organizations’ ability to produce documents and record experiences. The ban on the African National Council (ANC), and the ensuing relocation of organizational structure to the diaspora, mediated the constraints previously imposed on publishing documents and producing records. The PLO, on the other hand, was diasporic from the outset, and its leadership was not under the direct rule of the Israeli state’s repressive apparatus. This position allowed a significant margin of freedom of operation and documentation, and the Research Center archived the ensuing paper trail. This is not to say that the PLO operated beyond state repression. Its diasporic nature and dependence on Arab regimes presented their own sets of challenges, pushing the organization into a “delicate and dangerous balancing act.”¹³ Still, the Research Center’s archive was not beyond Israel’s reach.

Hardly acts of serendipity, Israel’s various attacks on and eventual seizure of the Research Center’s archive in 1982 confirm the difficulty of keeping a full documentary record when struggling for national liberation. The theft of the archive indicates that the very keeping of such records is

considered an additional threat posed by the movement; this threat exists not on the physical battlefield, but on the narrative one. As the Algerian case reveals, liberation movement archives are often subject to colonial appropriation. In May 1962, shortly before Algerian independence, a mass of documents was transferred from Algeria to France, bearing records of 132 years of French presence in Algeria, in addition to records of the Algerian resistance.¹⁴ Over fifty years later, the archive is housed at the Archives Nationales d'Outre Mer (the Overseas Archives Department) in Aix-en-Provence, and remains an object of dispute. Algeria demands the restitution of the archive as its national right, but France considers the archives to be the property of the French administration, and thus subject to its sovereignty.¹⁵ The Algerian argument states that documents originating on Algerian soil are Algerian property, and that continuous French denial of this right is a form of cultural neo-imperialism.¹⁶ Israel's seizure of the Research Center archive is one in a series of Israeli appropriations of Palestinian memory. The Israeli State Archives are estimated to contain about four thousand linear meters of pre-1948 Palestinian documents seized from Ottoman and British archives, in addition to papers collected from Egyptian, Jordanian, Palestinian, and "absentee" sources.¹⁷

The PLO Research Center Archive: From Beirut to the Algerian Desert

The Center's archive is neither the only, nor the most complete, archive of the Palestinian National Movement (PNM). Several others exist: the archive of the PLO Chairman's Office, the PLA archives, and the archives of the individual factions and affiliated unions and social organizations. Historians of the modern Palestinian national movement have turned to those collections, in addition to a plethora of periodicals, memoirs, published statements of factions and leaders, publications of factions (both for internal consumption and for public access), the Arabic press, and oral history interviews conducted with prominent figures active during the revolution.¹⁸ These primary sources, albeit fragmented and not easily accessible, sit in several libraries, archives, and private collections in the Middle East and elsewhere. Hence, the Research Center's archive is but one element in a process of the creation, decay, and survival of the PNM's paper trail. It is also one part of

a broader story about the social fabric that gave rise to the movement, and the ways in which the lives of different Palestinian communities have been affected by the movement.

The article tells the story of the archive by drawing on three kinds of sources. The first and most significant source is the body of published material discussing the fate of the Center's library. These publications are the writings of Anis Sayigh, the Center's director from 1966 to 1976, and Samih Shubayb, the chief archivist from 1981 to 1993, and the current editor-in-chief of *Shu'un Filastiniyya*. The second is a set of interviews with people involved with the Research Center in various capacities—employees, library patrons, and PLO members who follow the Center's story. The third is an inventory of the contents of the Center from 2003. The resulting narrative is a compilation of fragments and firsthand experiences, brought together in an attempt to retrace the life of the archive. Important as these fragments are in shedding light on the fate of the archive in question, there are still significant gaps and contradictions in accounts of the whereabouts of the archive, the convoluted path it took, and the motives of the actors involved. Far from trying to determine intentionality or assign responsibility, the aim of reconstructing the story is to recount the prevailing accounts, and to highlight, through these accounts, the significance of the loss.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot suggests that historical narratives are a result of a set of silences that happen in four moments: silencing in the making of sources; silencing in the making of archives; silencing in the making of narratives; and lastly silencing in the making of history. Borrowing Trouillot's notion of silence on the level of the archive, the story will be told as one of archival silencing. It will begin with the external silencing that Israel inflicted, and will then move to the internal silencing perpetuated by the PLO leadership.¹⁹

External Silencing: Israeli Seizure of the Archive

The PLO Executive Committee established the Research Center in Lebanon in 1965. It was based in Beirut, a city that became the headquarters of the Palestinian revolution starting in 1970.²⁰ The Center continued to operate in the city as part of the PLO's presence, despite the tribulations of the Lebanese civil war. In June 1982 the invading Israeli military targeted the Research

Center, in addition to other PLO institutions.²¹ But the Center resumed operations after the PLO's withdrawal from Lebanon in August of that year.²² It was one of few formal PLO institutions left in Lebanon and it had enjoyed diplomatic immunity since its inception. The Israeli army entered Beirut on 15 September 1982, and one of its units stormed the Center's headquarters in the Hamra district. Israeli soldiers systematically looted the contents of the library and pursued the Center's workers around the city. This event was not an anomaly but part of a broader Israeli imperative to seize documents from PLO offices during raids in the south of Lebanon.²³

On 5 February 1983 a car bomb rocked the Center's building. The explosion killed at least fourteen people, eight of whom were Center employees, and injured around 107 others.²⁴ Soon after, the Center closed its doors for the first time since its establishment, and its employees sought refuge throughout the Arab world. The Center reopened in Cyprus in 1985.²⁵

Beyond Theft: The Seized Documents at Work

The edited volume, *PLO in Lebanon* by the historian Raphael Israeli, published in 1983, contains a selection of PLO documents the Israeli army seized from the south of Lebanon, in addition to eyewitness reports. Israeli uses these documents to construct a narrative that depicts the PLO as a terrorist organization and the Israeli army as the liberator of southern Lebanon. Writing in Jerusalem on 30 August 1982, two months into the Israeli invasion and two weeks prior to the raid on the Center in Beirut, Israeli wrote that "Operation Peace for Galilee" brought surprising accounts of the extent of the PLO's entrenchment in the south of Lebanon. He added:

Still more surprising, however, is the myriad of documents seized in the local and regional headquarters of the various PLO factions. In the city of Nabatiye alone, some 22 different headquarters, representing as many groups within the PLO, were captured and destroyed. In practically all of them, files were seized which illuminated the ideological and operational aims of the PLO with regard to Israel.²⁶

A process similar to the looting of documents from PLO offices in the villages and towns of the south occurred in other PLO offices in Beirut. Jabir Sulayman, co-founder of the Documentation Center, explained the Center's attempts to rescue documents after the Israeli withdrawal from Beirut.²⁷

During the invasion, the Israeli army raided and ransacked several PLO offices in Beirut and seized the files. One can only imagine the scope of the document theft that took place in 1982. Sulayman recounted how the Documentation Center's staff toured various PLO offices in Beirut, collecting whatever shreds survived the attack. The team stored the rescued documents at the Planning Center office, located in the same building as the Research Center. The bombing of the building in February 1983 destroyed these papers.

PLO in Lebanon features seventy-four documents, both original texts and translations, emanating from various PLO factions' offices in the south of Lebanon.²⁸ After the army seized the records, along came Israeli, a historian at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, who enjoyed instant access to the documentary windfall. He carefully selected and curated the documents to fulfill a narrative that was rather familiar in the context of the Cold War. This narrative depicts the PLO as a terrorist organization at a nexus of international rogue actors, emphasizing its connections to the Eastern bloc, Arab and Islamic countries, and other countries that "allow subversive groups to operate, like many countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America."²⁹ Israeli's narrative claims to be especially authentic because it is built on *the PLO's own* documents, extracts truth from *their* records, and reveals the image of the PLO "as it actually sees itself."³⁰ Israeli claims to be fully faithful to the documents' hidden script; he claims merely to put into words the truth that the archive demanded.

Here lies the crux of the matter: archives do not perpetually serve the narrative of their creator. Rather they come to serve the narrative of their captor. Upon creation, the documents in the PLO offices were intended to serve quotidian purposes. Once the Israeli army stole them, it extracted them from the domain of the PLO's administration and put them in the domain of Israel's narrative. The PLO documents could not fend for themselves; they could not curate themselves in order to serve a Palestinian narrative. In her book *Governing Gaza*, Ilana Feldman analyzes the relationship between files, systems of governance, and archives. Put simply, state archives are built upon extracting files from the domain of governance and embedding them in the domain of history. Feldman argues that the process of transporting files from bureaucratic filing systems to storage in archives transforms them from a written record of governance into a primary source; the files thus change in function from systems of written accountability to systems of producing

meaning.³¹ Once the Israeli army looted the PLO offices, the documents ceased to serve as technology of textual rule and became primary sources in the Israeli archive. They became part of a system for the production of historical meaning—by their captor.

The state of Israel was not the archive's first captor. That was the archive's creator—the PLO Research Center. National archives are, at birth, held captive by the entity that created them in order to serve that entity's narrative. Nor was Israel the archive's last captor to date. The third captivity came with the narrative of state building, ushered in by the PA, as the colonized Palestinian leadership actively sought to change its narrative, rendering documents of the old narrative obsolete. In the last case, the dichotomy of creator/captor began with the gradual process by which the PLO changed its national goals, strategy, and tactics.

Internal Silencing: Neglect and Decay

Following the 1982 war, Israel and the PLO negotiated an exchange of prisoners under the auspices of the International Committee for the Red Cross. Sabri Jiryis, the Center's director from 1978 to 1993, insisted that the negotiators treat the library as a prisoner of war and demanded its inclusion in the exchange.³² Indeed, on 23 November 1983, 4,500 Palestinian prisoners and what Israel said was the Research Center library were returned, in exchange for six Israeli soldiers.³³

The Israeli army, under Red Cross auspices, shipped over one hundred boxes to Algiers where they were received by the Palestinian ambassador to Algeria, Mundhir al-Dajani. But no Center representative was present to receive the library, despite a request to that effect by al-Dajani. And there was no inventory against which the Research Center employees could check the received documents, because the Israeli army had stolen it along with the library's other contents in 1982.³⁴ These two aspects of the document transfer render it impossible to know if the full contents of the Center's archive were indeed returned. Unfortunately, as well, it is very difficult to know if the Israeli army and/or archival institutions destroyed or appropriated portions of the archive while it was in Israeli custody.

From the onset, disagreement reigned as to the library's fate. The Palestinian Embassy was the library's new custodian, but the ultimate decision lay in Arafat's hands.³⁵ The Algerian military, in coordination with the

Embassy's military attaché, ordered that the library be taken to al-Kharruba military base upon delivery, and then to Tebessa military base, where the Palestine Liberation Army units were based.³⁶ On 1 October 1985, the Israeli air force raided the PLO headquarters in Hammam al-Shatt, Tunisia. As a precautionary measure, the Algerian military moved the library from the Tunisian-Algerian border to al-Bayadh base in the Algerian desert.³⁷ Abandoned in the sands, the documents started to decay.³⁸

The library remained unclaimed until March 1986, when Shubayb and Jiryis travelled to Algeria. Taken to the desert site by the Algerian lieutenant, Shubayb opened around twenty boxes and inspected their contents. He attempted to ship the library to Cyprus, where the Research Center had reopened in 1985. He failed, however, due to insurmountable internal disagreement over the library's fate.³⁹ Shubayb recounts two additional propositions circulating at the time. Arafat wanted to house both the Center and its library in Cairo. In the meantime, Salah Khalaf (Abu Iyad), the deputy chief of the PLO at the time and the second most senior official in Fatah, was keen on moving the library to the Algerian capital.⁴⁰ Neither scenario materialized, and the library remained in the PLA base in Algeria.

Thirty years after the library's delivery to Algeria, little is known about its status, and whether or not it can be saved. One account says that bad storage conditions and PLA soldiers' misuse led to its annihilation.⁴¹ Another claims that the library endures but is suffering the toll of rain, heat, and rodents.⁴² The only piece of concrete evidence is an inventory of the library's contents compiled between the months of May and August 2003 (see fig. 1). There is no available information as to who prepared the inventory, who commissioned it, and for what purpose. The inventory is more than a hundred and twenty pages long, listing the contents of every box. Every page bears the letterhead of "State of Palestine, the PLA, al-Qastal Forces Command, Algeria." It is not clear whether or not the inventory was part of a broader process aimed at retrieving the library. One can hope.

Contemplation on the Archive's Absence: Ruptures and Resumptions

An obvious implication of the loss of the PLO archive is the inability to use its material in the writing of a fragment of the experience of the Palestinian people. An equally profound implication is the inability to read the Center's

دولة فلسطين
جيش التحرير الوطني الفلسطيني
قيادة مؤتمرة قوات القسطن / الجزائر

الرقم : م/ج 08
التاريخ : 2003/05/05م

مصدوق برقم 18

- طيف حركات التحرير في أمريكا الالمانية 1980م
- طيف جامعات ، معاهد ومدارس عدد 02
- طيف القصة الالمانية 1902م
- طيف قسم الدراسات
- طيف علاقات مرمية
- طيف تطور المهاسة السوفياتية
- طيف مصر والولايات المتحدة 1980م
- طيف الحرب البريطانية الارجنتينية 1988م
- طيف الحوادث ، المصور
- مجموعة كتب : - كتاب لهذا اكبر اسرائيل ، العريضة ، يوميات فلسطينية ،
حديث الهطل السزيم / جمال عبد الناصر ، الدستور ،
مخطبات من قيادة صدام ، حقائق عن الانتفاضة ،
الاقتصاد والمهاسة ، جيش الشعب ، حسن التوصل ،
الهلال الاحمر ، معلومات صحفية ، محاضرات عبد الناصر .
- دراسات فلسطينية . (مصدق)
- دراسات أزمة التحرير الديمقراطي . (مصدق)
- مجلد الدستور عدد 02



Figure 1.a

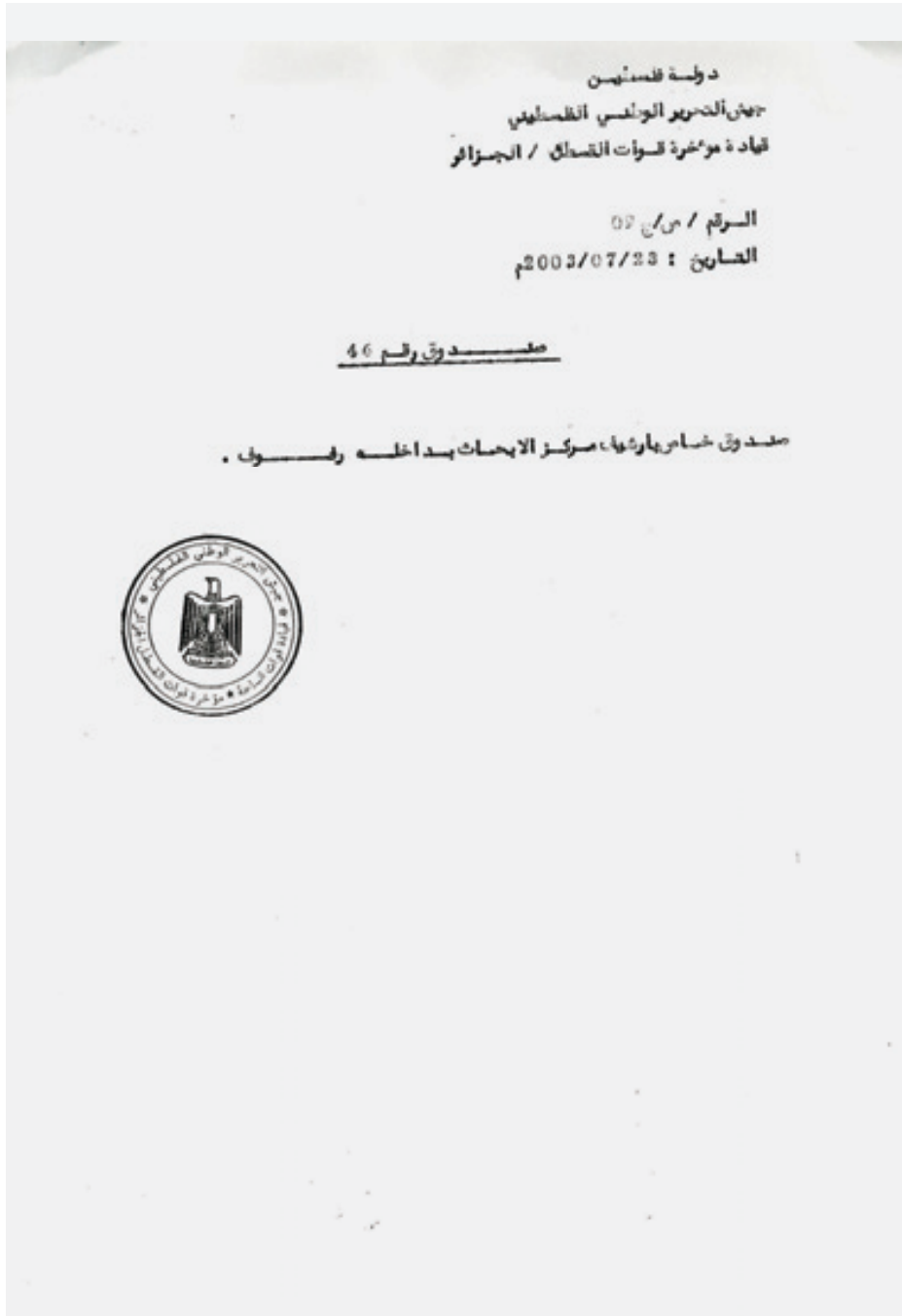


Figure 1.b: Sample pages from inventory; boxes 18 and 46. Unpublished inventory, provided by a professor and a former researcher at the PLO Research Center on 24 June 2014.

archive along the grain. Stoler explains how students of colonialism tend to read the archive against the grain, in an effort to tease out of moments of resistance to colonial discipline, to reinterpret objects of colonial discourse as subaltern subjects and agents of practice.⁴³ Instead, she encourages us to read archives along the grain: to read the archive's (re)distribution, (ir)regularities, (in)consistencies, (mis)information, and omissions. Such a reading treats moments of archival fabrication or omission as entry points to understanding and exposing agendas of power. Stoler emphasizes that to read along the grain is to read along the archive's constructed categories, in order to understand the circuits of knowledge production in which power operates.

The absence of the Research Center archive robs us of the ability to read it along the grain. The archive was lost, not because it was burnt or otherwise irreversibly destroyed, but because the decision makers of the time neglected to retrieve it. Whether out of mere negligence or intent to suppress, this continued abandonment leaves us with only one thing to read: the archive's absence. The following section places the absence of the Center's archive in a moment of rupture when the PNM broke with its revolutionary past, separating the PLO's past from the PA's future.

Rupture

Historian Rashid Khalidi notes that most studies of Palestinian politics view the PLO's trajectory in teleological terms, according to which the PLO's shift from liberation toward statehood is presented as the natural culmination of continued struggle.⁴⁴ This teleology, however, masks a rupture in the national goals of the movement: a strategic break from the goal of liberation and a shift to autonomy within the 1967 borders. There are several accounts of the periodization of the shift. Some argue it goes back to the foundational years of the movement. In his memoirs, Salah Khalaf said, "Contrary to appearances and general conviction, it wasn't in the wake of the October War that we decided to establish our state on any part of Palestine to be liberated. As of July 1967 . . . Faruq Qaddumi submitted a policy paper to Fatah's Central Committee."⁴⁵ Another milestone in the shift is the year 1974, when the Palestinian National Council (PNC), in its twelfth session, declared the Phased Solution, or the Ten-Point Program. Its second clause

stipulated, for the first time, the goal of establishing a national authority over “every part of the Palestinian territory that is liberated.”⁴⁶ The PNC passed the program, which recast the goals of the national movement as tactic and strategy: the creation of a national authority en route to fulfilling the strategy of liberation.⁴⁷ The program presented the first moment of departure from the declared goal of establishing a democratic state for Arabs and Jews in all of Palestine, and from the provisions of the Palestinian National Charter that called for the full liberation of Palestine, employing armed resistance as the only means of struggle.⁴⁸ Whether conceived in 1967 or 1974, the statist goal was made manifest with the creation of the Palestinian Authority in the aftermath of the Oslo Accords of 1993.

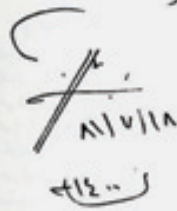
The year 1993 marked a point when the Oslo-era leadership of the PLO relinquished its demands for the lands of historic Palestine, essentially departing from the goals that the organization was founded to serve. Since the Research Center archive epitomized the PLO’s previous goals, and as the Palestinian Authority became increasingly invested in the discourse of the two-state solution and peaceful coexistence, the PLO Research Center archive stood out as an anomaly. The archive contained everything the term “Palestine Liberation Organization” stood for, embodying the goals the PA sought to distance itself from. The discourse of the two-state solution put forward by the PA has transformed “Palestine” from the entirety of historical Palestine and its people into a truncated entity inside the borders of the West Bank and Gaza. It transformed “Liberation” from a revolutionary goal to be achieved through armed struggle into an agenda of autonomy to be pursued through compromise and negotiation. Lastly, it replaced “Organization,” defined as a clandestine revolutionary movement, with a “state-to-be” that aspired to be the governing entity of the Palestinian territories. Most PLO documents were printed on letterhead featuring the map of historic Palestine and the motto “liberation” underneath. Most started with the salutation “a revolutionary greeting” and ended with “It is revolution until victory” (see fig. 2).

الذخ الحاح اسبيل

تجبة الثورة داهو

تجارة اللبس العسكري الابل هو الركبة يتدبر كريات ستون
 والمطله دلهان وسيريل ستوف وكرايا دمجارها
 كريات ستون : توزع على جميع القضاة لقصص الجراد لمدول
 المظله : تضرب بالاون ٣٦٠ ر.م.ت.ن. - ايمانه
 كرايا دمجارها : تضرب ممدخ ٣١٣٠ (ك) ١٣٥
 باليه للاس دسمة ياستوف ستيولها لفظع الشرق
 اكره باليه للدريات لبر صبه

داخ ثوره حتى لفر



 ٨١٧/١٨
 ١١٤

غان حنا
سيف



منظمة التحرير الفلسطينية
 المجلس العسكري الاعلى
 العمليات الرقوية
 قيادة منطقة بيروت مسخرة

الذخ الحاح اسبيل

Figure 2.a



Figure 2.b: Sample documents of internal Fatah communications. Documents appear in Raphael Israeli, *P.L.O. In Lebanon: Selected Documents* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), 27 and 30.

The Fatah logo with its two Kalashnikovs crossed over the map of Palestine, in addition to every piece of ephemera produced by the revolution, would continue to serve as a reminder of an abandoned national project (see fig. 3).



Figure 3: Fatah logo (“Harakat al-Tahrir al-Watani al-Filastini, Fatah” [Palestinian National Liberation Movement, Fatah]). Accessed on 25 July 2014, <http://www.fateh.ps/index.html>.

The PA’s discourse on the two-state solution has no place for the Research Center Archive because the visions of the PLO as a revolutionary organization and the PA as a pacified and disarmed state-to-be cannot be reconciled. The PLO claimed to: represent the entirety of the Palestinian people; demand the lands of historic Palestine; emphasize the refugees’ right of return; and adopt armed struggle as the means for achieving its goals. The PA’s mandate, on the other hand, is to represent the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza; it relinquished demands for full liberation and the right of return, and repudiated violence. The PA did not organically grow out of the PLO. The PLO, rather, metamorphosed into the PA. Along the way the leadership erased the record of armed revolution.

Institution Building and the PA Archive

The early years of Palestinian Authority institution building reveal an intricate process of bureaucratic maneuvering that governed the institutional shift from a diaspora-based liberation movement to a quasi-state. This section focuses on the immediate post-Oslo years when the bureaucratic apparatus

of the PA was envisioned and established. It analyzes the narrative of the PA archive as articulated in the immediate post-Oslo years.⁴⁹

In his book *The Politics of the Palestinian Authority*, Nigel Parsons describes the process of institutional adaptation that defined the PLO's metamorphosis into the PA.⁵⁰ He examines how the PA leadership imported institutions and personnel from the PLO bureaucracy in Tunis to form the backbone of the PA's administrative and coercive apparatus.⁵¹ Central to this process was the power Arafat accumulated in staffing the top strata of the PA bureaucracy with Fatah personnel, who were also the upper echelons of the PLO. This recasting of the PLO as the institutional backbone of the PA bolstered the power of Arafat and Fatah, and gradually marginalized the PLO as an institution in its own right.⁵²

Nathan Brown, in his book *Palestinian Politics After the Oslo Accords*, looks closely at the relationship between PLO institutions and their counterparts in the PA. He highlights the PA's difficult task in managing a collage of "diverse and overlapping institutions . . . that had grown up under different settings."⁵³ He highlights that drafting a constitution was vital to the transformation from a revolutionary organization to a state.⁵⁴ Brown recounts four attempts at drafting a constitution for the PA, and describes an undeclared constitutional framework composed of a set of Arafat's presidential decrees. Brown states that with every new draft of the Basic Law (the interim constitutional framework for the PA) the relationship between the PLO and the PA "grew increasingly attenuated, albeit in subtle ways."⁵⁵ Early drafts of the Basic Law made clear that the PA was subservient to the PLO, and that the latter was outside of the constitutional order. Later versions removed this provision, and the final draft of the constitution in 2001 referred neither to the PLO nor the PA, but to a sovereign state of Palestine, which would "absorb the constituting body of the PLO transforming it into a chamber of the Palestinian parliament."⁵⁶ Institutional transformation was thus instrumental in replacing the PLO as a revolutionary organization with a Palestinian state-to-be. The relationship, or lack thereof, between the PLO archive and the newly established Palestinian National Archive is a manifestation of this transformation.

In his "welcome message" on the website of the Palestinian National Archive, the archive's director Muhammad M. Bheiss Aramin says,

The year 1994 ushered in a new phase in the history of the Palestinian people and its contemporary revolution . . . with the implementation of what is known as the Oslo Agreement, and the arrival of the vanguards of returnees to the homeland . . . *The storm of return subsided, and a process of institution building immediately began* as a stepping-stone for building the free and independent state . . . The main incentive [for building the archive] was our firm belief in the necessity of preserving the memory of our people, *and the memory of its nascent entity, the Palestinian National Authority.* [emphasis added] ⁵⁷

The above quote aptly illustrates the PA archive's periodization and narration of Palestinian history. According to Aramin, the "storm of return"—that is, the struggle of the Palestinian people for liberation, return, and self-determination—subsided in 1994 with the return of Arafat and his entourage to the occupied territories. This event marked the end of an era and the beginning of a new one: institution building en route to complete statehood. In his address, Aramin envisions the establishment of the PA's archive as the national archive: the institution whose primary task is to safeguard the memory of the Palestinian people. But this "memory" is carefully defined as the memory-to-be of the nascent Palestinian state. The PA created the new archive in tandem with creating its bureaucratic apparatus so that the archive serves as the future reservoir of the future state's memory.

The PA archive makes no mention of the PLO archive. By excluding records of the liberation movement, the Palestinian National Archive will eventually contain the nascent state's records of governance only. It will house the files of the newly established bureaucratic apparatus, with little or no mention of its predecessor entity. It will qualify as a state archive, similar to those described by Feldman, in which files, after the passage of time, are extracted from the domain of governance and embedded in the domain of history. Future historians will read the PA archive, whether along or against the grain, and find little or no record of the liberation movement. What they will find, however, are ample records of PA institution building and the creation of a modern Palestinian state.

The logo of the new archives features the eagle of the PA, with "Palestinian Authority" written underneath. The archive's motto is "Memory of the Nation and State." Nation, state, and the Palestinian Authority overlap, and their unified and singular memory is to be guarded by the institution of the archive.



Figure 4: PA logo ("al-Sulta al-Filastiniyya" [Palestinian Authority]). Used by the Permanent Observer Mission to the UN. Accessed on 25 July 2014, <http://www.un.int/wcm/content/site/palestine/cache/offonce/pid/11544>.



Figure 5: Header of Palestinian National Archives webpage. Accessed on 16 August 2014, <http://www.pnac.pna.ps/ar/index.php?p=main&id=118>.

Conclusion

While it was Israel that previously held the Center's archive captive, the Palestinian state-building enterprise is its current captor. Once again the archive's creator and captor are at odds. In this case, however, the creator has metamorphosed into the captor, the revolution has metamorphosed into the state, and the Research Center's archive was lost. A consequence of the loss is the inability to tell stories using its sources. Such stories could be of the PLO as a rogue actor, a resistance movement, or a precursor to a state. They could also give rise to stories beyond the terrain of political history, venturing into social microhistories of the Palestinian community in Lebanon, or into avenues such as women's experiences in struggle, the financial infrastructure of the PLO, and the movement's linkages to global anti-colonial struggle, to name only a few possibilities.

Different actors have been complicit in silencing the archive in different capacities, for different reasons, and to varying degrees. The first actor is the PLO, as a constellation of power relations, which both produced the archive and contributed to its deterioration. It created the Research Center as its knowledge producer and record keeper, then neglected the archive, and allowed it to fade into oblivion. The second actor is Israel, whose theft of the archive is one of many instances of seizing Palestinian archives. Israel's systematic pattern of document seizure qualifies as an attempt to seize and suppress a part of the Palestinian memory.

The third actor is the Palestinian Authority archive. It perpetuated the archival silence Israel's seizure inflicted, by excluding the official records of the armed revolution from the "memory of the nation and state." This is not to say that historians cannot write the revolution's history due to the absence of the archive. A body of material does exist, albeit limited, in various libraries and repositories. What the absence of the PLO archive means is that the future state will not integrate records of the revolution's past in the primary sources it affords to researchers and historians, thereby excluding the history of the armed resistance movement from the state-sponsored boundaries of the production of history.

In the context of its state building enterprise in the post-Oslo moment, the PA created a new institutional archive whose periodization of Palestinian history begins with the creation of the quasi-state. In that sense, the PA archive

serves two functions: both as statement and as tool. Its very establishment as a national archive serves as a metaphor for continued institution building. It is a statement of relentless progress toward achieving a Palestinian state. Second, the institution itself serves as a tool for the production of the new state's carefully tended past. It contains the paper trail that the governing bureaucracy produced. It is an institution that preserves the memory of a reimagined, eroded, and ever-shrinking Palestine.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Samih Shubayb, *Al-Dhakira al-Da'i'a: Qissat al-Masir al-Ma'sawi li-Markaz al-Abhath al-Filastini* (Ramallah, Palestine: Muwatin, al-Mu'assasah al-Filastiniyya li-Dirasat al-Dimuqratiyya, 2005).
- 2 "Ta'rif bi-Markaz al-Abhath, Shu'un Filastiniyya," accessed 2 August 2013, <http://shuun.ps/atemplate.php?id=33>. My translation.
- 3 Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), 150.
- 4 For a discussion of the PLO's institutional relocation to the West Bank and Gaza, see Jamil Hilal, "PLO Institutions: The Challenge Ahead," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 23, no. 1 (1993), 46-60. For more information on the Palestinian National Archives, see the "Kalima Tarhibiyya" [Welcome Note], The Palestinian National Archives, <http://www.pnac.pna.ps/ar/index.php?p=main&id=118>.
- 5 Ann Laura Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," *Archival Science* 2, no. 1-2 (2002), 94.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 103.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 The Research Center played a dual role. First was that of the official research institute of the PLO, and second was that of a documentation center, embodied in its library and archive. Anis Sayigh provides a systematic description of the Library's five sections. Most important of which are the Documents and the Palestinian Resistance Documents sections. The Documents section contains unpublished records and personal papers, most important of which are: the Emily Francis Newton papers; a collection of the Criminal Investigation Department documents of the British Mandate Government; the All-Palestine Government documents; the Arab Liberation Army documents; a collection of Hajj Amin al-Husayni papers; and the personal papers of Husayn Fakhri al-Khalidi, Hanna 'Asfur, 'Awni 'Abd al-Hadi, Fawzi al-Qawuqji, Kamal Nasir, and many others. The Palestinian Resistance Documents section was established in the early 1970s, and included thousands of documents published by the PLO institutions, the political factions, and the military brigades. These holdings, combined with the Center's publications, allow us to make the claim that the Center's archive did in fact serve as an official archive for the PNM for the years from 1964 to 1982. Although not produced by a state bureaucracy, the archive collected the documents produced by the factions of the contemporary liberation movement, and the documents of past administrations and figures relating to modern Palestinian history. It thus constitutes an integral part of the PNM's archive. For details on the archive's holdings, see Anis Sayigh, *Anis Sayigh 'an Anis Sayigh* (Beirut: Riyad al-Rayyis li-l-Kutub wa-l-Nashr, 2006), 217-19.
- 9 The archive, housed at the University of Fort Hare, contains the records of the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), the Azanian People's Organization, the Black Consciousness Movement of Azania, and the New Unity Movement.
- 10 Brian Williams and William K. Wallach, "Documenting South Africa's Liberation Movements," in *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar*, ed. Francis X. Blouin and William G. Rosenberg (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 331, fn 20. One such moment of serendipity was the Treason Trials of 1955, which were preceded by the seizure of around twelve thousand documents from 460 offices and homes. Another was the Rivonia Treason Trial in the aftermath of a raid on the underground headquarters of the ANC during which hundreds of documents were confiscated. Not so much an "afterthought," these seizures helped preserve documents that would have otherwise been lost due to the secrecy of the organizations.

- 11 Rashid Hamid, "What Is the PLO?" *Journal of Palestine Studies* 4, no. 4 (1975), 94-95.
12 Ibid., 100.
13 Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, 145.
14 Pierre Lucain, "La question des archives Algériennes," *La Revue administrative* 34, no. 204 (1981), 641.
15 Christian Lowe, "Algeria, France Tussle over Archives 50 Years after Split," Reuters, 4 July 2012.
16 Ibid.
17 For more on the Palestinian documents in Israeli archives see Mahmoud Yazbak, "Al-Milaff al-Filastini fi al-Arshifat al-Sahyuniyya," *Hawliyyat al-Quds* 11, no. 12 (2011), 86-90.
18 See Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), xv-xvii; and Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, xl-xliv.
19 For a discussion of the four moments of silencing, see Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 26.
20 Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, 286-87.
21 Carole Collins, "Chronology of the Israeli Invasion of Lebanon June-August 1982," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 11/12 (1982), 135-92.
22 Ibid., 192.
23 Cheryl Rubenberg, *The Palestine Liberation Organization, Its Institutional Infrastructure* (Belmont, MA: Institute of Arab Studies, 1983), 62.
24 Samih Shubayb, "Al-Masir al-Ma'sawi li-Markaz al-Abhath al-Filastini," in *Anis Sayigh wa al-Mu'assasa al-Filastiniyya: al-Siyasat, al-Mummarasat, al-Intaj*, ed. Samih Shubayb and Bayan Nuwayhid al-Hut (Ramallah, Palestine: Muwatin, al-Mu'assasa al-Filastiniyya li-Dirasat al-Dimuqratiyya, 2010), 43.
25 While based in Beirut the Center witnessed several attacks. In 1969 a bomb was tossed into the building entrance from a moving car, shattering the glass façade. In the summer of 1972 a mail bomb was sent to Anis Sayigh, then director of the Center, which left him partially blind and partially deaf, and affected his motor capacities in his right hand. In 1974 four rockets from launchers mounted on the back of a car exploded in the Center and led to the destruction of several hundred books. In July 1982 a car bomb exploded outside the Center, shattering the building doors and injuring a guard. In August 1982 another car bomb exploded outside of the Center and led to minimal damage. In September 1982 the Israeli army ransacked the Center. And finally in February 1983 a car bomb exploded causing serious damage. For details on the attacks on the Center, see Shubayb, "Al-Masir al-Ma'sawi li-Markaz al-Abhath al-Filastini," 44.
26 Raphael Israeli, ed., *PLO In Lebanon: Selected Documents* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983).
27 Jabir Sulayman, interview by author, digital recording, Beirut, 29 August 2013. The Documentation Center was established in 1980 by two members of the staff of the Planning Center as a free-standing institution. After the PLO's withdrawal from Beirut the Documentation Center was annexed to the Research Center so that the latter would extend its diplomatic immunity to the former and allow it to resume operations.
28 These documents included internal PLO communiqués, minutes of meetings, military and administrative orders, military plans, target lists, graduation diplomas, internal reports, letters, identity cards, and pictures.
29 Israeli, *PLO In Lebanon*, 169.
30 Ibid, 9.
31 Ilana Feldman, *Governing Gaza: Bureaucracy, Authority, and the Work of Rule, 1917-1967*

- (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 34-35.
- 32 Samih Shubayb, telephone interview by author.
- 33 David Shipler, "Palestinians and Israelis Welcome Their Prisoners Freed in Exchange," *New York Times*, 25 November 1983.
- 34 Shubayb, "Al-Masir al-Ma'sawi li-Markaz al-Abhath al-Filastini," 46.
- 35 Shubayb, Samih, telephone interview by author.
- 36 Shubayb, "Al-Masir Al-Ma'sawi li-Markaz al-Abhath al-Filastini," 47.
- 37 Samih Shubayb, telephone interview by author.
- 38 Shubayb, "Al-Masir al-Ma'sawi li-Markaz al-Abhath al-Filastini," 49.
- 39 Samih Shubayb, telephone interview by author.
- 40 Shubayb, "Al-Masir al-Ma'sawi li-Markaz al-Abhath al-Filastini," 49.
- 41 Samih Shubayb, telephone interview by author.
- 42 Senior Fatah military officer, email interview by author, 27 June 2014.
- 43 Stoler, "Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance," 99.
- 44 Khalidi, *The Iron Cage*, 150.
- 45 Abu Iyad and Eric Rouleau, trans. Linda Butler Koseoglu. *My Home, My Land: A Narrative of the Palestinian Struggle* (New York: Times Books, 1978), 138.
- 46 Rashid Hamid, Muqarrarat al-Majlis al-Watani al-Filastini, 1964-1974 (Beirut: Munazzamat al-Tahrir al-Filastiniyyah, Markaz al-Abhath, 1975), 247.
- 47 The PLO mainstream, comprised of Fatah, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and al-Sai'qa, spearheaded the effort to adopt the program, and was met by opposition from the rejectionist camp, comprised of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command. For a discussion of the Ten-Point Program, see *Shu'un Filastiniyya's* article on the proceedings of a panel organized by the PLO Research Center in January 1974, bringing together Abu Iyad; George Habash, secretary general of the PFLP; Nayef Hawatmeh, secretary-general of the DFLP; Shafiq al-Hout, member of the PLO Executive Committee and representative of the PLO in Lebanon; and Zuhayr Mohsin, leader of al-Sa'iqa. For details, see Mahmoud Darwish, ed., "Al-Muqawama al-Filastiniyya Amam al-Tahaddiyat al-Jadida," *Shu'un Filastiniyya* 30.
- 48 Most notable of these provisions is the eleventh meeting of the PNC in January 1973, where the second clause of the declaration rejected attempts at settlement and any of its ensuing projects, be it a Palestinian entity or a state in parts of Palestine. The Palestinian National Charter echoes similar goals. Article 2 of the Palestinian National Charter of 1968 defined the borders of Palestine as those of Mandate Palestine and affirmed that they delineate an indivisible territorial unit. Article 19 rejected the 1947 partition of Palestine and the subsequent creation of Israel and declared these developments in opposition to the Palestinian will and a violation of the basic principles of the UN Charter. Article 9 stated that armed struggle is the only way to liberate Palestine, adding that this embodied an overall strategy and not merely a tactical phase. Article 21 reaffirmed the centrality of the armed revolution and rejected any alternative to full liberation and all proposals that "aimed at the liquidation of the Palestinian cause, or at its internationalization." For provisions of the Palestinian National Charter, see Zafarul Islam Khan, ed., *Palestine Documents* (New Delhi: Pharos Media and Publishing, 1998), 297-301. For proceedings of the eleventh and twelfth PNC meetings, see Hamid, Muqarrarat, 225-252.
- 49 As such, its analysis does not include the different iterations of the institution building process, most important of which is the program set forth by Salam Fayyad, prime minister from 2007 to 2013. Such analysis is beyond the scope of this article.
- 50 Nigel Craig Parsons, *The Politics of the Palestinian Authority: From Oslo to Al-Aqsa* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 9.

- 51 Ibid., 43.
- 52 Ibid., 126-32.
- 53 Nathan J. Brown, *Palestinian Politics After the Oslo Accords: Resuming Arab Palestine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 8.
- 54 Ibid., 86.
- 55 Ibid., 74.
- 56 Ibid., 91.
- 57 “Kalima Tarhibiyya” [Welcome Note], The Palestinian National Archives, <http://www.pnac.pna.ps/ar/index.php?p=main&id=118>.