



60 Years on

Palestinian Family Remains Divided by War

A Palestinian waving a flag during a demonstration commemorating the Nakba, in Jaffa, south of Beit-ul Moqaddas, May 15, 2007.



Half of the Hamduni family lives in a village in northern Beit-ul Moqaddas, and the other half is in the besieged Gaza Strip. Sixty years after the war waged by Israel they are more divided than ever.

In the Beach Refugee Camp, a Gaza slum on a sewage-poisoned stretch of the Mediterranean coast, Safaa, 70, holds the keys to her family home in Jaffa, now an upscale suburb of Beit-ul Moqaddas, from which her family fled in 1948. Just a few hundred kilometers north, Mahmud, 55, an Arab Israeli citizen who owns a tractor company, reclines in his spacious and well-furnished house in the quiet village of Tamra where he has lived most of his life, AFP reported.

As they approach the 60th anniversary of the Israel occupation of their lands, Palestinians commemorate the Nakba, the expulsion of some 700,000 people during the 1948 war, an event that for them is the core of the decades-old Middle East conflict. For Safaa's family, confined to the Gaza Strip, and for some 4.5 million Palestinian refugees scattered across the occupied territories, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, the war that followed Israel's illegal birth never really ended.

"We teach our children that we will return one day to our homeland, we will return to Jaffa and to Tamra," Safaa says. "We've kept the keys to the old house in Jaffa and the documents that prove we own it."

The Hamdunis' story begins in the 1940s with Mohammed, Safaa's deceased uncle, and Suleiman, Mahmud's late father, two orphaned brothers from a Bedouin family living near the northern town of Akka in British-ruled Palestine.

"Mohammed went to Jaffa in the 1940s. He was a young man and he needed work. He met a city woman there but in order to marry her he had to lie about his origins," Mahmud says over a lavish meal of grilled meats and fresh salads.

"So he told her he was a member of the wealthy Al-Najami

family in Akka. It was a lie! He had merely worked at a shop they owned," he laughs.

The ruse worked, however, and the two were married in 1945 and moved into her family home in Jaffa, a house Safaa remembers from her childhood.

"I remember the days before the expulsion like a dream. They were beautiful days. My father used to take us to the beach every Friday and to Beit-ul Moqaddas also," she says.

Suleiman, true to his Bedouin roots, remained in the north, living in a tent and guarding the fish ponds of a local kibbutz, but when the war broke out in May 1948 he was allowed to stay.

"My father used to say that those who didn't fight were left alone. But in the villages where there was resistance, where there was shooting, the Israelis destroyed them completely," Mahmud says.

Historians differ over whether the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled what is today known as the "forged regime of Israel" because of a deliberate expulsion campaign by Jewish militias or because of an artificial panic fanned by Arab radio broadcasts.

But from the time they arrived in the tent cities of Gaza until today Safaa's family, like the other refugees, have never been allowed to return.

From the time Israel occupied Gaza in 1967 until the outbreak of the latest Palestinian uprising in 2000 the two sides of the family visited each other on holidays and talked often on the telephone, even as their lives diverged.

Safaa and her children, like many refugees, take a long view of their troubled history. "God willing, we will return, either we or our children," says Safaa's daughter Sabah, 49, who was born in Gaza's refugee camps. "We want peace, not war, but it is our destiny to return to Palestine.

"We are sure that the occupation will not last for ever."

Germany Rebuilding Palaces

A new building boom is sweeping Germany--royal palaces destroyed during or after World War II are set to rise again.

Planning is underway to rebuild long-destroyed palaces in Berlin, Hannover and Potsdam; a former royal hunting lodge in the west could also rise again soon; a palace in Dresden is nearing completion and last year, the exterior of a Braunschweig palace was completed, AFP reported.

After World War II, many German cities rebuilt damaged and destroyed palaces and historic buildings. But urban planners in both East and West Germany also demolished many ruined buildings on ideological and aesthetic grounds.

This latest wave of reconstruction stems directly from the demise of former communist East Germany in 1990 and the successful reconstruction

of Dresden, according to Gabi Dolf-Bonekaemper, a professor at Berlin's Technical University.

"The idea that it is feasible, that it can be done, that money can be found and what comes out of it is not ugly, and it's not a fake, it's something different," Dolf-Bonekaemper said.

Others connect the campaign to rebuild long-destroyed palaces to a cultural identity crisis afflicting Germany and a rebellion against high-concept modern architecture.

"It's linked to anxiety about globalization," Peter Schabe of the German Foundation for Historic Preservation told AFP. "People want a place to identify with and they want to create cities that looked like they did long ago."

News in Brief

Iranian Woman Is Youngest Professor

An Iranian woman became a professor at the age of 19, breaking a 300-year-old record.

According to Fars news agency, Alieh Saboor, who resides in the US, learned how to read when she was 10 months old and completed her undergraduate degree at the age of 10.

She received her PhD at the age of 14 and was given the rank of professor recently. She is expected to teach at Konkook University, South Korea.

Before Saboor, Colin Maclaurin, one of the students of Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727), an English physicist and mathematician and the greatest scientist of his era, was registered in the Guinness World Records as the youngest professor of the world.

Saboor is an outstanding mathematician and a master musician.



Health Insurance for Foreigners Mandatory

Deputy health minister for parliamentary affairs said that based on a recent cabinet ratification all foreign nationals coming to Iran must have health insurance upon arrival or acquire insurance coverage soon after arrival.

Speaking to Fars news agency, Hassan Aminlou added, "Based on Article 91 of the Fourth Development Plan, which was recently ratified by the Economic Commission of the cabinet, each foreign national who enters Iran should have health insurance.

If the foreign national has health insurance that is acceptable to local health insurance companies there would be no problem, but otherwise he or she must be insured in Iran."

He also noted, "If a foreign national does not have health insurance, he or she will be insured by a local health insurance company upon the referral of foreign or interior ministries.

Difference between the insurance coverage of the foreign national and Iranian national is that the former must pay for the entire insurance cost and the government does not cover any portion. There is no reason that money be spent from the pocket of Iranians as subsidy to cover the health of foreigners."



Crackdown on Foreign Beggars

In continuation of the plan to crack down beggars, foreign children caught begging will be mopped up once again, beginning on Sunday, May 4.

According to Fars news agency, this time around, in a special plan foreign children found begging and engaged in false occupations will be detained by the Tehran Municipality.

There has been a significant increase in the number of beggars in Tehran in the past few weeks.

Tehran Municipality has been cracking down on beggars and rough sleepers for about two years.



Japan Looks to Immigrants As Population Shrinks

Japan's ruling party is considering plans to encourage foreign workers to stay in the country long-term, a daily reported after the birth rate fell for the 27th successive year.

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has proposed setting up an "immigration agency" to help foreign workers--including providing language lessons, the Nikkei economic daily said without naming sources.

The party also intends to reform current "training" programs for foreign workers, which have been criticized for giving employers an excuse for paying unfairly low wages, the paper said.

LDP lawmakers believe that immigration reform will help Japanese companies secure necessary workers as the declining birthrate is expected to further dent in the nation's workforce, it said.

A group of about 80 LDP lawmakers will draw up a package of proposals by mid-May, it said. No immediate comment was available from the party on Monday.

A government report on the falling birthrate warned in April that Japan's workforce could shrink by more than one-third to 42.28 million by 2050 if the country fails to halt the decline.

The government said Monday the number of children in Japan has fallen for the 27th straight year to hit a new low.

Children aged 14 or younger numbered 17,250,000 as of April 1, down by 130,000 from a year earlier, the internal affairs ministry said in an annual survey released to coincide with the May 5 Children's Day national holiday.

The figure is the lowest since 1950 when comparable data started.