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Compte-rendu d'ouvrage "Catastrophe Remembered: Palestine, Israel and the Internal Refugees". Edited by Nur Masalha.

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Catastrophe Remembered: Palestine, Israel and the Internal Refugees. Edited by Nur Masalha. London/New York: Zed Books, 2005. xi + 300pp. £18.95/\$27.50, ISBN 1 84277 623 1.

In this collection, contributors from different fields of specialization address the question of internal displacement among Palestinians, using two complementary approaches. The first focuses on Israeli policies and Palestinian resistance, and the second on the voices of the displaced themselves. The book draws on various sources, including unexamined Israeli archives, historical works, interviews and collections of oral history. As a tribute to the spirit and the legacy of Edward Said, this book aims to reflect his concerns with the refugee issue, articulating oral history and memory with the Nakba, indigenous rights, international protection and the right of return. Using the concept of transfer previously developed by Masalha in *A Land Without a People: Israel, Transfer and the Palestinians, 1945–1996* (Faber and Faber, 1997) and *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of Transfer in Zionist Political Thought, 1882–1948* (Institute For Palestine Studies, 1992), the book relates the roots of the Palestine question to the events of 1948 and Zionist strategies of Jewish territorial and demographic domination.

Internally displaced Palestinians are groups of Palestinians displaced and dispossessed of their homes and lands since 1948, due to internal transfer within and across the green line. The first section deals with Israeli policies and Palestinian resistance to them. Masalha focuses on the Zionist concept of transfer and its applications in Israeli policies past and present, and accounts for the specificity of the internally displaced in Israel—defined as ‘present absentees’ in Israeli law—and their political struggle. The Israeli legal apparatus and patterns of displacement are further developed in the following three chapters, with case studies highlighting Israeli policies against Palestinian identity and the ensuing Palestinian grassroots mobilization.

The second section deals with memory and Palestinian oral history. The stories of internally displaced people in Nazareth (Chapter Five) and the narratives of the villagers of Kafr Bir'im (Chapter Six) and Lubyia (Chapter Seven) illustrate the emotional dimension of dispossession, and the role of memory preservation and commemoration in contributing to history and political action. The case of the ‘unrecognized villages’ is presented in a lively manner by Jonathan Cook, who analyses Israeli obliteration of pre-1948 history and ‘Judaization’ of space through the confrontation of Israeli and Palestinian indigenous narratives. Similarly, Bronstein’s presentation of Zochrot’s direct action of posting Arabic signs in destroyed villages demonstrates the powerful effect of perverting ‘the symbolic order in the city’ (p. 234).

The last section discusses the issue of internal refugees in human rights and international law. Pappé advocates the inclusion of the internal refugees in the peace process as part of the wider Palestinian refugee communities, referring to Edward Said’s alternative vision of a peace plan. Finally, Terry Rempel exposes Israeli human rights violations against internally displaced Palestinians and proposes the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement as a possible legal framework to provide them with humanitarian assistance and legal protection.

This book addresses important issues concerning the social and political reality of uprooted Palestinians. In highlighting the continuity of the transfer concept and strategies in Israeli thought and policies, it challenges the security argument that legitimizes Israeli policies towards Palestinians, and considers the plight of the internally displaced in relation to the events of 1948 and the wider Palestinian refugee issue. The extensive presence of Palestinian oral history throughout the book provides historical and ethnographic primary sources for a historiography concerned with the reality of the oppressed and their experience of loss, construction of memory and identity in a context of denial. By advocating the acknowledgement of the Nakba and the acceptance of the right of return as a prerequisite to a just settlement rooted in international law, it can stimulate positively the debate on a peaceful resolution of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. It will interest scholars and activists working on internal displacement and refugee issues, and provide an inspiring reference for all those concerned with a just and durable peace in that region.

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