

Workshop Summary:

PALESTINIAN AND JEWISH NARRATIVES OF DISPOSSESSION,
DISPLACEMENT, MIGRATION AND YEARNING

This workshop was led by Amgad Beblawi, then Associate for Middle Eastern Congregational Support for the Presbyterian Church (USA) in Louisville. Since the Crossing Borders/Cruzando Fronteras event, he has assumed the position of Area Coordinator for Middle East, Central Asia and Europe in the World Ministries area, General Assembly Mission Council.

Both “sides” of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict have a narrative that involves dispossession, displacement, migration and yearning for home. While the Jewish narrative is perhaps more familiar, they share much commonality. The desire for each people to hear/understand the narrative of the other is a new pathway in the effort to build peace and understanding in Israel/Palestine.

The Jewish narrative begins with the migration of Abraham, the Exodus, and the movement to the Land of Promise. This is then followed by Exile (6th century BC), Return (Extra and Nehemiah) and Diaspora (AD 70, 135), followed by centuries of oppression and displacement. The Zionist movement, with its dream of creating a home for the Jewish people in Palestine, began in the 1800s. After World War I, immigration to Palestine was seen as a “return to the land of our ancestors.” Since Israel was established in 1948, there has been war with “hostile” Arab neighbors and internal conflict with Palestinians, dating largely from the 1967 war.

Palestinians too claim Palestine as the land of their ancestors. After World War I, the Middle East was divided up by Colonial Europe. President Woodrow Wilson spoke against “unlimited” Jewish migration and pressure on Palestinians to surrender their land. Nevertheless, in 1947, a U.N. Partition Plan was developed. In 1948, *The Nakba* (Catastrophe) depopulated/destroyed 531 Palestinian villages, and 80% of the residents (3/4 million) were displaced to the West Bank and Gaza or as refugees in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. Since then, the Right of Return has been an essential part of Palestinian aspirations. Today Palestinian refugees number 5-8 million and make up one-third of the world’s total refugee population. Palestinian lands have diminished dramatically since 1946, and Israeli settlements, deemed illegal under international law, encroach even more on the land that remains in Palestinian hands.

In 2006, the Middle Eastern Presbyterian Caucus wrote:

“...We recognize the importance and legitimacy of the efforts to ensure an end to Jewish suffering after the Holocaust. Yet, we regret that the solution was implemented with little regard to the rights of resident Palestinian Muslims and Christians as the state of Israel was established in mandated Palestine.”