

Sayigh, Anis. *Anis Sayigh 'an Anis Sayigh*. Beirut : Riyad al-Rayyis lil-Kutub wa-al-Nashr, 2006 (pp. 222-229). Translated by *The Palestinian Revolution*, 2016.<sup>1</sup>

When hiring a researcher, the PLO's Palestine Research Centre (PRC) did not take into account nationality. Indeed, a third of full time researchers were non-Palestinian Arabs, including Lebanese, Syrians, Iraqis, and Egyptians. Nor did the PRC take into consideration their political loyalties, or their party and organisational ties. Each researcher had to leave their narrow affiliations at the doorstep, keeping only their Palestinian/Arab loyalty. And since the PFLP and DFLP were the most popular amongst the ranks of Palestinian intellectuals and university graduates in Lebanon at the time, the percentage of researchers from these two groups was higher than that enjoyed by other movements. Fateh was just behind them in representation, and while its leadership would sometimes reproach us about this, as if this was intentionally directed against them, we did not receive any complaints from groups that did not have any researchers at the centre such as Al-Saiqa or the Palestinian Liberation Front.

The center was not concerned with the degrees held by each researcher or their university background. What mattered was the extent they were qualified for research work that was rooted in objectivity and analytical ability. Perhaps the reader will be surprised to learn that two of our specialists in Hebrew Studies and Zionism belonged to the working class. One of them was originally a clothes presser the other was a shoemaker, and they worked side by side with those who had PhDs and Masters degrees.

It was not always easy to convince the Palestinian leadership and the Palestine National Fund of the Center's practice of hiring researchers on a full-time basis. This was sometimes viewed as if it was a form of intellectual indulgence, and an excessive expenditure. However, I always stubbornly insisted on creating this knowledge structure, to the extent that in some years, the number of full time staff would exceed ten.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and while defending the center's role in hosting researchers, training them, and developing them in the same way educational institutions do with their academic staff, many heard this question from me: what would happen to Palestinian research if those scholars focusing on the Palestinian cause (who could be counted on two hands in the 1960s), were to travel to a conference or a seminar, and their

---

<sup>1</sup> This work is made available under a Creative Commons 4.0 International Licence, and must be used accordingly. Please see citation guidelines on the About Us page.

plane crashed? Wouldn't Palestinian research find itself orphaned, facing hundreds of researchers from enemy ranks who specialized in Zionism and Israeli studies?

The PRC took up the task of producing a new group of Palestinian and Arab researchers who specialized in the Palestinian cause, its various sub-topics, and its multiple aspects, and who were therefore able to fill the enormous gap in the Palestinian library of knowledge. The Centre believed in the existence of something called Palestinian knowledge and Palestinian scholarship. It attempted to channel into this field dozens of new arrivals who were armed with enough knowledge, exposure, and understanding so as to be trained towards closing the gap and confronting Zionist and Israeli knowledge.

I can put before the reader a list of the researchers that were given a home by the centre, hired and trained. Only a few of these men and women (less than a fourth) were already established before joining our ranks. After some years, our researchers became leading authors, specialists, and even authorities on multiple fields relating to Palestinian and Zionist studies. Some of them later assumed high positions in public and private cultural, political, and diplomatic establishments in several Arab countries, international institutions, and the Palestinian arena.

These included Ibrahim al-Abid, Ahmad Khalifah, Asad Razouq, Asad Abdel Rahman, Elias Khoury, Elias Sahhab, Bassam Abu Sharif, Bassam Abu Ghazaleh, Bilal al-Hasan, Jamil Hilal, Habib Qahwaji, Al-Hakam Darwazeh, Hussein Abu al-Namel, Hamdan Badran, Hannah Shaheen, Khalil al-Hindi, Kheiryeh Qasmyeh, Daoud Talhami, Rashid Hamid, Said Jawad, Salmah Haddad, Saleem Naser, Samir Ayoub, Samir Jeryes, Suheil Natour, Charles Mahshi, Sharif al-Husseini, Shihadah Musa, Sadiq Jalal al-Azm, Sabri Jeryes, Abdel Hafiz Muharib, Isam Sakhnini, Ali al-Khalili, Issa al-Shuaibi, Imad Shaqour, Firas al-Mansour, Fouad Bawarshi, Victor Sahhab, Faisal Darraj, Camile Mansour, Lutfi al-Abid, Laila al-Qadi, Marlene Abu Sadid, Mahmoud Darwish, Mahmoud Azmi, Makram Younis, Musa Anz, Nayfeh Qahwaji, Nabil Ayoub, Nabil Sha'th, Najla Bashour, Nazih Qourah, Hani Fares, Hani al-Abdallah, Hani Mandes, Hani al-Hindi, Huda Osairan, Hilda Sha'ban Sayigh, Hisham Abdallah, Haytham al-Ayoubi, and Yousif Hamdan. I should point out here that seven of these moved up to the rank of researcher after holding administrative and security posts in the centre.

In addition to this elite core of researchers, there were hundreds of Arab writers that found a space for their books, studies, and articles in the projects of the PRC. This was to the extent that most considered themselves to be part

of the centre's family, a feeling that was shared by the centre as well. I will not include here a list of names because there are too many to be counted over several decades.

Both those who were full time staffers as well as those who were connected from afar (let us call the first group sons and the second brothers of the PRC!), represent a rich accumulation of knowledge regarding Palestinian rights, and defending these rights with knowledge. Here, I would like to recall a statement written by an Arab author in his discussion of the centre and its director: 'the PRC produces writers and researchers as regularly as a hen produces chicks!'

Researchers were spread across several research departments within the centre: Israeli and Zionist Studies, The Palestinian People, Military Studies, and International Relations. These four departments used to cooperate with other sections that I established and that were no less important. These were the Documentation Section (library, files, and documents) and the Publications Section, which was concerned with editing and correcting material for printing as well as overseeing distribution. In this latter section, three editors stood out, maintaining the level of accuracy and fact checking: Ghazi Daniel, Sameer Khoury, and Hilda Sayigh (who worked as a volunteer).

PRC researchers also fed their work into three major projects that were initiated by the centre and received regular contributions from its staff. The first was the journal *Shu'un Filastiniya*, which was launched in March 1971; the periodical *The Palestinian Diary*, which started to appear in 1965; and the newsletter *Israel Radio Broadcasts Monitor*, which was first published in 1973. These projects constituted three channels for connecting the information available at the centre to provide it to the Arab reader interested in the Palestinian cause.

I discussed *Shu'un Filastiniya* in the previous chapter of my memoirs. This was my favourite daughter and the eldest amongst my children. Shortly after it was launched, it became the premier periodical reference on Palestine for the Arab reader. It caught the attention of its readers because of the density of its volumes, which contained diverse and levelheaded treatments on a range of subjects. Perhaps the section that received the greatest appreciation and attention was the 'Monthly Record', which used to follow the progress of the Palestinian cause, its developments, and its latest events, one month after the next. This section was also the cause of much controversy and complaint. Officials, be they Palestinian and Arab, used to hold against this section a

sentence here or there that they did not approve of, finding in it unfairness to them, or too much appreciation for one of their competitors.

To no avail, I would try to explain to these critics the neutrality of this section and its objectivity, in the broader context of the overall impartiality of the journal and the PRC. Perhaps the most famous of these protestations was the anger of the PLO Chairman, Yassser Arafat, over an article that appeared in this section by Sadiq Jalal al-Azm. Arafat insisted on expelling the author from the centre. I refused, for I was solely responsible for hiring and firing in the journal and the centre. Moreover, all matters could be dealt with through close examination and dialogue, so long as there was no divergence from core principles, detraction from the PLO charter, or lack of adherence to the basic rules pertaining to discussion or critique. After a strong clash with Arafat, I made sure to keep the author as a researcher in the centre, and as a senior editor in the journal. However, his name was not included amongst the list of contributors for a month or two. This compromise allowed the centre and the author to maintain their dignity and freedom of expression, without making the Chairman feel that the centre rebelled, or scored a victory against him.

As for *The Palestinian Diary*, it was established by the first director of the center, Fayez Sayigh, at the beginning of 1965. It appeared regularly throughout my directorship, and I edited it from the summer of 1966 until the spring of 1976. It continued to be published, more slowly and with some interruption, until the close of the 1970s, when it stopped, along with the rest of the PRC projects. This was a huge biannual file that documented events relating to the Palestinian cause on a daily basis, with a great deal of neutrality and precision, using a scientific documentary style. Each volume used to include detailed indexes.

Here as well, some Palestinian (and occasionally Arab) officials would get confused about the nature of the publication, thinking that just because a news item was featured, that meant the editor approved of the opinions expressed in it. It was difficult for them to understand that the role of this series was to present facts and occurrences without any editorial intervention or normative agreement with the content. This is despite the fact that every item reproduced was attributed to the body that had issued or published it.

*The Palestinian Diary* was a source of financial loss for the centre. Its cost, which included the salaries of three full-time editors, in addition to proofreaders and reviewers, was several times larger than its revenue. For these volumes were primarily directed at institutions, libraries, and specialists, rather than towards the lay reader. The latter used to enthusiastically purchase other PRC publications, such as those appearing in

the *Palestinian Studies Series*, whose copies used to vanish quickly from the markets within weeks of appearing.

Similarly, the *Israel Radio Broadcasts Monitor* was extremely costly. It followed both military and civilian radio throughout their broadcast times (morning, evening, and night). This required monitoring on a 24-hour basis, seven days a week. In addition to the editors who used to monitor the broadcasts and who of course knew Hebrew (led by George Dakloush), two editors (the brothers Victor and Elias Sahhab) used to oversee the proofing and publication of the translated material, preparing it for printing in a newsletter that appeared twice a day. Several media institutions in Lebanon used to subscribe to the newsletter, depended on it extensively, and referring to it when covering enemy news. The publication of this newsletter continued until 1977.

As for books, they were the most widely distributed amongst the PRC publications. Hundreds of them appeared over the course of my ten years in the centre. Some were published in multiple languages, and some sold tens of thousands of copies, all of which carried the name of the center and its mission across the world.