

60 Years after the Nakba: Historical Truth, Collective Memory and Ethical Obligations

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1948 was the year of the Nakba. This year Palestinians throughout the world will commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Nakba and will reflect on its real essence—as the most traumatic catastrophe that ever befell the Palestinians. Today some 70 percent of the Palestinians are refugees; there are more than five million Palestinian refugees in the Middle East and many more worldwide. 1948 saw the establishment of a settler-colonial Zionist state on 78 percent of Mandatory Palestine. It also symbolised the Palestinian Nakba (the “disaster” or “catastrophe”)—the destruction of historic Palestine and “ethnic cleansing” of the Palestinians.

One of the first to label it *Nakba* was Constantine Zurayk, a distinguished Arab historian, in his book *The Meaning of the Disaster* [Zurayk 1956], a self-critical analysis of the socio-economic causes of the Arab defeat in the 1948 war, written and published while the war was still going on. The term also became the title of the monumental work of Palestinian historian and mayor of East Jerusalem, ‘Arif Al-‘Arif, *The Disaster: The Disaster of Jerusalem and the Lost Paradise 1947–52 (Al-Nakba: Nakbat Bayt al-Maqdis Wal-Firdaws al-Mafqud, 1947–1952)* [Al-‘Arif 1958–1960].

The year of the Nakba is a key date in the history of the Palestinian people—a year of dramatic rupture in the continuity of historical space and time in Palestinian history. The Nakba resulted in the destruction of much of Palestinian society, and much of the Arab landscape was obliterated by the Zionist state—a state created by the Ashkenazi Jewish Yishuv, a predominantly European settler community that immigrated into Palestine in the period between 1882 and 1948. From the territory occupied by the Israeli state in 1948, about 90 percent of the Palestinians were driven out—many by psychological warfare and/or military pressure and a very large number at gun-point. The 1948 war simply provided the opportunity and the necessary background for the creation of a Jewish state largely free of Palestinians. It concentrated Jewish-Zionist minds, and provided the security, military and strategic explanations and justifications for “purging” the Jewish state and dispossessing the Palestinian people.

In 1948 the expulsion and dispossession of the Palestinians was carried out as an integral part of the infamous Plan Dalet and through the systematic use of terror and a series

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of atrocities and massacres, of which the massacre of Deir Yasin in April 1948 was the most notorious. The Israeli state delegates the job of acquiring, settling and allocating land in the country to the Jewish National Fund (JNF), a quasi-governmental racist institution whose own mandate is to build a homeland for the Jewish people *only* [Lehn and Davis 1998; Abu Hussein and McKay 2003].

The Nakba changed the lives of the Palestinians at the individual and national levels drastically and irreversibly; it also continues to inform and structure Palestinians' lives. The rupture of 1948 and the "ethnic cleansing" of the Nakba are central to both the Palestinian society of today and Palestinian social history and collective identity.

The year of the Nakba is a key date in the history of the Palestinian people—a year of dramatic rupture in the continuity of historical space and time in Palestinian history. The Nakba was climax of the preceding Zionist colonisation and the great watershed in the history of the Palestinian people, marking the beginning of their Exodus and Diaspora. The Nakba has become in Palestinian history and collective memory the demarcation line between two contrasting periods. Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi likens the Nakba to the "ineluctible climax of the preceding Zionist colonization and the great watershed in the history of the Palestinian people, marking the beginning of their Exodus and Diaspora"[Khalidi 1992: xxxi]. As Palestinian scholar Elias Sanbar puts it:

That year, a country and its people disappeared from maps and dictionaries [...]. "The Palestinian people does not exist," said the new masters, and henceforth the Palestinians would be referred to by general, conveniently vague, terms as either "refugees," or in the case of a small minority that had managed to escape the generalized expulsion, "Israeli Arabs," a long absence was beginning [Sanbar 2001: 87–94].¹

That year, a country and its people disappeared from maps, dictionaries and international collective memory. On international maps "Israel" replaced "Palestine" and the Palestinian space was re-invented as an Israeli space. "The Palestinian people does not exist," said the Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir in 1969 [*Sunday Times* 1969(Jun. 15); *The Washington Post* 1969(Jun. 16)]. Meir, who herself migrated to Palestine in 1921, was born in the Ukraine as "Golda Mabovitch" and was known as "Golda Myerson" from 1917–1956. Meir spoke Hebrew in a thick American accent. Here attempt to re-invent the Palestinian space went hand in-hand with her drive to fashion a new Hebrew identity for herself.

Zionism's re-invention of the Palestinian space was inevitable. After all Zionism itself

¹ See also [Sa'di and Abu-Lughod 2007: 4]. Sanbar's work is situated at the crossroads of personal and collective history. See [Sanbar 1984; 1994; 1996]

was a classic case of European nation-building and the invention of a national tradition and a new collective memory—a typical European practice of using collective memory selectively by manipulating certain bits of the national and religious past, suppressing others and elevating and mobilising others in an entirely functional way and for political purposes; thus mobilised collective memory is not necessarily authentic but rather useful politically [Said 1991: 6–7]. Competing modes of modern nation-building and nationalist myth-making have received extensive critical reappraisal in the works of Benedict Anderson [Anderson 1991: 6, 11–2], Eric Hobsbawm [Hobsbawm 1990; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1996], Anthony Smith [Smith 1971, 1981, 1984, 1986] and Ernest Gellner. Hobsbawm’s most comprehensive analysis of nation-building and myth-making in Europe is found in *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*. Published in 1990 under the subtitle “Programme, Myth, Reality,” his work is about the “invention of tradition,” the invention of collective memory, and the construction national of identities from a mixture of folk history and historical myths [Hobsbawm 1990]. In *The Invention of Tradition* (1996) Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger explore the way social and political authorities in the Europe of the mid-nineteenth century set about creating supposedly age-old traditions by providing invented collective memories of the past as a way of creating a new sense of identity for the ruler and ruled [Hobsbawm and Ranger 1996: 1–14, 263–83].

Golda Meir’s statement also typically embodies the Israeli politics of denial: since the Nakba Israeli policy towards the Palestinian refugees has become a classical case of denial [Masalha 2003]: denial of the existence of the Palestinian people; denial is central to the Zionist narrative about what happened in 1948; denial of any historical injustice; denial of the ethnic cleansing of Palestinian; denial of any moral responsibility or culpability for the creation of the plight of the Palestinian refugees; denial of the Palestinian “right of return”; denial of restitution of refugee property (returning the properties to their rightful owners)—after expropriating the refugees’ land and property.

Less typical, however, was the statement made by Meir’s Defense Minister, General Moshe Dayan, who, in 1969, felt it was necessary to remind their compatriots, including those who were opposed to his settler colonial policies in the occupied territories settlements, of what some of them, the younger generation, never knew. Dayan had this to say in a 1969 speech at the Technion, Israel Institute of Technology, in Haifa:

We came here to this country, which was settled by Arabs, and we are building a Jewish State [...] Jewish villages arose in the place of Arab villages. You do not even know the names [of these villages], and I do not blame you, because those geography books no longer exist. Not only do the books not exist, the Arab villages are not there either. Nahlal [Dayan’s own settlement] arose in the place of Mahlul, Gvat [a kibbutz] in the place of Jibta, Sarid [another kibbutz] in the place

of Haneifis, and Kfar-Yehoshu'a in the place of Tal-Shaman. There is not one single place built in this country that did not have a former Arab population [*Haaretz* 1969(Apr. 4): 15].

After 1948 the exclusion of the Palestinian Nakba (a mini-holocaust) from Western discourses on Israel-Palestine was reflected by the fact the Palestinians would be referred to by general, conveniently vague, terms as either “refugees,” or in the case of a small minority that had managed to escape the generalised expulsion, “Israeli Arabs,” a long absence was beginning. Denied the right to independence and statehood, the Palestinians were treated after 1948 as “refugees” (*lajiin* in Arabic)—either as a “humanitarian problem,” deserving the support of international aid agencies and, more specifically, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), or as an “economic problem” requiring “dissolution” through resettlement and employment schemes [Masalha 2003].

But the “ethnic cleansing” of Palestine and the displacement of Palestinians did not end with the 1948 war and the Israeli authorities continued to “transfer,” or “ethnic cleanse,” Palestinians during the 1950s. Israel instituted a military government and declared Palestinian villages “closed military zones” to prevent displaced Palestinians from returning.

The Israeli army and the Jewish National Fund (JNF) became the two Zionist institutions key to ensuring that the Palestinian refugees were unable to return to their lands, through complicity in the destruction of Palestinian villages and homes and their transformation into Jewish settlements, national parks, forests and even car parks. The JNF also planted forests in the depopulated villages to conceal Palestinian existence. In the post-1948 period the minority of Palestinians (160,000)—who remained behind, many of them internally displaced—became second-class citizens, subject to a system of military administration by a government that confiscated the bulk of their lands. Today almost a quarter of the 1.3 million Palestinian citizens of Israel are “present absentees.” The term is a legal one, coined with Kafkaesque irony by Israel’s legal bureaucracy in its 1950 Absentee’s Property Law to describe those Palestinians who had been displaced from their homes and villages in 1948–49 and became internal refugees within their own country [Masalha 2005; Kamen 1984].

Palestinians, hardly surprisingly, perceive their catastrophe as something unique, after all the Nakba brought about a dramatic rupture in modern Palestinian history. Palestinian author Salman Abu Sitta’s description of the Nakba is a case in point:

The Palestinian Nakba is unsurpassed in history. For a country to be occupied by a foreign minority, emptied almost entirely of its people, its physical and cultural landmarks obliterated, its destruction hailed as a miraculous act of God and a victory for freedom and civilised values, all done according to a premeditated plan,

meticulously executed, financially and politically supported from abroad, and still maintained today, is no doubt unique [Abu Sitta 1998: 5].

Although the ocean of refugee suffering is bound to be perceived as unique by the Palestinian people, it is, however, resonant with all extreme human suffering, including historic Jewish persecution and suffering in Europe. Surely the Nakba and ongoing Palestinian suffering are a reminder of the reality of the suffering of Jews in Europe. Some observers have remarked that that it is precisely because of the Jewish Shoah that the truth about the Nakba and the continuing horrific suffering of the Palestinian people have remained invisible to enlightened public opinion in the West. Of course acknowledging the truth of what took place in Europe can never morally justify the uprooting of another people outside of Europe and the destruction of historic Palestine.

The Nakba and Palestinian Collective Memory

Collective memory and commemoration have played an important role in nation-building processes and as a vehicle for victims of injustice and violence to articulate their experience of suffering. Narratives of memory and commemoration have also been part of grassroots initiatives to bring to life marginalised and counter-narratives that have been suppressed, either by hegemonic discourses or the unwillingness on the part of repressive regimes to acknowledge the past.

In the case of the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine the Nakba has been a key site of collective memory and history that “connects all Palestinians to a specific point in time.” While Palestinian national identity took roots long before 1948, Palestinian memory accounts of the post-Nakba period played a major role in the reconstruction of Palestinian national identity and the emergence of the PLO in the 1960s; in recent decades there has been an intense relationship between the Nakba and the articulation of Palestinian national identity.

In the absence of a Palestinian state, which would have been expected to devote material and cultural resources to commemorative events and memorialisation projects, Palestinian refugee communities in Lebanon and elsewhere in the Middle East have actively promoted Nakba commemoration and memorialisation. Since 1948 Palestinian refugees from individual villages marked “their” Nakba, or the anniversary of the date of the fall of their village. At the same time, however, for many years the topic of the Nakba was hardly broached in Palestinian film-making—a memory too painful to evoke.

In “*Nakba: Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*” Ahmad Sa’di and Lila Abu-Lughod show how in the last decade this has changed dramatically, with Palestinian filmmakers examining the history and the memories of this cataclysmic event [Sa’di and Abu-Lughod 2007]. The book provides excellent accounts of memory of the Nakba in a number

of recent Palestinian films. It also explores concepts of home and exile, identity and its relationship to memory, and exilic cinema and its characteristics, cinematic use of narrative devices and storytelling and the struggle between two opposing narratives: the hegemonic (Zionist) narrative which tries to displace, replace and suppress the narrative of the indigenous people of Palestine. As Palestinian film-maker Omar al-Qattan points out, “There is no single Palestinian memory” of the Nakba—“rather, there are many tangled memories. A collective memory or experience is in its nature complex and elusive, constantly changing with time.”

Two recent edited collections: “*Nakba: Palestine, 1948 and the Claims of Memory*” and a book I edited in 2005: “*Catastrophe Remembered*” [Masalha 2005], are two books which explore the complex narratives of the Nakba and Palestinian collective memory. Coined by memory theorist Maurice Halbwachs [Halbwachs 1980; 1992], collective memory is constructed, invented, re-invented, manipulated, shared and passed on by social and ethnic groups. Pierre Nora’s contribution to the role of place and spaces of shared memory (the “lieux de memoire” that we all inhabit) is also important [Nora 1996; 1997; 1998]. Drawing on the works of Halbwachs and Nora, Sa’di and Abu-Lughod highlight the re-invention of the Palestinian space by Israel. They also show that authors dealing with Palestinian collective memory have not always been sensitive to the complex and multi-layered relationships existing between collective memory, national identity, oral history and historiography. As a result, studies of Palestinian collective memory have been largely divorced from the broader political context, national narratives and national identities, elite discourses and the class structures which inform and shape them [Sa’di and Abu-Lughod 2007].

Ten years ago, in 1998, there was a remarkable proliferation of Palestinian films, memoirs and archival websites—all created around the 50th anniversary of the Nakba. In conjunction with this 50th anniversary, several films were released, including Edward Said’s *In Search of Palestine*, Muhammad Bakri’s *1948*, Simone Bitton’s film about the poet Mahmoud Darwish: *Et la terre comme la langue*. More Nakba films have recently been released in conjunction with the 60th anniversary, including Maryse Gargour’s *La Terre Parle Arabe*, with which I have been personally involved. Also since 1998 several “online archives” have been created on oral history and refugee experiences and recollections of the Nakba.

Palestinian social history and refugee experience and stories about places from their past that appear in oral history collections, autobiographies, novels, poetry collections and memorial books focus on both the symbolic and the emotional connections of Palestinians to their former homes and villages. It is also the “documentary evidence” that proves their existence and legal right to the land of their ancestors. Their memory accounts of Palestine before 1948 reflect the beauty of the landscape, richness of the land and of village and city lives. These narratives about the land testify to the intimate and intense experience of everyday life on the land—the names of the valleys and *wadis*, hills, shrines, streets,

springs and water wells, cultivated fields and vineyards; the importance of all kinds of trees (olive, almond, grape) and other natural elements in memories of the past. Hand-drawn maps marking the places of importance to the villagers, personal documents, personal memories and oral accounts all intertwine to create a larger picture and a collective narrative of life before the Nakba.

Interestingly, however, Sa'di and Abu-Lughod show how until recently little research has been carried out in order to understand the underlying power claims within the context of what French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu would have referred to as the Palestinian “symbolic marketplace”; narratives of memory are the archaeology of a people criss-crossed with individual experiences—narratives of suffering and *sumud* (steadfastness), of courage and resistance born out of anger and revolt against oppression.

The Politics of Denial: The Nakba and Israeli Collective Memory

The Israeli state was built on old biblical symbols and legends and modern Zionist myths. The founding myths of Zionism and the Israeli state, which dictated the conceptual removal of Palestinians before, during and after their physical removal in 1948, and the invention of euphemisms such as “transfer” and “present absentees.” Moreover since the 1948 Nakba Israeli policy towards the Palestinian refugees has become a classical case of denial; denial of the existence of the Palestinian people; denial is central to the Zionist narrative about what happened in 1948; denial of any historical injustice; denial of the ethnic cleansing of Palestinian; denial of any moral responsibility or culpability for the creation of the plight of the Palestinian refugees; denial of the Palestinian “right of return”; denial of restitution of refugee property (returning the properties to their rightful owners)—after expropriating the refugees’ land and property; denial of Palestinian rights in Jerusalem.

In 1992 I published a book called: *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of ‘Transfer’ in Zionist Political Thought, 1882–1948* [Masalha 1992]. This was followed by a book called: *A Land Without a People* [Masalha 1997]. In 2003 I published another book called: *The Politics of Denial: Israel and the Palestinian Refugee Problem* [Masalha 2003]. The trilogy was extensively based on Hebrew documents and Israeli archives. In the Israeli collective memory, Palestine of 1948 was “a land without a people for a people without a land.” Yet, not only was the country never empty, an abundance of archival and documentary evidence shows a strong correlation between the Zionist “transfer solution” and the Nakba. By the end of the 1948 war, hundreds of villages had been completely depopulated and their houses blown up or bulldozed. The main objective was to prevent the return of refugees to their homes, but the destruction also helped to perpetuate the Zionist myth that Palestine was virtually empty territory before the Jews entered [Masalha 1992]. In a lecture entitled: “Palestine: Memory, Invention and Space,” given at a Birzeit University conference in

November 1998, the late Edward Said remarked on the “irreconcilability” of the Zionist and Palestinian narratives:

For Israelis and many Jews throughout the world 1998 has been the 50th anniversary of Israel’s independence and establishment, a miraculous story of recovery after the Holocaust, of democracy, making the desert bloom, and so. Thus, two totally different characterizations of a recollected event have been constructed. What has long struck me about this radical irresponsibility at the origin of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is that it is routinely excluded from considerations of related subjects concerning ethnic or collective memory, geographical analysis, political reflection [Said 1991: 11].

It is frequently argued, Edward Said once explained, that Zionism is in essence an unchanging idea that expresses 2000 years of yearning for Jewish political and religious self-determination to be exercised over the “promised land.” Because political Zionism has culminated in the creation of the Israeli state, it is also often argued that its historical realisation has confirmed its unchanging essence, and no less important, the brutal means used for its realisation. Very little is said about the actual genealogy and provenance of Zionism, especially its European settler-colonial context of the late nineteenth-century from which Zionism drew its force; and almost nothing is said about what the creation of the Israeli state entailed for the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine. Despite its distinct features and its nationalist ideology, political Zionism followed the general trajectory of colonialist projects in Africa, Asia and Latin America: European colonising of another people’s land while seeking to remove or subjugate the indigenous inhabitants of the land.

“Land redemption” (in Hebrew *geolat adama*), “land conquest” (*kibbush adama*), emigration, settler colonisation and demographic transformation of the land, the Judaisation of Palestine and the Hebraicisation of its landscape and geographical sites have all been permanent themes of modern Zionism. The analogies between Eastern and Central European populist nationalisms and Labour Zionism: Zionist nationalist socialists repudiated liberal individualism and were suspicious of bourgeois liberal democracy. In this illiberal legacy of Labour Zionism, Israeli historian Zeev Sternhell finds the seeds of current Israeli problems—the lack of a constitution, an inadequate concept of universal human rights, the failure to separate religion and state, etc. Deflating the socialist pretensions of Labour Zionism, Sternhell explains that socialist Zionists and right-wing Revisionist movement of Betar, founded by a Russian Jew, Vladimir Jabotinsky (1880–1940), through Menahem Begin (1913–1992) and Yitzhak Shamir to Binyamin Netanyahu, were all integral nationalists. He argues that Labour Zionism ran its course with the founding of the state and there were no social

perspectives or ideological directions, beyond a nationalism based on “historical rights to the whole land of Israel.” This settler-colonial legacy of Labour Zionism, with its obsession with land settlement, ethnic and demographic separation (in Hebrew *hafrada*), continued after the founding of the Israeli state in 1948. With no social perspectives or ideological directions beyond a racist volkisch nationalism and mystical attitudes towards the land, based on abstract “historical rights to the whole land of Israel,” the mould set in the pre-state period did not change. After 1967, unable to come to terms with Palestinian nationalism, Labour Zionism had inevitably pursued its settler colonialism in the occupied territories and tried to test the Zionist method of “creating facts on the ground” [Sternhell 1998].

From the beginning of the modern Zionist settlement in Palestine, European Jewish settlers had to confront the reality that their project immediately clashed with the ethnic, religious and demographic realities of Palestine and precipitated conflict with the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine. In particular Palestinian demography and the land issue were at the heart of the struggle between the Zionist settlers and indigenous Palestinians. Even in 1947, the indigenous Palestinians were the overwhelming majority in the country and owned much of the land. The Jewish community or Yishuv (mainly East European settlers) was about a third of the total population and owned, after fifty years of land purchases, only 6 percent of the land.

In the 1930s, with the intensification of the Palestinian resistance to Zionism, the general endorsement of “transfer”/ethnic cleansing, Ben-Gurion and other leaders of the Jewish Agency (in different forms: voluntary, agreed and compulsory) was designed to achieve two crucial objectives: (1) to clear the land for Jewish settlers and would be immigrants, and (2) to establish an ethnocratic, mono-religious and fairly homogenous Jewish state. During the same period key leaders of Labour Zionism, such as Ben-Gurion, then chairman of the Jewish Agency, strongly believed that Zionism would not succeed in setting up a homogenous Jewish state and fulfilling its imperative of absorbing the expected influx of Jewish immigrants from Europe if the indigenous inhabitants were allowed to remain.

Central to Zionist foundational myths is the theme that the land, until the arrival of European Jewish settlers, was virtually barren, desolate and empty, waiting to be made fertile and populated by Israel; it was the rightful property of “returning Jews.” The mega-narrative of Zionism contains several intertwined foundational myths which underlie contemporary Israeli culture. These include the “negation of exile” (*shlilat ha-galut*), the “return to history” (*ha-shiva la-historia*), the “return to the land of Israel” (*ha-shiva le-Eretz Yisrael*) and the myth of “empty territory.”² The “negation of exile” allows Zionism to establish a (mythical) line of unbroken continuity between ancient Palestine and a present that renews it in the

² For further discussion of Israeli foundational myths and Zionist historiography, see [Masalha 1992, 1997; Piterberg 2001; 2008; Rose 2004; Ram 1995; Raz-Krakotzkin 1993, 1994; Sternhell 1998].

resettlement of Palestine [Masalha 2007]. These slogans run through state education in Israel and finds strong expression in children's literature. One such work for children contains the following excerpt:

Joseph and some of his men thus crossed the land [Palestine] on foot, until they reached Galilee. They climbed mountains, beautiful but empty mountains, where nobody lived [...]. Joseph said, "We want to establish this Kibbutz and conquer this emptiness. We shall call this place Tel Hai [Living Hill] [...]. The land is empty; its children have deserted it [reference is, of course, to Jews]. They are dispersed and no longer tend it. No one protects or tends the land now"[Gurvitz and Navon 1953: 128, 132, 134].

In a similar vein, Israel's leading satirist, Dan Ben-Amotz, observed in 1982 that

the Arabs do not exist in our textbooks [for children]. This is apparently in accordance with the Jewish-Zionist-socialist principles we have received. "A-people-without-a-land-returns-to-a-land-without-people"[Ben-Amotz 1982: 155].

This characteristic thinking echoes strongly the deep-seated theme of "land without a people." These images and formulas of "underpopulated and untended land" gave those who propounded them a simple and self-explanatory Zionism. These myths not only justified Zionist settlement but also helped to suppress conscience-pricking among Israeli Jews for the dispossession of the Palestinians before, during, and after 1948: if the "land had been deserted," then no Zionist wrong doing had taken place.

For the Zionist settler who is coming "to redeem the land of the Bible," the indigenous people earmarked for dispossession are usually invisible. They are simultaneously divested of their human and national reality and classed as a marginal non-entity. Furthermore, Zionism, like all European settler colonial movements, had to demonise and dehumanise the indigenous people in its path in order to legitimise their displacement and dispossession. Thus, the Palestinians were depicted as "conniving," "dishonest," "lazy," "treacherous," "liars," "murderous" and "Nazis." Indeed, Zionist historiography provides ample evidence suggesting that from the very beginning of the Yishuv in Palestine the attitude of most Zionist groups towards the native Arab population ranged from a mixture of indifference and patronising racial superiority to outright denial of its national rights, the goal being to uproot and transfer it to neighbouring countries. Leading figures such as Israel Zangwill, a prominent Anglo-Jewish writer, close lieutenant of Theodor Herzl and advocate of the "transfer" solution,

worked relentlessly to propagate the slogan that Palestine was “a land without a people for a people without a land.” Another use of the same myth of an empty country was made in 1914 by Chaim Weizmann, later president of the World Zionist Congress and the first president of the state of Israel:

In its initial stage, Zionism was conceived by its pioneers as a movement wholly depending on mechanical factors: there is a country which happens to be called Palestine, a country without a people, and, on the other hand, there exists the Jewish people, and it has no country. What else is necessary, then, than to fit the gem into the ring, to unite this people with this country? The owners of the country [the Ottoman Turks?] must, therefore, be persuaded and convinced that this marriage is advantageous, not only for the [Jewish] people and for the country, but also for themselves.³

A few years after the Zionist movement obtained the Balfour Declaration, Zangwill wrote:

If Lord Shaftesbury was literally inexact in describing Palestine as a country without a people, he was essentially correct, for there is no Arab people living in intimate fusion with the country, utilising its resources and stamping it with a characteristic impress; there is at best an Arab encampment [Zangwill 1920: 104].

This and other pronouncements by Weizmann and other leading Zionists embodying European supremacy planted in the Zionist mind the racist notion of an empty territory—empty not necessarily in the actual absence of its inhabitants, but rather a kind of civilisational barrenness—justifying Zionist colonisation, and obliviousness to the fate of the native population and their eventual removal.

Disposable Natives: The Concept of “Transfer” in Mainstream/Labour Zionism

Neither Israel Zangwill nor Chaim Weizmann intended these demographic assessments in a literal fashion. They did not mean that there were no people in Palestine, but that there were no people worth considering within the framework of the notions of European white supremacy that then held sway. In this connection, a comment by Weizmann to Arthur Ruppin, head of the colonisation department of the Jewish Agency, is particularly revealing. When asked by Ruppin about the Palestinian Arabs and how he (Weizmann) obtained the Balfour Declaration in 1917, Weizmann replied:

³ Weizmann, 28 March 1914, in [Litvinoff 1983: 115–6].

The British told us that there are some hundred thousand negroes [*kushim* in Hebrew] and for those there is no value [Heller 1984: 140].

Such pronouncements by Weizmann, Zangwill and other leading Zionists planted in the Zionist mind the racist notion of an empty territory—empty not necessarily in the sense of an actual absence of inhabitants, but rather in the sense of a “civilisational barrenness” justifying Zionist colonisation and obliviousness to the fate of the native population and its eventual removal.

In my above-mentioned books I have dealt with the evolution of the theme of “population transfer”—a euphemism denoting the organised removal of the Arab population of Palestine to neighbouring or distant countries. I have shown that this concept—delicately described by its proponents as “population exchange,” “Arab return to Arabia,” “emigration,” “resettlement” and “rehabilitation” of the Palestinians in Arab countries, etc. —was deeply rooted in mainstream Zionist thinking and in the Yishuv as a solution to Zionist land and political problems. Although the desire among Zionist leaders to “solve” the “Arab question” through transfer remained constant until 1948, the envisaged modalities of transfer changed over the years according to circumstances. From the mid-1930s onwards a series of specific plans, generally involving Transjordan, Syria and Iraq, were produced by the Yishuv’s transfer committees and senior officials.

The justifications used in defence of the transfer plans in the 1930s and 1940s formed the cornerstone of the subsequent argumentation for transfer, particularly in the proposals put forward after 1948 and in the wake of the 1967 conquest of the West Bank and Gaza. After 1967, Zionist territorial maximalists and proponents of transfer continued to assert, often publicly, that there was nothing immoral about the idea. They asserted that the Palestinians were not a distinct people but merely “Arabs,” an “Arab population,” or an “Arab community” that happened to reside in the land of Israel.

Closely linked to this idea of the non-existence of the Palestinians as a nation and their non-attachment to the particular soil of Palestine was the idea of their belonging to an Arab nation with vast territories and many countries. As Ben-Gurion put it in 1929, “Jerusalem is not the same thing to the Arabs as it is to the Jews. The Arab people inhabit many great lands.” And if the Palestinians did not constitute a distinct, separate nation, had little attachment to Jerusalem, were not an integral part of the country and were without historical ties to it, then they could be transferred to other Arab countries without undue prejudice. Similarly, if the Palestinians were merely a marginal, local segment of a larger population of Arabs, then they were not a major party to the conflicts with Israel; therefore, Israeli efforts to

deal over their heads were justified.

Despite their propaganda slogans of an underpopulated land, of Palestine's "civilisational barrenness" and of their making "the desert bloom," all of which were issued partly for external consumption, the Zionists from the outset were well aware that not only were there people on the land, but that they were there in large numbers. Zangwill, who had visited Palestine in 1897 and come face-to-face with the demographic reality of the country, himself acknowledged in a 1905 speech to a Zionist group in Manchester that

Palestine proper had already its inhabitants. The pashalik [province] of Jerusalem is already twice as thickly populated as the United States, having fifty-two souls to the square mile, and not 25 percent of them Jews [Zangwill 1937: 210].

Abundant references to the Palestinian population in early Zionist texts show clearly that from the beginning of the Zionist settlement in Palestine, the Palestinian Arabs were far from being an unseen or hidden presence.

The concept of "transfer"/ethnic cleaning is old as modern political Zionism and has accompanied its evolution and praxis during the past century." Ben-Gurion, in particular, was an enthusiastic and committed advocate of the transfer "solution." The importance he attached not merely to transfer but forced transfer is seen in his diary entry for 12 July 1937:

The compulsory transfer of Arabs from the valleys of the proposed Jewish state could give us something which we never had [an Arab-free Galilee], even when we stood on our own feet during the days of the First and Second Temple [Ben-Gurion 1974: 297–9].

Ben-Gurion was convinced that few, if any, Palestinians would "voluntarily" transfer themselves to Transjordan. He also believed that if the Zionists were determined in their effort to put pressure on the British Mandatory authorities to carry out "compulsory transfer," the plan could be implemented:

We have to stick to this conclusion in the same way we grabbed the Balfour Declaration, more than that, in the same way we grabbed Zionism itself. We have to insist upon this conclusion [and push it] with our full determination, power and conviction [...]. We must uproot from our hearts the assumption that the thing is not possible. It can be done.

Ben-Gurion went as far as to write in his memoirs:

“*We must prepare ourselves to carry out*” the transfer [emphasis in the original] [Ben-Gurion 1974: 297–9].

A letter to his son, Amos, dated 5 October 1937, shows the extent to which transfer had become associated in his mind with expulsion. Ben-Gurion wrote:

We must expel Arabs and take their places [...] and, if we have to use force—not to dispossess the Arabs of the Negev and Transjordan, but to guarantee our own right to settle in those places—then we have force at our disposal [Teveth 1985: 189].

At the Twentieth Zionist Congress, held from 3 to 21 August 1937, Ben-Gurion emphasised that transfer of Arab villagers had been practised by the Yishuv all along:

Was the transfer of the Arabs ethical, necessary and practicable? [...] Transfer of Arabs had repeatedly taken place before in consequence of Jews settling in different district.⁴

A year later, at the Jewish Agency Executive’s transfer discussions of June 1938, Ben-Gurion put forward a “line of actions” entitled “The Zionist Mission of the Jewish State”:

The Hebrew State will discuss with the neighbouring Arab states the matter of voluntarily transferring Arab tenant farmers, workers and *fellahin* from the Jewish state to neighbouring states. For that purpose the Jewish state, or a special company [...] will purchase lands in neighbouring states for the resettlement of all those workers and *fellahin* [Protocol of the Jewish Agency Executive meeting of 7 June 1938].

Ben-Gurion elaborated on the idea in his “Lines for Zionist Policy” on 15 October 1941:

We have to examine, first, if this transfer is practical, and secondly, if it is necessary. It is impossible to imagine general evacuation without compulsion, and brutal compulsion [...]. The possibility of a large-scale transfer of a population by force was demonstrated, when the Greeks and the Turks were transferred [after the First World War]. In the present war [the Second World War] the idea of

⁴ As reported in [*New Judea* (London) 1937: 220].

transferring a population is gaining more sympathy as a practical and the most secure means of solving the dangerous and painful problem of national minorities.⁵

Ben-Gurion went on to suggest a Zionist-inspired campaign in England and the United States that would aim at influencing Arab countries, especially Syria and Iraq, to collaborate with the Jewish Yishuv in implementing the transfer of Palestinians in return for economic gains.

There are mountains of evidence to show that in the pre-1948 period, “transfer”/ethnic cleansing was embraced by the highest levels of Zionist leadership, representing almost the entire political spectrum. Nearly all the founding fathers of the Israeli state advocated “transfer” in one form or another, including Theodor Herzl, Leon Motzkin, Nahman Syrkin, Menahem Ussishkin, Chaim Weizmann, David Ben-Gurion, Yitzhak Tabenkin, Avraham Granovsky, Israel Zangwill, Yitzhak Ben-Tzvi, Pinhas Rutenberg, Aaron Aaronson, Zeev Jabotinsky and Berl Katznelson.

In August 1937, Berl Katznelson, who was one of the most popular and influential leaders of the Mapai party (later the ruling Labour party), had this to say in a debate at the World Convention of Ihud Po’alei Tzion (the highest forum of the dominant Zionist world labour movement) about ethnic cleansing:

The matter of population transfer has provoked a debate among us: Is it permitted or forbidden? My conscience is absolutely clear in this respect. A remote neighbour is better than a close enemy. They [the Palestinians] will not lose from it. In the final analysis, this is a political and settlement reform for the benefit of both parties. I have long been of the opinion that this is the best of all solutions [...]. I have always believed and still believe that they were destined to be transferred to Syria or Iraq [‘Al Darchei Medinyutenu: Mo’atzah ‘Olamit Shel Ihud Po’alei Tzion (c.s.). 1938].

A year later, at the Jewish Agency Executive’s discussions of June 1938, Katznelson declared himself in favour of maximum territory and the “principle of compulsory transfer”:

What is a compulsory transfer? [...] Compulsory transfer does not mean individual transfer. It means that once we resolved to transfer there should be a political body able to force this or that Arab who would not want to move out. Regarding the transfer of Arab individuals we are always doing this. But the question will be the transfer of much greater quantity of Arabs through an agreement with the

⁵ Ben-Gurion, David 15 October 1941. “Lines for Zionist Policy”, in [Masalha 1992: 128–9].

Arab states: this is called a compulsory transfer [...]. We have here a war about principles, and in the same way that we must wage a war for maximum territory, there must also be here a war [for the transfer “principle”] [...]. We must insist on the principle that it must be a large agreed transfer [Protocol of the Jewish Agency Executive meeting of 12 June 1938].

In the early 1940s Katznelson found time to be engaged in polemics with the left-wing Hashomer Hatzair about the merits of transfer. He says to them: don't stigmatise the concept of transfer and rule it beforehand.

Has [kibbutz] Merhaviya not been built on transfer? Were it not for many of these transfers neither Merhaviya or [kibbutz] Mishmar Ha'emek or other socialist Kibbutzim would have been set up.

Supporters of “voluntary” transfer included Arthur Ruppin, a co-founder of Brit Shalom, a movement advocating bi-nationalism and equal rights for Arabs and Jews; moderate leaders of Mapai (later the Labour party) such as Moshe Shertok and Eli'ezer Kaplan, Israel's first finance minister; and leaders of the Histadrut (Jewish Labour Federation) such as Golda Meyerson (later Meir) David Remez.

But perhaps the most consistent, extreme and obsessive advocate of “compulsory transfer” was Yosef Weitz, a Polish Jew who arrived in Palestine in 1908 and later became director of the settlement department of the Jewish National Fund and head of the Israeli government's official Transfer Committee of 1948. Weitz was at the centre of Zionist land-purchasing activities for decades. His intimate knowledge of and involvement in land purchase made him sharply aware of its limitations. As late as 1947, after half a century of tireless efforts, the collective holdings of the JNF—which constituted about half of the Yishuv total—amounted to a mere 3.5 percent of the land area of Palestine. A summary of Weitz's political beliefs is provided by his diary entry for 20 December 1940:

Amongst ourselves it must be clear that there is no room for both peoples in this country [...]. After the Arabs are transferred, the country will be wide open for us; with the Arabs staying the country will remain narrow and restricted [...]. There is no room for compromise on this point [...] land purchasing [...] will not bring about the state [...]. The only way is to transfer the Arabs from here to neighbouring countries, all of them, except perhaps Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Old Jerusalem. Not a single village or a single tribe must be left. And the transfer must be done through their absorption in Iraq and Syria and even in Transjordan. For

that goal, money will be found—even a lot of money. And only then will the country be able to absorb millions of Jews [...] there is no other solution [Weitz: 1090–1].

A countryside tour in the summer of 1941 took Weitz to a region in central Palestine. He recorded in his Diary seeing:

large [Arab] villages crowded in population and surrounded by cultivated land growing olives, grapes, figs, sesame, and maize fields [...]. Would we be able to maintain scattered [Jewish] settlements among these existing [Arab] villages that will always be larger than ours? And is there any possibility of buying their [land]? [...] and once again I hear that voice inside me called: **evacuate this country** [emphasis in the original].⁶

Earlier in March 1941 Weitz wrote in his Diary after touring Jewish settlements in the Esdraelon Valley (Marj Ibn ‘Amer): The complete evacuation of the country from its [Arab] inhabitants and handing it to the Jewish people is the answer. In April 1948 Weitz recorded in his Diary:

I made a summary of a list of the Arab villages which in my opinion must be cleared out in order to complete Jewish regions. I also made a summary of the places that have land disputes and must be settled by military means.⁷

In 1930, against the background of the 1929 disturbances in Palestine, Weizmann, then president of both the World Zionist Organisation and the Jewish Agency Executive, actively began promoting ideas of Arab transfer in private discussions with British officials and ministers. He presented the colonial secretary, Lord Passfield, with an official, albeit secret, proposal for the transfer of Palestinian peasants to Transjordan whereby a loan of one million Palestinian pounds would be raised from Jewish financial sources for the resettlement operation. Lord Passfield rejected the proposal. However, the justification Weizmann used in its defence formed the basis of subsequent Zionist transfer arguments. Weizmann asserted that there was nothing immoral about the concept of transfer; that the transfer of Greek and Turkish populations in the early 1920s provided a precedent for a similar measure regarding the Palestinians; and that the uprooting and transportation of Palestinians to Transjordan, Iraq, Syria or any other part of the vast Arab world would merely constitute a relocation from one

⁶ Entry dated 17 July 1941. [Weitz: 1204].

⁷ Entry dated 18 April 1948. [Weitz: 2358].

Arab district to another. Above all, for Weizmann and other Jewish Agency leaders, transfer was a systematic procedure, requiring preparation, money and a great deal of organisation, which needed to be planned by strategic thinkers and technical experts.

The Jewish Agency's "Transfer Committees" (1937–1948)

While the desire among the Zionist leadership to be rid of the "Arab demographic problem" remained constant until 1948, the extent of the preoccupation with, and the envisaged modalities of, transfer changed over the years according to circumstances. Thus, the wishful and rather naive belief in Zionism's early years that the Palestinians could be "spirited across the border," in Herzl's words, or that they would simply "fold their tents and slip away," to use Zangwill's formulation, soon gave way to more realistic assessments. Between 1937 and 1948 extensive secret discussions of transfer were held in the Zionist movement's highest bodies, including the Zionist Agency Executive, the Twentieth Zionist Congress, the World Convention of *Ihud Po'alei Tzion* (the top forum of the dominant Zionist world labour movement), and various official and semi-official transfer committees [Masalha 1992].

Many leading figures justified Arab removal politically and morally as the natural and logical continuation of Zionist colonisation in Palestine. There was a general endorsement of the ethical legitimacy of transfer; the differences centred on the question of compulsory transfer and whether such a course would be practicable (in the late 1930s/early 1940s) without the support of the colonial power, Britain.

From the mid-1930s onwards the transfer solution became central to the assessments of the Jewish Agency (then effectively the government of the *Yishuv*). The Jewish Agency produced a series of specific plans, generally involving Transjordan, Syria or Iraq. Some of these plans were drafted by three "Transfer Committees." The first two committees, set up by the *Yishuv* leadership, operated between 1937 and 1944; the third was officially appointed by the Israeli cabinet in August 1948.

As of the late 1930s, some of these transfer plans included proposals for agrarian legislation, citizenship restriction and various taxes designed to encourage Palestinians to transfer "voluntarily." However, in the 1930s and early 1940s, Zionist transfer proposals and plans remained largely confined to private and secret talks with British (and occasionally American) senior officials. The Zionist leadership generally refrained from airing the highly sensitive proposals in public. Moreover, the Zionist leadership was tireless in trying to shape the proposals of the Royal (Peel) Commission of 1937, which proposed a partition of Palestine between Jews and Arabs. It has generally escaped the attention of historians that the most significant transfer proposal submitted to the commission—the one destined to shape the outcome of its findings—was put forward by the Jewish Agency in a secret memorandum containing a specific paragraph on Arab transfer to Transjordan.

The Nakba as a Form of Politicide

The 1948 War was presented by the Zionist leadership in messianic terms as a “miraculous clearing of the land” and as another “War of Liberation” modelled on the Book of Joshua. The question is: from whom the land was “liberated”? From the British whose colonial administration in Palestine after 1918 had alone made it possible for the growth of the European Jewish settlement against the will of the overwhelming majority of Palestinians? Or from its indigenous inhabitants who had till the land and owned the soil for many centuries and for whom the Bible had become an instrument mandating expulsion.

The myth of “no expulsion” was echoed by the first United States ambassador to Israel, James McDonald, who told of a conversation he had with the president of Israel, Chaim Weizmann, during which Weizmann spoke in “messianic” terms about the 1948 Palestinian exodus as a “miraculous simplification of Israel’s tasks.” McDonald said that not one of Israel’s “big three”—Weizmann, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett—and no responsible Zionist leader had anticipated such a “miraculous clearing of the land.” The available evidence (based on mountains of Israeli archival documents), however, shows that the big three had all enthusiastically endorsed the concept of “transferring” the Palestinians in the 1937–48 period and had anticipated the Palestinian refugee exodus in 1948.

In the official Zionist rendition of the 1948 war the events are presented as a battle between a Jewish David and an Arab Goliath. Central to key narratives in Israeli culture is the myth which depicts the Israel-Palestine conflict as a “war of the few against the many.” Since the early 20th century Zionist historiography has based this narrative of the “few against-the-many” on the biblical account of Joshua’s conquest of ancient Palestine, while mainstream Israeli historians continue to portray the 1948 war as an unequal struggle between a Jewish David against an Arab Goliath, and as a desperate, heroic, and ultimately successful Jewish struggle against overwhelming odds. The European Zionist settlers brought with them Palestine the “few-against-the-many” narrative—a widespread European cultural myth which appeared in many variations, including the American western cowboy variation of the early 20th century. Turning the Jewish faith into secular ideology, Israeli historians and authors have adopted and reinterpret biblical sources and myths and have mobilised them in support of post-1948 Israeli objectives. The few, who overcame the many by virtue of their courage and absolute conviction, were those European Zionist settlers who emulated the fighters of ancient Israel, while the many were those Palestinians and Arabs who were the embodiment of various ancient oppressors. The Zionist struggle against the indigenous Palestinians was thus portrayed as a modern re-enactment of ancient biblical battles and wars, including David’s slaying of Goliath.

While the David and Goliath version of the Israel-Palestine conflict continues to gain

hegemony in the Western media, since the late 1980s, however, many of the myths that have come to surround the birth of Israel have been challenged by revisionist Israeli historians including Simha Flapan, Benny Morris, Ilan Pappé, Avi Shlaim. Furthermore the new and recent historiography of Palestine-Israel has shown that the 1948 Palestinian catastrophe was the culmination of over half a century of often secret Zionist plans and, ultimately, brute force. The extensive evidence shows a strong correlation between transfer discussions, their practical application in 1948 and the Palestinian Nakba. The primary responsibility for the displacement and dispossession of three-quarters of a million Palestinian refugees in 1948 lies with the Zionist-Jewish leadership, not least David Ben-Gurion. The work of revisionist Israeli historians contributed to demolishing some of the long-held Israeli and Western misconceptions surrounding Israel's birth. Containing remarkable revelations based on Hebrew archival material, their studies throw new light on the conduct of the Labour Zionist founding fathers of the Israeli state.

The new historiography of Israel-Palestine shows that in reality throughout the 1948 war, the Israeli army outnumbered all the Arab forces, regular and irregular, operating in the Palestine theatre. Estimates vary, but the best estimates suggest that on 15 May 1948 Israel fielded 35,000 troops whereas the Arabs fielded 20,000–25,000. Moreover during the war imported arms from the Eastern bloc: artillery, tanks, aircraft, decisively tipped the military balance in favour of Israel. During the second half of 1948 the Israelis not only outnumbered but also outgunned their opponents. While the Arab coalition facing Israel in 1948 was one of the most deeply divided, disorganised, and ramshackle coalitions in the history of warfare, the final outcome of the war was not a miracle but a reflection of the underlying Arab-Israeli military balance. Furthermore since 1948 the Arab-Israeli military imbalance has been illustrated by the fact that Israel (with US backing) has developed the fourth most powerful army in the world and has become the only nuclear power in the region.

Ben-Gurion's 1948 war against the Palestinians was a form of politicide. Ben-Gurion entered the 1948 war with a mind-set and premeditation to expel Palestinians. On 19 December 1947, he advised that the Haganah, the Jewish pre-state army, "adopt the method of aggressive defence; with every [Arab] attack we must be prepared to respond with a decisive blow: the destruction of the [Arab] place or the expulsion of the residents along with the seizure of the place." There is also plenty of evidence to suggest that as early as the beginning of 1948 his advisers counselled him to wage a total war against the Palestinians, and that he entered the 1948 war with the intention of expelling Palestinians: a) Plan Dalet: a straightforward document, this Haganah plan of early March 1948 was in many ways a blueprint for the expulsion of as many Palestinians as possible. It constituted an ideological-strategic anchor and basis for the destruction of Arab localities and expulsion of their inhabitants by Jewish commanders. In conformity with Plan Dalet, the Haganah

cleared various areas completely of Arab villages; b) The general endorsement of transfer schemes and the attempt to promote them secretly by mainstream Labour leaders, some of whom played a decisive role in the 1948 war, highlight the ideological intent that made the 1948 refugee exodus possible. Ben-Gurion in particular emerges as both an obsessive advocate of compulsory transfer in the late 1930s and the great expeller of the Palestinians in 1948. In 1948 there was no need for any cabinet decision to drive the Palestinians out. Ben-Gurion and senior Zionist military commanders, such as Yigal Allon, Moshe Carmel, Yigael Yadin, Moshe Dayan, Moshe Kalman and Yitzhak Rabin, played a key role in the expulsions. Everyone, at every level of military and political decision-making, understood that the objective was a Jewish state without a large Arab minority.

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that a policy of mass expulsion was adopted and carried out in 1948. Aharon Cohen, who in 1948 was the Director of the Arab Department of Mapam, wrote a memorandum dated 10 May 1948:

There is reason to believe that what is being done [...]. is being done out of certain political objectives and not only out of military necessities, as they [Jewish leaders] claim sometimes. In fact, the “transfer” of the Arabs from the boundaries of the Jewish state is being implemented [...]. the evacuation/clearing out of Arab villages is not always done out of military necessity. The complete destruction of villages is not always done because there are “no sufficient forces to maintain garrison”[Cohen 1948(May 10)].

Yosef Sprintzak, who in 1948 was Secretary General of the Histadrut, stated at a debate of the Mapai Centre on 24 July 1948, which was held against the background of the Ramle-Lyddá expulsions of 12–13 July:

There is a feeling that faits accomplis are being created [...]. The question is not whether the Arabs will return or not return. The question is whether the Arabs are [being or have been] expelled or not [...]. I want to know, who is creating the facts [of expulsion]? And the facts are being created on orders.

Sprintzak added that “a line of action [...] of expropriating and of emptying the land of Arabs by force” [Morris 1990: 42–3].

With the 1948 war, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion and the Zionist leadership succeeded in many of their objectives. Above all, they created a vastly enlarged Jewish state in which the Palestinians were forcibly reduced to a small minority. The available evidence shows that the evacuation of some three-quarters of a million Palestinians in 1948 can only be ascribed to

the culmination of Zionist expulsion policies and not to mythical orders issued by the Arab armies. Benny Morris's *Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* explodes many Israeli myths surrounding the 1948 exodus. Morris assesses that of 330 villages whose experience he studied, a total of 282 (85 percent) were depopulated as a result of direct Jewish attack.

Ben-Gurion, who was personally responsible for many of the myths surrounding 1948, had this to say in the Israeli Knesset debate of 11 October 1961:

The Arabs' exit from Palestine [...] began immediately after the UN resolution, from the areas earmarked for the Jewish state. And we have explicit documents testifying that they left Palestine following instructions by the Arab leaders, with the *Mufti* at their head, under the assumption that the invasion of the Arab armies at the expiration of the Mandate will destroy the Jewish state and push all the Jews into the sea, dead or alive.⁸

Ben-Gurion was propagating two myths: (a) there were orders from the neighbouring Arab states and the Hajj Amin Al-Husseini, the *Mufti* of Jerusalem, for the Palestinians to evacuate their homes and lands on the promise that the Arab armies would destroy the nascent Jewish state; (b) that those armies intended to "push all the Jews into the sea, dead or alive." Ben-Gurion gave no attribution for this phrase, nor did he claim that it was a quote from an Arab source. Since the Second World War the Shoah had been used as a legitimiser of Zionism. However the phrase "push all the Jews into the sea"—a highly emotive phrase invoking images of the Holocaust, though adapted to a Mediterranean setting—has since acquired extraordinary mythical dimensions as it is constantly invoked by Israelis and Zionists in order to justify the policies of Israel towards the Palestinians as well as the continuing occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem.

Although Ben-Gurion and his commanders did not drive the Palestinians into the sea, but they did drive them from their homes and villages and ancestral lands and from Palestine and into squalid refugee camps. The irony of Ben-Gurion's "chilling phrase" should not escape us. He demanded deference for a fictitious intention on the part of the Palestinians and Arabs while denying his own direct and personal involvement in the "ethnic cleansing" of the Palestinians.

Expulsion of Lydda and Ramle

From the territory occupied by the Israelis in 1948–49 about 90 percent of the Palestinians were driven out, many by psychological warfare and/or military pressure. A very large

⁸ Quoted in [Martin 2005(Mar. 11)].

number of Palestinians were expelled at gunpoint. A major instance of “outright expulsion” is the widely documented case of the twin towns of Lydda and Ramle in July 1948. More than sixty thousand Palestinians were expelled, accounting for nearly 10 percent of the total exodus. Ben-Gurion and three senior army officers were directly involved: Yigal Allon, Yitzhak Rabin and Moshe Dayan. Shortly before the capture of the towns, Ben-Gurion met with his army chiefs. Allon, commander of the Palmah, the Haganah’s elite military force, asked Ben-Gurion, “What shall we do with the Arabs?” Ben-Gurion answered (or according to one version, gestured with his hand), “Expel them.” This was immediately communicated to the army headquarters and the expulsion implemented. Morris writes:

At 13.30 hours on 12 July [...] Lieutenant-Colonel Yitzhak Rabin [...] issued the following order: “1. The inhabitants of Lydda must be expelled quickly without attention to age. They should be directed to Beit Nabala [...] 2. Implement immediately.” A similar order was issued at the same time to the Kiryati Brigade concerning the inhabitants of the neighbouring town of Ramle, occupied by Kiryati troops that morning [...]. On 12 and 13 July, Yiftah and Kiryati brigades carried out their orders, expelling the 50–60,000 remaining inhabitants of and refugees camped in and around the two towns [Morris 1990: 2].

In the case of Nazareth, Ben-Gurion arrived only after its capture. On seeing so many Palestinians remaining *in situ*, he angrily asked the local commander, “Why are there so many Arabs? Why didn’t you expel them?”

A Pattern of Massacres

The view that the Bible provides Jews with a title-deed to the “Land of Israel” combined with European Zionism’s self-perception as morally superior to the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine was echoed in the myth of “purity of arms”—a slogan initially coined by the Haganah/Palmah in early 1948. In the period between the mid-1930s and 1948, the Yishuv Labour leadership had embraced the concept of “transfer” while quietly pondering the question of whether there was a “more humane way” of expelling the indigenous Palestinians. In *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Power*, Anita Shapira shows that already during the Great Palestinian Rebellion of 1936–39 the Zionist leadership abandoned the slogan of *havlaga*—a restrained and proportionate response—and legitimised the use of terror against Palestinian civilians—the Zionist nationalist end justified the means.

The ethnic cleansing of 1948 was characterised by politicide which included the destruction of the Palestinian leadership and society; a series of atrocities and massacres carried out in 1948 included mutilation (in Deir Yasin); hundreds of Palestinians died from

illness, thirst and exhaustion during the “death march”: the mass deportation of the inhabitants of the twin towns of Lydda and Ramle during the hot summer of 1948:

Quite a few refugees died—from exhaustion, dehydration and disease—along the roads eastwards, from Lydda and Ramleh, before reaching temporary rest near and in Ramallah. Nimr Khatib put the death toll among the Lydda refugees during the trek eastward at 335; Arab Legion commander John Glubb Pasha more carefully wrote that “nobody will ever know how many children died” [Neff 1994(Jul–Aug)].

The 1948 war proved that engineering mass evacuation was not possible without perpetrating a series of massacres and a large number of atrocities. According to Israeli military historian Arie Yitzhaki (a former director of the Israeli army’s archives) about ten major massacres (of more than fifty victims each) and about one hundred smaller massacres were committed by Jewish forces in 1948–49. Yitzhaki argues that these massacres, large and small, had a devastating impact on the Palestinian population by inducing and precipitating the Palestinian exodus. Yitzhaki suggests that almost in every village there were murders. Another Israeli historian, Uri Milstein, corroborates Yitzhaki’s assessment and goes even further to suggest that each battle in 1948 ended with a massacre:

In all Israel’s wars, massacres were committed but I have no doubt that the War of Independence was the dirtiest of them all [Erlich 1992(May 6)].

Both Israeli “new historiography” and Palestinian oral history confirm that in almost every Palestinian village occupied by the Haganah and other Jewish militias during the 1948–49 war atrocities—such as murders, execution of prisoners and rape—were committed. In *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Israeli historian Ilan Pappé, commenting on the massacres carried out by Jewish forces during the Nakba, writes:

Palestinian sources, combining Israeli military archives with oral histories, list thirty-one confirmed massacres—beginning with the massacre in Tirat Haifa on 11 December 1947 and ending with Khirbat Illin in the Hebron area on 19 January 1949—and there may have been at least another six. We still do not have a systematic Nakba memorial archive that would allow one to trace the names of all those who died in the massacres [Pappé 2006: 258].

In an article entitled “Survival of the Fittest,” published in the daily *Haaretz* of 8 January

2004, Israeli historian Benny Morris had this to say about the pattern of atrocities in 1948:

In some cases four or five people were executed, in others the numbers were 70, 80, 100. There was also a great deal of arbitrary killing. Two old men are spotted walking in a field—they are shot. A woman is found in an abandoned village—she is shot. There are cases such as the village of Dawayima [in the Hebron region], in which a column entered the village with all guns blazing and killed anything that moved. The worst cases were Saliha (70–80 killed), Deir Yassin (100–110), Lod [Lydda] (250), Dawayima (hundreds) and perhaps Abu Shusha (70). There is no unequivocal proof of a large-scale massacre at Tantura, but war crimes were perpetrated there. At Jaffa there was a massacre about which nothing had been known until now. The same at Arab al Muwassi, in the north. About half of the acts of massacre were part of Operation Hiram [in the north, in October 1948]: at Safsaf, Saliha, Jish, Eilaboun, Arab al Muwasi, Deir al Asad, Majdal Krum, Sasa. In Operation Hiram there was a unusually high concentration of executions of people against a wall or next to a well in an orderly fashion. That can't be chance. It's a pattern. Apparently, various officers who took part in the operation understood that the expulsion order they received permitted them to do these deeds in order to encourage the population to take to the roads. The fact is that no one was punished for these acts of murder. Ben-Gurion silenced the matter. He covered up for the officers who did the massacres [Shavit 2004(Jan. 8)].

Moreover, the most striking result of the new historiography of Israel-Palestine is that the discourse has shifted away from the orthodox Zionist interpretation of the Deir Yasin massacre as “exceptional.” The focus of study is no longer so much on the terrorism carried out by the Irgun Tzvai Leumi (National Military Organisation), the military arm of Betar Zionism, and Lehi irregular forces before and during the 1948 war, but on the conduct of the mainstream Haganah/Palmah and Israeli Defence Force (IDF). At issue are the roles and involvement of the Haganah and the Israeli army in the numerous atrocities carried out in 1948. Sharif Kanaana of Birzeit University places the massacre of Deir Yasin and the evacuation of Arab West Jerusalem in 1948 within the framework of what he terms the Zionists' “maxi-massacre pattern” in their conquest of large Palestinian cities: Jewish attacks produced demoralisation and exodus; a nearby massacre would result in panic and further flight, greatly facilitating the occupation of the Arab city and its surrounding towns and villages.

Although not the bloodiest massacre of the war, Deir Yasin was the site of the most notorious massacre of Palestinian civilians in 1948—a massacre which became the single

most important contributory factor to the 1948 exodus—became a powerful marker of the violence at the foundation of the State of Israel. On 9 April, between 120 and 254 unarmed villagers were murdered, including women, the elderly and children. There were also cases of rape and mutilation. Most Israeli writers today have no difficulty in acknowledging the occurrence of the Deir Yasin massacre and its effect, if not its intention, of precipitating the exodus. However, most of these writers take refuge in the fact that the massacre was committed by “dissidents” of the Irgun, then commanded by Menahem Begin and Lehi, then co-commanded by Yitzhak Shamir, thus exonerating Ben-Gurion’s Haganah, the mainstream Zionist military force. Recently published Hebrew material, however, shows that: a) in January 1948, the *mukhtar* (head man) of Deir Yasin and other village notables had reached a non-aggression agreement with the Haganah and the neighbouring Jewish settlements of Giva’t Shaul and Montefiori; b) the Irgun’s assault on the village on 9 April had the full backing of the Haganah commander of Jerusalem, David Shaltiel. The latter not only chose to break his agreement with the villagers, but also provided rifles and ammunition for the Irgunists; c) the Haganah contributed to the assault on the village by providing artillery cover; d) a Haganah intelligence officer in Jerusalem, Meir Pa’il, was dispatched to Deir Yasin to assess the effectiveness and performance of the Irgun forces.

Although the actual murders of the non-combatant villagers were carried out by Lehi and the Irgun, the Haganah must share responsibility for the slaughter. The atrocity was fiercely condemned by liberal Jewish intellectuals, most prominent of which was Martin Buber who wrote repeatedly to Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion about the massacre. But apparently Ben-Gurion did not reply. According to Israeli historian Benny Morris, Ben-Gurion was at that very time explicitly sanctioning the expulsions of the Palestinians. More significantly, the recently published Israeli material shows that Deir Yasin was only one of many massacres carried out by Jewish forces (mainly the Haganah and the IDF) in 1948. Recent research proves that the Palestinians were less prone to evacuate their towns and villages in the second half of the war. Hence the numerous massacres committed from June 1948 onwards, all of which were geared at forcing mass evacuation.

In 1948, al-Dawayma, situated in the western Hebron hills, was a very large village, with a population of some 3,500 people. Like Deir Yasin, al-Dawayma was unarmed. It was captured on 29 October 1948 without a fight. The massacre of between eighty and one hundred villagers was carried out at the end of October 1948, not in the heat of the battle but after the Israeli army had clearly emerged victorious in the war. The testimony of Israeli soldiers present during the atrocities establishes that IDF troops under Moshe Dayan entered the village and liquidated civilians, throwing their victims into pits. “The children they killed by breaking their heads with sticks. There was not a house without dead.” The remaining Arabs were then shut up in houses “without food and water” as the village was systematically

razed. “One commander ordered a sapper to put two old women in a certain house [...] and blow up the house [...]. One soldier boasted that he had raped a woman and then shot her. One woman, with a newborn baby in her arms, was employed to clear the courtyard where the soldiers ate. She worked a day or two. In the end they shot her and her baby.” A variety of evidences indicate that the atrocities were committed in and around the village, including at the mosque and in a nearby cave, that houses with old people locked inside were blown up, and that there were several cases of the rape and shooting of women.

The evidence surrounding the Galilee expulsions shows clearly the existence of a pattern of actions characterised by a *series* of massacres deigned to intimidate the population into flight.

Erasing Villages

In 1948 more than half of the Palestinians were driven from their towns and villages, mainly by a deliberate Israeli policy of “transfer” and ethnic cleaning. The name of Palestine disappeared from the map. To complete this transformation of the country, in August 1948, a *de facto* “Transfer Committee” was officially (though secretly) appointed by the Israeli cabinet to plan the Palestinian refugees’ organised resettlement in the Arab states. The three-member committee was composed of ‘Ezra Danin, a former senior Haganah intelligence officer and a senior foreign ministry adviser on Arab affairs since July 1948; Zalman Lifschitz, the prime minister’s adviser on land matters; and Yosef Weitz, head of the Jewish National Fund’s land settlement department, as head of the committee. The main Israeli propaganda lines regarding the Palestinian refugees and some of the myths of 1948 were cooked up by members of this official Transfer Committee. Besides doing everything possible to reduce the Palestinian population in Israel, Weitz and his colleagues sought in October 1948 to amplify and consolidate the demographic transformation of Palestine by:

- preventing Palestinian refugees from returning to their homes and villages;
- destroying Arab villages;
- settling Jews in Arab villages and towns and distributing Arab lands among Jewish settlements;
- extricating Jews from Iraq and Syria;
- seeking ways to ensure the absorption of Palestinian refugees in Arab countries and launching a propaganda campaign to discourage Arab return.

Apparently, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion approved of these proposals, although he recommended that all the Palestinian refugees be resettled in one Arab country, preferably Iraq, rather than be dispersed among the neighbouring states. Ben-Gurion was also set against

refugee resettlement in neighbouring Transjordan [Morris 1986a: 549–50].

An abundance of archival documents shows a strong correlation between the Zionist transfer solution and the 1948 Palestinian Nakba. By the end of the 1948 war, hundreds of villages had been completely depopulated and their houses blown up or bulldozed. The main objective was to prevent the return of refugees to their homes, but the destruction also helped to perpetuate the Zionist myth that Palestine was virtually empty territory before the Jews entered. An exhaustive 1992 study by a team of Palestinian field researchers and academics under the direction of Walid Khalidi details the destruction of 418 villages falling inside the 1949 armistice lines.

Palestinian author Dr. Salman Abu-Sitta produced and distributed a map on the occasion of the 50th. anniversary of the Nakba showing that Palestinians left from 531 villages in what was mandatory Palestine.

The study by Walid Khalidi gives the circumstances of each village's occupation and depopulation, and a description of what remains. Khalidi's team visited all except fourteen sites, made comprehensive reports and took photographs. The result is both a monumental study and a kind of memorial. It is an acknowledgement of the enormous suffering of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees.

Of the 418 depopulated villages, 293 (70 percent) were totally destroyed and ninety (22 percent) were largely destroyed. Seven survived, including 'Ayn Karim (west of Jerusalem), but were taken over by Israeli settlers. A few of the quaint Arab villages and neighbourhoods have actually been meticulously preserved. But they are empty of Palestinians (some of the former residents are internal refugees in Israel) and are designated as Jewish "artistic colonies." While an observant traveller can still see some evidence of the destroyed Palestinian villages, in the main all that is left is a scattering of stones and rubble. But the new state also appropriated for itself both immovable assets including urban residential quarters, transport infrastructure, police stations, railways, schools, libraries, churches, mosques as well as personal possessions including silver, furniture, pictures, carpets, etc.

Memory for Forgetfulness: Silencing the Palestinian Past

Since 1948 Palestinian attempts to constitute a coherent narrative of their past have often been challenged and silenced. The destruction of Palestinian villages and the conceptual deletion of Palestinians from history and cartography meant that the names of depopulated Palestinian villages and towns were removed from the map. The historic Arabic names of geographical sites were replaced by newly-coined Hebrew names, some of which resembled biblical names. In his recent book, *A History of Modern Palestine*, Israeli historian Ilan Pappé remarks:

[W]hen winter was over and the spring of 1949 warmed a particularly frozen

Palestine, the land as we have described [...] —reconstructing a period stretching over 250 years—had changed beyond recognition. The countryside, the rural heart of Palestine, with its colourful and picturesque villages, was ruined. Half the villages had been destroyed, flattened by Israeli bulldozers which had been at work since August 1948 when the government had decided to either turn them into cultivated land or to build new Jewish settlements on their remains. A naming committee granted the new settlements Hebraized [sic] versions of the original Arab names: Lubyā became Lavi, and Safuria Zipori [...] David Ben-Gurion explained that this was done as part of an attempt to prevent future claim to the villages. It was also supported by the Israeli archaeologists, who had authorized the names as returning the map to something resembling ‘ancient Israel’ [Pappe 2004: 138–9].

The disappearance of Palestine in 1948, the deletion of the demographic and political realities of historic Palestine and the erasure of Palestinians from history centred on key issues, the most important of which is the contest between a “denial” and an “affirmation.” The deletion of historic Palestine from cartography was not only designed to strengthen the newly-created state but also to consolidate the myth of the “unbroken link” between the days of the biblical Israelites and the modern Israeli state.

Post-1948 Zionist projects concentrated on the Hebraicisation and Judaisation of Palestinian geography and toponymy through the practice of re-naming sites, places and events. The Hebraicisation project deployed re-naming to construct new places and new geographic identities related to supposed biblical places. The new Hebrew names embodied an ideological drive and political attributes that could be consciously mobilised by the Zionist hegemonic project. The official project began with the appointment of the Governmental Names Committee (*Va’adat Hashemot Hamimshaltit*) by Prime Minister Ben-Gurion in July 1949. Ben-Gurion had visited the Negev in June and had been struck by the fact that no Hebrew names existed for geographical sites in the region. The 11 June 1949 entry for his War Diary reads:

Eilat [...] we drove through the open spaces of the Arava [...] from ‘Ein Husb [...] to ‘Ein Wahba [...]. We must give Hebrew names to these places-ancient names, if there are, and if not, new ones! [Ben-Gurion 1982: 989]

The Governmental Names Committee, which included members of the Israeli Exploration Society and some leading Israeli biblical archaeologists, concentrated in its initial efforts on the creation of a new map for the Negev [Abu El-Haj 2001: 91–94].

Throughout the documents produced by the Governmental Names Committee, there were reported references to “foreign names.” The Israeli public was called upon “to uproot the foreign and existing names” and in their place “to master” the new Hebrew names. Most existing names were Arabic names. The committee for assigning Hebrew names in the Negev held its first meeting on 18 July and subsequently met three times a month for a ten-month period and assigned Hebrew names to 561 different geographical features in the Negev—mountains, valleys, springs, and waterholes—using the Bible as a resource. Despite the obliteration of many ancient Arabic names from the Negev landscape, some Arabic names became similar-sounding Hebrew names, for example “Seil ‘Imran” became “Nahal ‘Amram,” apparently recalling the father of Moses and Aaron; the Arabic Jabal Haruf (“Mount Haruf”) became Har Harif (“Sharp Mountain”), Jabal Dibba (“Hump Hill”) became Har Dla‘at (“Mount Pumpkin”). After rejecting the name Har Geshur after the people to whom King David’s third wife belonged, as a Hebrew appellation for the Arabic Jabal Ideid (“Sprawling Mountain”), the committee decided to call it Har Karkom (“Mount Crocus”), because crocuses grow in the Negev. However the sound of the Arabic name Ideid was retained in the nearby springs, which are now called “Beerot Oded” (“the Wells of Oded”), possibly after the biblical prophet of the same name. The committee report of March 1956 stated:

In the summarized period 145 names were adopted for antiquities sites, ruins and tells: eight names were determined on the basis of historical identification, 16 according to geographical names in the area, eight according to the meaning of the Arabic words, and the decisive majority of the names (113) were determined by mimicking the sounds of the Arabic words, a partial or complete mimicking, in order to give the new name a Hebrew character, following the [accepted] grammatical and vowelings rules.⁹

In the north, the depopulated Arab village of Balad al-Shaykh, near Haifa, which housed the grave of the legendary Sheikh ‘Izz ad-Din al-Qassam (1882–1935), became the Jewish town of “Nesher.” Many of the Palestinian houses and shops are still standing and are occupied by the Jewish inhabitants of Nesher. “The cemetery is visible and is in a state of neglect.” Throughout the country the Hebraicisation project included renaming Muslim holy men’s graves and holy sites into Jewish and biblically-sounding ones. “In the fifties and sixties,” Meron Benvenisti writes:

the location and “redemption” of holy men’s graves was in the hands of the

9 Quoted in [Abu El-Haj 2001: 95].

religious establishment—especially the Ministry of Religions—and of Ashkenazi Haredi groups [...] According to an official list, issued by a group known as the Foundation of the World and appended to a book [entitled: *Jewish Holy Places in the Land of Israel*] published by the Ministry of Defence, there are more than 500 Jewish holy places and sacred graves in Palestine (including the Occupied Territories). Many of these, albeit not the majority, are former Muslim sites [Benvenisti 2002: 282].

In the centre of the country, among the many Judaised Muslim holy places were two sites: Nabi Yamin and Nabi Sama'an, located one kilometre east of the Jewish town of Kfar Sava—a Jewish city itself named after a Palestinian village destroyed in 1948 (Kafr Saba). Until 1948, Benvenisti writes, these two sites were

sacred to Muslims alone, and the Jews ascribed no holiness to them. Today they are operated by ultraorthodox Jewish bodies, and members of the religion from which they were taken do not set foot there, despite the fact there is a large Muslim population in the area [Benvenisti 2002: 276–7].

The tomb of Nabi Yamin was renamed the grave of Benjamin, representing Jacob's youngest son, and Nabi Sama'an became the grave of Simeon. Jewish women seeking to bear offspring pray at the grave of Benjamin:

The dedication inscriptions from the Mamluk period remained engraved in the stone walls of the tomb, and beside them hang tin signs placed there by the National Center for the Development of the Holy Places. The cloths embroidered with verses from the Qur'an, with which the gravestones were draped, have been replaced by draperies bearing verses from the Hebrew Bible [Benvenisti 2002: 277].

Jewish settlements were established on the land of Palestinian villages. In some cases these settlements took the names of the original Palestinian villages. For instance, the Jewish settlement that replaced the destroyed village of Beit Dajan village was named Beit Dagan; Kibbutz Sa'sa' was built on Sa'sa' village; the cooperative moshav settlement of 'Amka on the land of 'Amqa village; moshav Elanit (tree in Hebrew) on the land of al-Shajara (tree in Arabic) village. Al-Kabri in the Galilee was renamed "Kabri"; al-Bassa village renamed "Batzat"; al-Mujaydil village (near Nazareth) renamed "Migdal Haemek." In the region of Tiberias there were 27 Arab villages in the pre-1948 period; 25 of them—including

Dalhamiya, Abu Shusha, Hittin, Kafr Sabt, Lubyia, al-Shajara, al-Majdal and Hittin—were destroyed by Israel. The name “Hittin”——where Saladin famously defeated the Crusaders in 1187——was renamed “Kfar Hittim.” Nearby the road to Tiberias was named the “Menachem Begin Boulevard” and heavy iron bars were placed over the entrance to Hittin’s ruined mosque; the staircase leading to its minaret was blocked.

Fifty-six years after the Nakba, in March 2004, Israeli journalist Gideon Levy published an important article in *Haaretz*, entitled “Twilight Zone/Social Studies Lesson.” The article describes an excursion to the hidden side of the Galilee——the ruins of depopulated Palestinian villages in eastern Galilee and the Tiberias region. The guided tour was organised in commemoration of the “Land Day” of 1976, organised by three NGOs: the Haifa-based Emile Toma Centre, the Association for the Defense of the Rights of the Internally Displaced in Israel (ADRID) and Zochrot (Remembering). Founded in 2002, Zochrot is a group of Israeli citizens working to raise awareness of the Nakba. The March tour was led by Palestinian guides from the Galilee. Levy writes:

Look at this prickly pear plant. It’s covering a mound of stones. This mound of stones was once a house, or a shed, or a sheep pen, or a school, or a stone fence. Once——until 56 years ago, a generation and a half ago——not that long ago. The cactus separated the houses and one lot from another, a living fence that is now also the only monument to the life that once was here. Take a look at the grove of pines around the prickly pear as well. Beneath it there was once a village. All of its 405 houses were destroyed in one day in 1948 and its 2,350 inhabitants scattered all over. No one ever told us about this. The pines were planted right afterward by the Jewish National Fund (JNF), to which we contributed in our childhood, every Friday, in order to cover the ruins, to cover the possibility of return and maybe also a little of the shame and the guilt [Levy 2004(Mar. 31)].

The JNF put up a sign: “South Africa Forest. Parking. In Memory of Hans Riesenfeld, Rhodesia, Zimbabwe.” The “South Africa Forest” and the “Rhodesia parking area” were created atop the ruins of Lubyia village, of whose existence not a trace was left. Here was a big village whose sons and daughters are now scattered throughout the world and who continue to carry the memories with them. Dr. Mahmoud ‘Issa, a son of Lubyia and a Danish citizen, who accompanied Levy on this excursion, made a film in Danish (with English subtitles) about his village. Dr. ‘Issa, an oral historian, also published a book based on interviews with refugees from Lubyia. Levy writes:

Deep in the grove, one can find a single wall that survived from the village, as well

as a stone archway that covered a cavern used to store crops. The dozens of wells that belonged to the village (‘Issa says there were more than 400) are surrounded by barbed wire. They are wrecked and full of garbage left behind by hikers in the South Africa Forest who must have thought that the JNF had dug big trash cans in the ground. How were they to know that these were freshwater wells [Levy 2004(Mar. 31)]?

Subaltern Groups, Palestinian Oral History and Collective Memory

As is the case with other subaltern groups, Palestinian oral testimony is a vital tool for recovering the voice of the subaltern: peasants, the urban poor, women, refugee camp dwellers, and bedouin tribes. An important feature of the Palestinian oral history effort from its inception has been its popular basis with the direct participation of displaced community [Gluck 2008: 69]. Since the mid-1980s this grassroots effort has shown an awareness of the importance of recording the events of the Nakba from the perspective of those previously marginalised in Palestinian elite and male-centred narratives. Although gender (both female and male) imagery and symbols have always been prevalent in Palestinian nationalist discourses [Khalili 2007: 22–23; 2005] —the Palestinian National Charter of 1964 (revised in 1968) and the Palestinian Declaration of Independence of 1988 had both imagined the Palestinian nation as a male body and masculinised political agency [Massad 2005].

In 2002 the editors of a special oral history edition of the Beirut-based *Al-Jana*—*the Harvest*: Arab Resource Centre for the Popular Arts—pointed out that individual initiatives were being undertaken even before the 1980s, when more projects began to develop with institutional support, especially from NGOs. One of the earliest projects was first proposed in 1979 by three Birzeit University scholars, Dr. Sharif Kanaana [Kanaana 1992],¹⁰ Dr. Kamal Abdel Fattah and Dr. Saleh Abdel Jawad [Abdel Jawad 2007]. In 1985 the University’s Research Centre launched a series of monographs on the destroyed villages. Since 1993 this work has been overseen by Dr. Saleh Abdel Jawad. From 1983 onwards Dr. Rosemary Sayigh, in particular, pioneered working with Palestinian women in the refugee camps of Lebanon on an oral history project. Sayigh and other oral historians, who advocate a fresh examination of Palestinian history from an oral history perspective, have been working in a field in which there are already dominant elite narratives which rely on official documentation and archival material. This oral history approach has both challenged and complemented archival historiography. Sayigh’s original contribution to the field of oral history has made it possible for the victims, the subaltern, the marginalised and women to challenge Zionist hegemonic and Palestinian elite narratives [Sayigh 2007; 2007b].¹¹

¹⁰ Also [Kanaana and Zitawi 1987].

¹¹ Also [Sayigh 1994, 1979].

This “history from below” approach was given a major boost in the 1990s with the publication of Ted Swedenburg’s seminal work on the great Palestinian rebellion of 1936–1939: *Memories of Revolt: The 1936–1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past* [Swedenburg 1995]. Earlier in 1990 Swedenburg commented on the internal silencing of the Palestinian past and popular memory by the PLO leadership:

Perhaps the sensitive nature of the subject of infighting during the [1936–39] revolt is one of the reasons why PLO, which funded numerous projects in Lebanon during the seventies and early eighties, never supported a study of the [revolt] based on the testimony of the refugees living in Lebanon. Maybe the resistance movement was hesitant to allow any details about the internal struggle of the thirties to be brought to light because bad feelings persisted in the diaspora community [Swedenburg 1990].¹²

Clearly more accounts of memory and research are still needed on Mandatory Palestine and the events surrounding the Nakba as experienced and remembered not just by particular subaltern groups but by the whole non-elite majority of Palestinian society.

The storyteller (al-Hakawati) is part of a long tradition in Arab society and culture. Story telling and oral history was deployed in the post-1948 period by the Palestinian refugee community as an “emergency science.” Individual accounts of struggle and revolt (thawra), displacement and exodus, survival and heroism served as a buffer against national disappearance. Narratives of memory and oral history became a key genre of Palestinian historiography—a genre guarding against the “disappearance from history” of the Palestinian people.

Archives *versus* Oral History: The Historian’s Methodology

The Palestinian elite and intellectuals produced and published a number of Nakba memoirs. However in the absence of a rich source of contemporary Palestinian documentary records, oral history and interviews with Palestinian (internal and external) refugees are a valuable and indeed essential source for constructing a more comprehensible narrative of the *experience* of ordinary Palestinian refugees and internally displaced Palestinians across the Green Line.

In recent decades two distinct historiographical approaches concerning the birth of the Palestinian refugee problem have evolved. Recent debates about 1948 tell us something about the historian’s method and the meaning of the “historical document.” Methodologically, many historians have displayed a bias towards archival sources; Israeli historians, in particular,

¹² See also [Swedenburg 1991, 1995].

believe they are both ideologically and empirically impartial, and that the only reliable sources for the reconstruction of the 1948 war are in the IDF archives and official documents. This bias towards “archives” has contributed to silencing the Palestinian past. The silencing of the Nakba by Israeli historians follows the pattern given by Michel-Rolph Trouillot in *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*:

Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of sources); the moment of fact assembly (the making of archives); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of history in the final instance) [Trouillot 1995: 26].

Taken as whole, Palestinian oral history and refugee recollections give a good idea of reality. However in the case of the Palestinian Nakba, oral history is not merely one choice of methodology. Rather its use can represent a decision as to whether to record any history at all [Esber 2003: 22]. Oral history is the major means of reconstructing the history of the Palestinian refugees and internally displaced Palestinians as seen from the perspective of primary subjects. In the context of rural and peasant Palestinian society, oral history is a particularly useful methodology; throughout much of the twentieth century the majority of the Palestinians were *fellahin* (peasants); in 1944 sixty-six percent of the Palestinian population was agrarian with a literacy rate, when last officially estimated, of only fifteen percent [Esber 2003: 22]. Their experiences in the fields, in their villages and in exile are largely absent from history-writing and much recent historiography. Moreover the Nakba itself, and the political instability and repression faced by the dispersed Palestinian communities since 1948 have also impeded Palestinian researches and studies. In *Palestinian Identity*, Rashid Khalidi argues that modern Palestinian historiography has suffered from “inherent historical biases” and that

The views and exploits of those able to read and write are perhaps naturally more frequently recorded by historians, with their tendency to favour written records, than those of the illiterate [Khalidi 1997: 98].

Benny Morris, Nur Masalha and other historians could not resist the opportunity presented by the availability of mountains of Israeli and Hebrew archival sources on 1948 and the Mandatory period. However as in the case of other subaltern groups, Palestinian oral testimony is an important tool for recovering the voices of the victims of the Nakba: the Palestinian refugees. Furthermore in recent years, more and more historians have been paying attention to the idea of “social history from below”——or “from the ground up” and thus

giving more space to the voices and perspective of the refugees, rather than that of “policy-makers”; and also incorporating extensive oral testimony and interviews with the refugees. In that sense, the oral history of the Nakba is not only an intellectual project dictated by certain ideological commitments; it can provide an understanding of the social history of the refugees “from below” that Palestinian elite narratives and political history often obscure.

Of course the two sets of methodologies can complement each other. But, also crucially, in recent years Palestinian authors have been producing memories of the Nakba, compiling and recording oral testimony and studying annual commemorations. While many authors in the West continue to rely on Morris and his publications, as a key source for recovering and reconstructing the past, at least some authors, influenced by the emergence of post-colonial and post-modern studies in recent decades, are beginning to raise question marks concerning the reliability and “objectivity” of the IDF archives. Moreover it is important to point out that a report by an Israeli officer from 1948 is as much an interpretation of the reality as any other human recollection of the same event; archival documents are never the reality itself; the reality of 1948 Palestine can only be reconstructed using a range of sources. Even historians who rely extensively on written documents often resort to guesswork and imagination when reconstructing the past from official documents. Therefore the vitality and significance of Palestinian oral testimony in the reconstruction of the past is central to understanding the Nakba. The most horrific aspects of the Nakba—the dozens of massacres that accompanied the “ethnic cleansing” of the Nakba, as well as a detailed description of what “ethnic cleansing” was from the point of view of the one “ethnically cleansed”—can only be recovered when such an historiographical approach is applied.

Those of us who have used Israeli archival sources know that there are still many files of the Israeli army from 1948 which are still closed and not accessible to the historian or the public. But what are the overall historiographical implications of the debate on 1948? The first point concerns the military historiography of 1948 which tends to dominate Israeli and Western historiographies. The clashes taking place in Palestine during the late Mandatory period have been treated as part of an overall war between the Arab and Israeli armies. Such a paradigm calls for the expertise of military historians. Military historians tend to concentrate on the balance of power and military strategy and tactics. They see actions and people as part of the theatre of war, where events and actions are judged on a moral basis very different from that applicable in a non-combatant situation. The writing of the military historiography of 1948 inherently tends to favour the victorious Israeli army.

Israeli revisionist historian Ilan Pappé argues that the events of 1948 should be examined within the paradigm of “population transfer” and “ethnic cleansing” and not just as part of military history [Pappé 2004a]. The decisive factors in 1948 were ethnic ideology, colonial settlement policy and demographic strategy, rather than military plans or considerations. In my

book *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of "Transfer" in Zionist Political Thought* (1992) I show that "transfer"—a euphemism for expulsion and "ethnic cleansing"—was from the start an integral part of Zionism and that much of the "ethnic cleansing" of the Nakba was not related to the battles taking place between regular armies waging war.

Pappé makes another important point which centres on the difference between macro and micro histories. The Israeli "New Historiography" of 1948 has remained largely macro-historical. This is partly due to the nature of the Israeli archival material. In general Israeli archival sources give us a skimpy picture of 1948. This means that a detailed description of what happened in the case of each Palestinian village and town remains largely elusive. Often a document produced in 1948 by an Israeli army officer refers briefly to an occupation of a Palestinian village, or to the "purification" of another. Pappé points out that Palestinian oral history can produce historically accurate accounts of 1948, showing that the same events in 1948 appear in a detailed and graphic form in accounts of memory, often as a tale of expulsion, and sometimes even massacre. Israeli historians who reject Palestinian oral history may conclude there was no massacre until the precise documentary sources assure them otherwise [Pappé 2004a].

Avishai Margalit [Margalit 2003], Alessandro Portelli [Portelli 1997] and others argue that "Memory is *knowledge from the past*. It's not necessarily *knowledge of the past*"; and that oral history tells less about events in history and much more about the significance of the events. But written documents are also often the result of a processing of oral testimonies. Therefore refugee memory accounts could be as authentic as the documented ones. But also the narrative of individual villages and towns in Palestine can *only* be constructed with the help of Palestinian oral history. Consequently oral history is a crucial methodology for pursuing further research on the Nakba. Although oral history is not a substitute for archival material, it can supply crucial material for filling gaps and be cross-referenced with archival sources and documentary evidence.

Collective Memorisation and Memorialisation: The Nakba and the Jewish Shoah; Deir Yasin and *Yad va-Shem*

Oral history has been of such importance in the recollection and collective memorisation and memorialisation of the Shoah. The national memorial at *Yad va-Shem*, the "Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance" institution, is predominantly based on oral history and millions of pages of testimony. It was established in 1953 by a Knesset act and located in West Jerusalem. According to its website, *Yad va-Shem* is a vast, sprawling complex of tree-studded walkways leading to museums, exhibits, archives, monuments, sculptures, and memorials. It has been entrusted with documenting the history of the Jewish people during the Holocaust period, preserving the memory and story of each of the six million victims,

and imparting the legacy of the Holocaust to generations to come through its archives, library, school, museums and recognition of the “Righteous Among the Nations.” The archive collection of *Yad va-Shem* comprises 62 million pages of documents, nearly 267,500 photographs along with thousands of films and videotaped testimonies of survivors. The Hall of Names is a “tribute to the victims by remembering them not as anonymous numbers but as individual human beings.” The “Pages of Testimony” are symbolic gravestones, which record names and biographical data of millions of martyrs, as submitted by family members and friends. To date *Yad va-Shem* has computerised 3.2 million names of Holocaust victims, compiled from approximately 2 million pages of testimony and various other lists. The collections of *Yad va-Shem* include tens of thousands of testimonies dictated, recorded or videotaped by survivors of the Shoah in Israel and elsewhere. The testimonies are in all of the languages spoken by the survivors. A second type of testimony consists of the forms filled out by survivors or relatives of the victims containing information about individual victims, such as their names, place and date of birth, place of residence, vocation, place and circumstances of death and so on. 2 million pages of testimony have been digitised in order to be accessible to the public in the institution’s Central Database of Shoah Victims’ Names which went online in September 2004.

However in contrast to the Israeli holocaust museum at *Yad va-Shem* in Jerusalem, and other holocaust museums (including the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum in Oświęcim, Poland and the US Holocaust Memorial Museum) there is still no central database of Nakba victims’ names, no tombstones or monuments for the hundreds of villages ethnically cleansed in 1948. The hundreds of Palestinian villages and towns destroyed in 1948 are still forced out of Israeli public awareness, away from the signposts of memory. What is also more chilling is the fact that the Deir Yasin massacre of 9 April 1948 took place within sight of the place which became the holocaust museum in Jerusalem; only a mile from where Jewish martyrs are memorialised lie the Palestinian martyrs of Deir Yasin whose graves are unknown and unmarked. In fact *Yad va-Shem* itself is situated on the lands of Deir Yasin, as is the city of Jerusalem western (Jewish) cemetery. The irony of *Yad va-Shem* and Deir Yasin is breathtaking; any Israelis and foreign visitors to *Yad va-Shem* go to Deir Yasin and in dedication ceremonies at *Yad va-Shem* no one ever looks to the north and remembers Deir Yasin.

For Palestinians Deir Yasin has remained a potent symbol of the collective Nakba. But in Israel the ghosts of Deir Yasin, Lubyá, Kafr Bir’im and the hundreds of villages destroyed in 1948 are rendered completely invisible. Dr ‘Azmi Bishara, a leading Palestinian intellectual, writes:

The villages that no longer exist were forced out of [Israeli] public awareness, away from the signposts of memory. They received new names——of Jewish

settlements—but traces [of their past] were left behind, like the *sabra* [sic] bushes, or the stones from fences or bricks from the demolished houses [...]. The Arab villages have no tombstones and there are no monuments to them. There will be no equality and there will be no democracy [in Israel], and there will be no historic compromise [between Israelis and Palestinians]—until they receive their tombstones [...]. The Jewish site cast out utterly the other, the “local,” i.e., the other who was in that place. The response of the [Jewish] Left to the [Palestinian use of the] nomenclature of the collective memory was that this matter must be removed from the [Jewish-Arab national] compromise, [that] there is no room in the compromise of history. History itself will prove that it must be part of the compromise—in order for the victim to forgive, he must be recognized as a victim.¹³

There are some interesting developments, however. Since 2002 the Nakba Archive in Lebanon has recorded more than 500 interviews on digital video with first generation Palestinian refugees living in the country about their recollections of 1948. This project was conceived as a collaborative grassroots initiative in which the refugees themselves were encouraged to participate in the process of representing this historical period. The project, which consists of about 1,000 hours of video testimony with refugees from over 135 villages in pre-1948 Palestine, has its work centred on the twelve official UNRWA camps in Lebanon. But it has also conducted interviews within unregistered refugee “gatherings,” and with middle class and elite Palestinians living in urban centres in Lebanon. Apparently six duplicate sets of the interviews have been produced, along with a detailed database and search engine and copies of the archive will be held at the Institute for Palestine Studies in Beirut, Birzeit University (Palestine), the American University of Cairo, Oxford and Harvard universities. The project is also part of the “Remembrance Museum” which is being established by the Welfare Association in Palestine.

The Challenge of a New Narrative: “Present Absentees” and Indigenous Resistance

Storytelling and memory accounts have always been central to the struggle of the Palestinian internal refugees—internally displaced Palestinians inside Israel—often referred to as “present absentees” (in Hebrew “*nifkadim nokhahim*”). Since 1948 the “villages of origin” have been the centre of memory accounts and the important provider of “legitimacy” for the internally displaced persons and for their struggle for return. Moreover in recent years the local campaigns of the internal refugees have reflected a strong relationship between memory accounts, refugee identity, and the desire to return to the place of origin. These three inter-

¹³ Azmi Bishara, “Between Place and Space,” *Studio* 37(1992)[Hebrew], quoted in [Benvenisti 2002: 267].

connected dimensions are closely linked to the current grassroots struggle of the internal refugees. “Socialisation” of the place of origin, promoted by many grassroots activists of the displaced communities, was aimed at creating a territorially-based identity which centred on the village of origin. This, in turn, helped to empower and renew the struggle for return. Most of the activities of the internally displaced inside Israel have had a strong physical connection to the village of origin. These initiatives, which include annual Nakba commemorations, visits to destroyed villages, and summer camps, have taken place not only within the boundaries of the village of origin, but also outside it. These activities include issuing pamphlets about destroyed villages, printing new maps, lobbying Arab parties and politicians, petitioning the Israeli courts, and generally articulating the new “narrative” of the village of origin [Boqa’i 2005].

The grassroots struggles of the internal refugees residing in host villages in Galilee centres on the village of origin, is directed more against the Israeli government and its quasi-governmental arm the JNF. While becoming an important symbol for the provision of “legitimacy” for the internal refugees, the village of origin also provides a collective identity for the internally displaced within the host village. The village of origin shapes the perception of both the past and the future, and more specifically the collective memory, refugee identity and desire to return. Social protests which centre on the village of origin embody elements of indigenous resistance directed against both the Israeli authorities and the “status quo” in the host village. Through their grassroots struggles, the internal refugees articulate a new and more assertive programme which can only be fulfilled through return to the village of origin.

In recent years grassroots organisations and NGOs set up by Palestinians inside Israel have waged a never-ending battle for the preservation of both Nakba memory and the material heritage of the refugees.

An interesting development in the struggles of the internally displaced, which are centred on the villages of origin, has taken place among the second and third generations of internal refugees. Younger activists have made the village of origin a key project of collective memory and identity, and have expressed a stronger belief in future return than the older generation of internal refugees. The same younger generations have also learned from their fathers’ attempts to return without success in the past, taking into account the political developments that have taken place among Palestinians inside Israel. As Dawud Bader, a member of the second generation of internal refugees and one of the leaders of the Association for the Defense of the Rights of the Internally Displaced in Israel (ADRID), put it:

the internally displaced persons in Israel faced difficult experiences and bad conditions in the past. During the early years of military rule, displaced people could only find a shelter to live quietly and to try to advance themselves. Later,

and gradually, the younger educated generation became more involved in political and national issues. The displaced persons became more advanced in many fields. They became more involved in confronting the Israeli authorities and their discriminatory policies. Israel doesn't distinguish in its policy between displaced persons and non-displaced persons in the fields of land confiscation and ethnic-national discrimination.¹⁴

Younger generations of internal refugees began to recover the past and reconstruct memory accounts of the village of origin through various means. Until the 1980s the stories and memories of the older generation had largely existed in oral form, and within the social context of the host village. Since the early 1990s younger generations have been trying to articulate a new narrative of return and memorialisation [Humphries 2004]. In this regard, the internal refugees have been more fortunate than the Palestinian refugees in the diaspora, owing to the possibility of physical access to the villages of origin, providing individuals and local groups with the opportunity to “experience the village of origin.” As Secretary-General of ADRID Wakim Wakim explains:

Our task is not only to confront the grandsons of Zionism on the issue of displacement, or to rewrite the Palestinian Nakba narrative, systematically and comprehensively; it is more than this. We aim to organise the displaced communities through the popular committees and relevant associations, and under the [umbrella] of the Displaced Committee [ADRID], as an organised national forum, and by encouraging the local committees to organise visits [to the villages of origin], by publishing bulletins to strengthen the belonging of the de-populated village as a microcosm of Palestine, by organising summer camps for displaced children, and by protecting the holy sites in the depopulated villages [Wakim 2001(Mar.)].

Visits to the villages of origin, preserving holy sites, holding summer camps and marches within the boundaries of the village of origin, have become key components of the internal refugees' strategy in their attempts to articulate a new narrative based on the village of origin. These activities aim to encourage displaced people to “rediscover” the village of origin themselves, and to empower their memory, sense of belonging and identity.

Institutionalising Nakba Commemoration?

Individual solutions for the Palestinian refugees will not suffice. There is a need to address

¹⁴ Interview with Dawud Bader, 28 October 2002, Shaykh Dannun village, quoted in [Boqa'i 2005: 102].

the questions of land and property that have symbolic, religious, national, cultural and economic significance for the Palestinian refugee community as a whole. For Palestinians a main reason for the continuation of the Israeli-Palestine conflict is the failure of the Israeli state to acknowledge 1948 as an “ethnic cleansing” and the dispossession of the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine and their descendants. As long as this historical truth is denied or excluded, there can be no peace, no reconciliation in the Middle East. Clearly recognition of the Nakba is central to the future of Palestine and Israel; recognition of the historic injury and injustice that were visited upon the Palestinians is a prerequisite for a just solution.

Remembering the Nakba is also vital because its most salient by-product was the Palestine refugee problem, the greatest and the most enduring refugee problem in the world. In the last two decades we have had major contributions by Palestinian authors, many of whose accounts have been based on oral history of the refugees themselves and “social history from below.” Palestinian authors have also been producing data and memory accounts of the Nakba, compiling and recording oral history and encouraging annual commemorations designed to preserve the memory of the catastrophe, while emphasising the link between refugee rights, collective identity and the challenge of return.

Remembrance seems to be about the past. But the Nakba did not end in 1948. For Palestinians, mourning 60 years of al-Nakba is not just about remembering the “ethnic cleansing” of 1948; it is also about marking the ongoing dispossession and dislocation. Today the Nakba continues: the ongoing forced displacement of Palestinians caused by land confiscation, continued closures and invasions, *de facto* annexation facilitated by Israel’s 730-kilometer Apartheid Wall in the occupied West Bank, and the ongoing horrific siege of Gaza. Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank and east Jerusalem are denied access to land, water, and other basic resources. Today the Nakba continues through the “politics of denial.” There are more than 5 million Palestinian refugees around the world, all of whom are denied their internationally recognised “right of return” to their homes and land. The history, rights and needs of Palestinian refugees have been excluded from recent Middle East peacemaking efforts. The failure of both the Israeli state and the international community to acknowledge 1948 as an “ethnic cleansing” continues to underpin the Palestine-Israel conflict.

The facts of the Nakba, the destruction of Palestinian society and dispersion of the Palestinian people in 1948, Israel’s responsibility for “ethnic cleansing,” the denationalisation of the Palestinian refugees, the ocean of suffering in the last six decades and the gross and ongoing colonisation of Palestine and continuing violation of international law, morality and human decency by successive Israeli governments, are some of the issues which require redress. Many Palestinian activists believe that the struggle to publicise the truth about the Nakba would be better served by the institutionalisation of Nakba commemoration. Of course in Israel Holocaust commemoration is heavily institutionalised and Holocaust remembrance is

a state-funded industry. In 1959 the Israeli parliament (Knesset) made Holocaust Remembrance Day (Yom Hashoah) a “nationalist” public holiday. In 1961 another law was passed that closed all public entertainment on that day; at ten in the morning, a siren is sounded when everything stops and everyone stands in remembrance. In the absence of a Palestinian state, the efforts to institutionalise Nakba commemoration in Palestine will remain patchy. But perhaps the last thing the Palestinians need is a state-controlled Nakba industry—modelled on the Jewish “holocaust industry.” There is a need, however, for various grassroots projects such as educational workshops on the Nakba, a Nakba Museum and perhaps the institutionalisation of a Nakba Memorial Day as a *worldwide* event. Nakba remembrance at grassroots levels will bind this generation directly to the older one, and bind the exiled to Palestine. It will also protect Nakba memory against its denial in Israel and around the world, and will relocate the right of return at the centre of peacemaking in the Middle East.

The Israeli Threat of another Nakba and Palestinian Resistance

Sixty-years of Israeli state’s dispossession, subjugation and often violent repression of the Palestinian people—from the Nakba to the murderous assault on Gaza in December 2008 – January 2009—was also coupled with occasional threats of another catastrophe. For instance on 23 January 1979 the then Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan threatened the Palestinian citizens of Israel with another Nakba: “If they are going to follow the line of Islamic fanaticism, they should realise that they will pay very dearly for it, just as they did in 1948” [*Yedi’ot Aharonot* 1979(Jan. 24): 3]. Dayan’s warnings were made at a meeting of the State of Israel Bonds Organisation (a Zionist fund-raising organisation, operating in the United States, Canada, and other Western countries, with an army of volunteers recruited from all branches of the Zionist movement in the West, with the main task of selling Israeli bonds), held at the Jerusalem Hilton Hotel. Dayan had this to say:

[...] some Arab circles and leaders here [inside Israel are] talking about a Palestinian state [in the West Bank and Gaza] [...] if they [Israeli-Palestinians] will not be satisfied and if they don’t want to live together with us, then I say they will have to pay for it. They will have to pay for it very dearly, if they will try to materialise what they are talking about now. If they will be carried away with the wave of the fanatic Islamic mood that’s going around, then they better would remember and have in mind what happened with the Arab people in 1948, that had the chance to live with us at peace [...]. So they find themselves now, some of them, as refugees in Lebanon and that should serve as a lesson.¹⁵

¹⁵ Dayan’s speech is quoted in [Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB) 1979(Jan. 25)].

Dayan's threat of another Nakba was not an isolated one. Less than two years later, on 1 December 1980, the then Agriculture Minister Ariel Sharon made a similar threat that specifically was also directed at the Palestinians inside Israel. Sharon, who at the same time was also presiding over the on-going "Judaisation of Galilee" policy, said at a conference of the Likud's municipal division in Kiryat Gat:

We have no inclination of dispossessing Arab citizens in the Galilee. But I would advise the Arab citizens in the region not to radicalize their attitudes in order not to bring about another tragedy like the one that befell the Palestinian people in 1948. Even if we do not want it, it may recur.

Early in the first Palestinian *intifada* (uprising) when the Palestinian citizens of Israel expressed solidarity with their brothers in the Occupied Territories, Haim Hertzog, then Israel's President, warned the Palestinians inside Israel "against another chapter in the Palestinian tragedy," an implicit threat of mass expulsion.¹⁶ About the same time, Hertzog's colleague Yitzhak Rabin (then Defense Minister) warned Israeli Palestinians: "you should remain as you have been until now, loyal [...]. In the distant past you have known tragedy, and it would be better for you not to return to that tragedy."¹⁷ Every Palestinian and Israeli Jew understands perfectly what Rabin's and Hertzog's warnings imply. Rabin himself had taken part in carrying out Ben-Gurion's orders to expel between 60,000–70,000 Arab residents from the twin towns of Lydda and Ramle in 1948.¹⁸

More recently some Israeli leaders went one step further, threatening the Palestinians with a new "shoah" and even nuclear holocaust if they continue to resist Israeli occupation. On 28 February 2008 Matan Vilnai, Israel's deputy defence minister, warned that his country was close to launching a devastating military attack on Gaza and that the Palestinians would bring on themselves a "bigger shoah" [*The Guardian* 2008(Mar. 1)] —using the Hebrew word usually reserved for the Jewish Holocaust. In January 2009, after the launch of the Israeli attack on Gaza, Avigdor Lieberman—the leader of Yisrael Betienu who later March became Foreign Minister in the new Israeli government of Binyamin Netanyahu—threatened the Palestinians with another Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Commenting on the shameful appointment of Lieberman as Foreign Minister, Dr. Neve Gordon, Chair of the Department of Politics and Government at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, wrote:

¹⁶ See *Jerusalem Post International*, 23 January 1988.

¹⁷ Quoted from the Hebrew press in [McDowall 1989: 259–60].

¹⁸ On Rabin's role in this widely documented episode, see e.g., [Morris 1986b].

In January 2009, during Israel's war on Gaza, Lieberman argued that Israel "must continue to fight Hamas just like the United States did with the Japanese in the second world war. Then, too, the occupation of the country was unnecessary." He was referring to the two atomic bombs dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima [Godon 2009(Mar. 26)].

The Israeli recent onslaught against the people of Gaza echoed an Israeli war against the Palestinians two and a half decades earlier. Back in the early 1980s the exiled Palestinian national poet, Mahmoud Darwish, used the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the shelling of Beirut as the setting for his collection of prose poems called: *Memory for Forgetfulness: August, Beirut, 1982* [Darwish 1994].¹⁹ This was a disturbing account of the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the siege of Beirut. Darwish vividly recreates the sights and sounds of a city under horrific siege. As American produced, Israeli fighter jets scream overhead, Darwish explores the war-ravaged streets of Beirut on 6 August – Hiroshima Day.

Memory for Forgetfulness is a journey into personal and collective memory. What is the meaning of exile and refugeedom? What is the role of the public intellectual in time of war? What is the relationship of memory to history (and forgetfulness)? In exploring these themes, Darwish brilliantly connects Palestinian collective memory, dispossession, exile, homeland, meaning, in an ironic work that combines wit with rage, *sumud* and resistance.

Truth-telling, Liberation and Reconciliation: Collective Memory and Remembrance as an Act of Hope

Memory accounts of the traumatic events of 1948 are central to Palestinian history and the Palestinian society of today. With millions still living under Israeli occupation or in exile, the Nakba remains at the heart of Palestinian national identity. With the history, rights and needs of the Palestinian refugees being excluded from recent Middle East peacemaking efforts and with the failure of both the Israeli state and the international community to acknowledge the Nakba, "1948" as an "ethnic cleansing" continues to underpin the Palestine-Israel conflict. This article argues that to write more truthfully about the Nakba is not just to practice a professional historiography; it is also a moral imperative of acknowledgement and redemption. The struggles of the refugees to publicise the truth about the Nakba is a vital way of protecting the refugees' rights and keeping the hope for peace with justice alive.

Clearly there is a need for a new approach to peacemaking in Palestine based on a recognition that the root cause of the Palestine conflict is the Nakba. The righting of the wrongs inflicted in 1948, and the redressing of the evils inflicted on the Palestinians ever

¹⁹ *Memory for Forgetfulness: August, Beirut, 1982* was translated from Arabic by Ibrahim Muhawi (Berkeley, CA: University of Californian Press, 1995).

since, would allow both citizens and returnees to enjoy a normal and peaceful life on an equal basis in Palestine. But there can be no peace in the region until there is accountability, acknowledgement and acceptance of Israel's role in the continuing conflict. Public participation in peacemaking, and the inclusion of international human rights principles and the recognition of refugee rights are essential in any successful peace agreements.

Inevitably collective memory and memory narratives are bound to be selective. The French anthropologist Joel Candau [Candau 1998; 2005] has explained the way the recent past influences representations of the distant past: transmission is always an reinterpretation of the past in the light of more recent memories. Some versions of Palestinian oral history which emerges in the memory narratives of the refugees comes close to a "lost paradise"/"golden age" narrative which seems to function as a sort of sanctuary in the face of Israeli dispossession, occupation and exile. However remembrance and forgetting (based on selective memory) do not represent a pair of opposites for those refugees who produce narratives about their past. Rather, they are two tools serving a larger strategy of remembrance which is intimately linked to Palestinian collective identity and to the desire of mastery over one's destiny: one could say that remembering is about configuring a past event in the present and within the framework of a strategy for the future, be this future immediate or distant. Selective memory is usually designed to tell a coherent narrative of a collective past, a narrative which is significant for the refugees in their present life. In this sense, the narrative of memory do not just evoke past events; rather they inform us about the future they wish for: they project an image of a better tomorrow.

Remembrance is also an act of hope and liberation. Edward Said once argued that to write more truthfully about what happened in 1948 is not merely to practice professional historiography; it is also a profoundly moral act of redemption and a struggle for justice and for a better world. Remembering, as a work of mourning and commemorating, with its regime of truth, opens up new possibilities for attending to the rights of the victims of the Nakba. In English, "re-membering," which is made of "re" and "membering," means reuniting things and putting the wreckage of a painful past together in ways which helps end suffering and helps the process of healing. Collective amnesia and contemporary forms of silenced voices are not confined to the Palestinian refugees. Silenced voices are found in many countries among groups of migrant workers and asylum-seekers. These silences are partly due to racism and the lack of status granted to different groups, people who fall into the category of "the despised Other." These silences are often maintained because they serve racist and colonial interests, or vested interests. In Palestine when injustice remains unaddressed, repetitive violence will continue to occur.

How to break open the silence of injustice and many-layered oppressions, a key question we face in Palestine, is a key dimension in building truth and reconciliation. To quote

Archbishop Desmond Tutu: “it wasn’t possible to move forward in South Africa without listening to the painful stories of victims of Apartheid in the “Truth and Reconciliation Commission.” In 2002 Tutu said Israel was practising apartheid in its policies towards the Palestinians. He was “very deeply distressed” by a visit to the Holy Land, adding that “it reminded me so much of what happened to us black people in South Africa.” In Guatemala, also, there is the Recovery of Historical Memory Project (REMHI): the truth-telling of memories of the killings that would enable healing. Truth-telling projects should be part of the solution in historic Palestine. Acknowledging and remembering the Nakba will help us to begin tackling the Palestine refugee problem.

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