



Sedek

A Journal on the Ongoing Nakba

Towards return
of Palestinian refugees

Issue no. 6

May 2011

THE CHRONOTOPE OF REFUGEE RETURN

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From Hebrew, Charles Kamen and Linda Landau



Mahmoud al-Rimawi's short story, "A Longing for the Good Land," and three projects included here – Sandy Halal, Alessandro Pati and Eyal Weizman's "Present Returns: Al Feneiq in Miska" of *Decolonizing Architecture*, Hana Farah Kufr-Bir'im's "*Re:Form-a Model*," and Einat Manoff's Counter-Mapping Workshop with Jewish and Palestinian activists – invite a reconsideration of the "nakba" and the "return," the connection between them, and their combined relationship to history and politics. These texts are the starting point for a discussion leading toward a revised political model of "return," one that is not subordinated to the utopian modernist narrative that could be called "from destruction to redemption." In order to formulate a political model of return, we must first begin to think theoretically about the "time" and the "space" of the nakba and the return, as well as about their political basis. These are the fundamentals of the discussion that follows.

"FROM DESTRUCTION TO REDEMPTION"

The dream of return is based on the narrative "from destruction to redemption," a narrative that conceptualizes the past as a time of destruction (the nakba) and the future as a time of redemption (the return). Zionist nationalism likewise conceptualizes the relationship between the past and the future in terms of destruction (destruction of the Temple, Diaspora, Holocaust) and redemption (establishing the State of Israel). Within both these national contexts, "from destruction to redemption" is a powerful recruiting narrative, whose utopian vision paradoxically removes all discussion of the return from its political context. Palestinian nationalism often assumes that the nakba is a discrete traumatic event that occurred in 1948, and thus it allows only one way and one channel for talking about the return of the refugees: it is the return of a people to the "the grand place" from which they

were uprooted. This assumption must be reexamined because it is based on a perception of time that fixes both the disaster and the return in a mythic universe located outside of time, and on a perception of space as two distinct locations inflexibly related to one another in binary opposition. This relationship assumes, in other words, that the return will be an exact mirror image of the destruction and thereby conceptualizes the future eschatologically, ahistorically and apolitically. Mircea Eliade calls this approach (in a different context) "the myth of the eternal return":

Everything begins over again at its commencement every instant. The past is but a prefiguration of the future. No event is irreversible and no transformation is final ... nothing new happens in the world, for everything is but the repetition of the same primordial archetypes. (Eliade 1971, 89)

We understand from Foucault that the "from destruction to redemption" narrative is an eschatological confrontation between the "the pious descendants of time and the determined inhabitants of space." This confrontation imposes "timeless temporality" on the pious descendants of time, the refugees waiting to return home. It is a situation of self-consuming waiting. Admittedly, the dream of "redemption" is important. It motivates and sustains the political process. But, at the same time, it must be distinguished from the return as a political goal whose defining parameters are both more complex and necessarily grounded in political thinking.

The catastrophe of 1948 was undoubtedly the most important historical point of reference in the history of Palestinian nationalism. Between 520,000 to 650,000 Palestinians became refugees in 1948 according to Jewish sources, approximately 800,000 according to Palestinian sources, and about 710,000 according to British sources. Today the Palestinian refugees and

their descendants number between 4.5 and 6.5 million people (depending on the source). These refugees were uprooted from more than 400 localities, most of which were destroyed and erased from the map; in most places, Jewish immigrants were settled. In addition to the refugees that were uprooted from their homes and scattered in all directions, about fifteen percent of the Palestinian population within the Green Line are classified as “internal refugees,” the majority of whom are from villages in the Galilee (Cohen 2000). Refugee property, including the property of the “internal refugees,” was expropriated by the Israeli Custodian of Absentee Property. More and more evidence is coming to light about massacres and expulsions during the process of what can be called the “ethnic cleansing” of 1948. These include, for example, the Tantura massacre on the night between May 22 and May 23, 1948 and the destruction of Bayt Dajan on May 25, 1948. But we should also recognize that the disaster did not occur at one specific time or in one specific place. The nakba is an ongoing process that takes a variety of forms; it is not an isolated event frozen in time (Sa’di and Abu-Lughod 2007). For this same reason, the return as well should not be seen as an isolated event fixed in time. We should not assume, to use Eliade’s terminology, a cyclical “regeneration of time” whereby a perfect “innocent” past will be “resurrected” in the future (Eliade 2000, 101).

This is why we must acknowledge the nakba’s ongoing historical and spatial character: recognition of the great catastrophe that occurred in 1948, alongside a recognition that it continues till today. Similarly, we must also acknowledge that the physical landscape has changed. It is unfortunate that we must surrender to the imperatives of these power mechanisms. But refusing to recognize that the landscape has changed is a depoliticizing act because it transforms the struggle for return into a theology. The return must be

grounded in a new sovereign structure that I call “post-Westphalian”: this structure rejects the traditional definition of sovereignty as an exclusive monopoly of territory in favor of a more appropriate model of joint intersecting sovereignties organized in a manner reflecting the complexity of actual communal existence. The post-Westphalian sovereignty model intends to situate the return in the present and to include within it the Jews and their geography. This model, which requires the Jews to relinquish privileges obtained through violence, proposes a decentralized political structure that is more fluid and more just. This political framework will also make it possible to think about the return of refugees in a way that will not lead to the destruction of the Jewish space. A post-Westphalian sovereignty model requires rethinking the concepts of time and space and the relations between them.

TIME, SPACE, AND THE CHRONOTOPE OF RETURN

The philosophy of science has proposed various models to describe the relationship between time and space. Evolutionary theory and structuralism are two examples of polar models radically opposing the “diachronic” and the “synchronic” to one another. In evolution time negates space until space is seen as nothing more than frozen time. Space subordinated to time is defined as infinitely slowing movement, and nothing more. The disappearance of space from evolutionary theory allowed the anthropologists of imperial Europe to describe the meeting between the imperialist and the conquered native as a contact across time, in which the native was viewed as a pre-descendant of modern man before undergoing socio-cultural evolution. Similarly, evolutionary theories of modernization subordinated power relations to chronological developments only, thereby ignoring and blurring the power relations that existed in the economic and political space.

The logic of structuralism is radically opposed to the evolutionary approach. It negates time by enspacing it: this philosophy characterizes social relations synchronically, always simultaneously, thereby blurring the effects of time and history. Both these extreme models – evolution, on the one hand, structuralism, on the other – blur the relationship between the diachronic and the synchronic and conceal power relations.

Nakba discourse requires explicit consideration of the power relations made invisible by these extreme opposing perspectives. The continuing condition of catastrophe requires a “heterochronic” conception of time, one according to which the present is included in the past and the past is included in the present. It also requires conceptualizing the “heterotropic” space, in which the nakba and the return are multi-spatial events comprised of Palestinian space prior to 1948, its memories, the contemporary Israeli space, and the refugee camps. Given this multiplicity, I propose to formulate what I call the chronotope of the return.

The term “chronotope” is taken from the theory of relativity, which defines time as the fourth dimension of space. Bakhtin adopted the concept to analyze temporal and spatial literary loops:

In the literary artistic chronotope, spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope. (Bakhtin 1981, 84)

This insight has complex political implications which I would like to elucidate through a reading of al-Rimawi’s “A Longing for the Good Land.”

A LONGING FOR THE GOOD LAND

The story recounts an evening in the life of Abu al-‘Abd in the Suwaylih refugee camp where he was forced to flee after being dispossessed in 1967. Abu al-‘Abd wants only to sleep. The text is replete with descriptions of forgetting and endless sleep, for example: “His eyes were heavy with sleep; and so, there being nothing to prevent him, he surrendered himself completely to it”; “Drowsiness overcame his consciousness, so he closed his eyelids”; “Once again he threw himself down on the blanket, as though he wanted to escape from some unknown thing that was lying in wait for him”; “He was determined that he would sleep for a long time – even if it did lead to his final sleep;” “His mind was so weary and confused from too much thinking and remembering;” “He had now reached the point where he could no longer think of any one thing or bring any memories back into his mind. This state made him feel better, for usually it led to deep sleep and forgetfulness.” Abu al-‘Abd is presented not as an active subject in control of his life, but exactly the opposite: unlike Hasan, his son, who joined the armed struggle, Abu al-‘Abd is passive, someone whose every act is tentative.

Abu al-‘Abd’s traumatic condition is complex. Forgetting and sleepiness are post-traumatic characteristics of a person who has experienced the destruction of 1948 and bears its consequences on his body and soul to this day. “Post-trauma” refers to a past trauma whose effects are still evident in the present, but Abu al-‘Abd’s traumatic condition contains an additional element: the origins of the violence persist into the story’s present – that is, in 1948, in 1967, and during the intervening years. The same trauma continues to occur in an ongoing present. It is trauma without a distinct starting point or a single conclusion.

Following Effi Ziv, I would like to distinguish between

“extreme trauma” and “insidious trauma.” Ziv seeks to redefine the conventional meaning of trauma in psychiatric discourse to include trauma that is not only limited to past events. Unlike post-trauma, which refers to the traumatic effect in the present of a single event in the past, insidious trauma is characterized by continuous occurrences of the event in the present. We should therefore distinguish between the ongoing experience of the disaster that happened in 1948 (post-trauma) and the continuation of the catastrophe (insidious trauma):

[Insidious] trauma refers not only to an event whose visibility and boundaries are characterized by their exceptional nature (for example, natural disasters, traffic accidents or wars). This definition requires that ongoing traumatic experiences remain visible because, by their very nature, they are characterized by invisibility or intentional forgetting....This is the central reason for defining trauma as a social and cultural category...as insidious traumas, in order to stress the uncompromisingly recurrent nature of traumas whose origins are social or cultural. (Ziv, in press)

Ziv’s concept of trauma corresponds to the account of Palestinian memories, which refer not only to the extreme trauma of 1948, but also to its continuing existence through insidious repetition: the reality of the disaster has never ended for Palestinians, and has continued to occur after ’48 in the “reprisals” of the 1950s, in life under the military government’s heel, in the 1967 war that came to be known as the “nakhsa” (the little nakba) and, of course, also today. As I write, the government of Israel, represented by inspectors from the Israel Lands Authority and some 1,500 police officers, demolishes dozens of “illegal” structures belonging to the al-Turi tribe in the unrecognized Bedouin village of al-Araqueeb, north of Beersheba. Residents of the village report that the inspectors

“smiled and signaled ‘V’ for Victory” as they carried out the demolitions. The demolitions are described by the Guardian newspaper in England as “ethnic cleansing in the Negev,” and by others as “Nakba 2010” (Kassem 2006). These events cannot be separated from the 1948 disaster, nor is there any doubt that they are one more link in the chain of disasters known as the “nakba,” even if the tools the state employs are “legal” and the time is different.

Another example of the blurring of different historical periods can be found in interviews Fatma Kassem has conducted during the past few years with Palestinian women from Lod and Ramleh. They describe the dramatic moments when the Palestinian residents of these towns were expelled as part of the Haganah’s “Plan Dalet.” Their accounts do not differentiate between “Jews” and “Israelis,” or between “past” and “present”: “The Jews entered” (“دخل اليهود”), “The Jews took us” (“اخذونا اليهود”), “Israel took us” (“اخذتنا اسرائيل”). They characterize the dramatic moment with the verb “we migrated” and describe “when we migrated” using expressions like “the Jews expelled us” (“طردوهم اليهود”), “we migrated” (“هاجرنا”), “they migrated” (“هاجروا”), “before we left” (also, “before we would leave” [“قبل”] (ما نطلع (Kassem 2006). These accounts not only describe the “past,” but also depict a mediated past in a continuing present. One of the women interviewed says so explicitly: “Those days return,” she says, referring to one of Israel’s attacks on Gaza. “People have nothing to eat...[the Israelis] are hitting them [the Palestinians] from the sky.”

The historical narrative of the disaster, which limits the nakba to an isolated event that occurred in the past, has difficulty including the multiple histories of the nakba and the ways in which the trauma repeats itself in the present. This is clear from Ha’ula abu Bakr’s chilling testimony, during which she recounts what happened

to her and her family on the day the 1967 war broke out. She displays “insidious trauma,” which views 1967 as a recurring event and part of a continuous phenomenon rather than a break with the past:

When the war actually began, Muhammad and Nada abu Bakr gathered their five children for a talk...They were both heartbroken: two months earlier their youngest child, Bakr, had been killed accidentally while playing at a neighbor’s home. The children – Scheherazade, the eldest, was 14, Ha’ula was 12, Ahmad was 9 and Osama and Basama, the twins, were 7 years old – were ordered to practice repeating their full names: their first name, then those of their father and his male ancestors going back six generations, then their family name, and finally the address of their home in Acre. (Rabinovitch and Abu Bakr 2002)

Abu Bakr describes that unsettling moment by speaking of herself in the third person: “Ha’ula remembers very well how she practiced ‘I’m an Arab. My name is Ha’ula Muhammad Da’ud Taha Yassin abu Bakr. My address is Ba’harat al-Yahud 13, Akka. Her parents, Nada and Mahmud, took no chances, and prepared the children for the disaster about to befall them: “They wanted to insure that each of their children would be able to introduce themselves as people did in Arab countries. If they were expelled or became separated during the war, they’d be able to ask adults for help.” We also see in al-Rimawi that “Abu al-‘Abd had been afraid that his family might get scattered - that Hasan, his youngest, for example, or poor, sad Khadijeh, or his spouse, with whom he had fallen in love one day in Bayt Dajan.” This refers to the disaster of 1948, which returns and reproduces itself as insidious trauma, this time in 1967.

The extreme trauma of the nakba reflects the disaster which befell the Palestinians in 1948, when they

became victims of the violence that upended their world. But focusing only on the most extreme trauma imposes a modernist formulation according to which the conquest of space is formulated in temporal terms; time, however, does not stand still. Thus, an additional dimension is needed in order to understand the Palestinian trauma: that of insidious trauma. This trauma continues replicating itself because the sources of violence have never ceased to operate and because Jews now live in many of the locations from which Palestinians were uprooted. Fatma Kassem writes about her conversations with women from Ramleh and Lod: “The words ‘I’m not from here’ reflect the sense of alienation and foreignness, despite the time which has passed, these women continue to feel about the “new” locality to which they came after being uprooted from their ‘original’ place.” Abu al-‘Abd feels the same way in al-Rimawi’s story. It is not only post-trauma; it is also an ongoing trauma caused by the disaster’s continuation into the present.

The concept of insidious trauma expresses dynamic, flexible time/space relationships that develop jointly and simultaneously. Ignoring these relationships freezes the trauma in the past and anchors it in fixed time/space, thereby turning the disaster into an isolated event. This restricted view of the nakba is a mythic account that removes it from its own history. Dominick La Capra (2006) harshly criticizes what he calls a “narrative of redemption”: a narrative structured with a beginning, middle and end, with the end bringing the beginning to a conclusion. In psychoanalytic terms, the redemption narrative offers a seductive, over simplified cure for the disaster; but, La Capra stresses, the trauma cannot be fully represented, not even by a “narrative of redemption.”

The concept of insidious trauma, despite its political nature, does not necessarily offer healing or redemption.

Its associated concepts of time and space are elastic and extend throughout a network of different times and spaces. It gives expression to the fact that the disaster is not a tragedy that can be formulated as a single plot line moving toward an obvious climatic peak: structured as a network, it contains multiple entry and exit points. The continuum along the different sites is not necessarily linear, and duplications are possible along the way.

Al-Rimawi wrote a story whose approach to trauma is complex. His main point is that trauma cannot be healed, cannot be fully represented, and that bringing about the return is no simple matter. He is in dialogue with La Capra and with Ziv's distinction between insidious trauma and extreme trauma, as well as with the fluidity of the connections between them. The story is filled with time markers, some locating it in a chronological context, others cradled within one another in a non-linear manner. Bayt Dajan and al-Nu'ayma are real past spaces. Abu al-'Abd himself does not live there, however, but in a vacuum (unlike, as noted, his son Hasan, who is described as an active subject living in real time). Abu al-'Abd lives in frozen time and space. In Elias Sanbar's terms Abu al-'Abd is "beyond space and beyond time" (Sanbar 2001). Note the following examples: "He felt alone, in an unknown land, cut off from the world"; or he remained "suspended between the world of awareness and the world of blissful sleep"; or "he was cut off from the place, gazing into his memories. It didn't occur to him to find out what time it was"; or "The air on his face made him imagine he was traveling endlessly, exhaustingly; traveling, but never arriving at his destination." These are descriptions of actual null times and spaces, but at the same time they hint at abundant vistas by creating potential experiences of temporal and spatial arabesques. The play of times and spaces within the text makes possible a complex reading of the disaster and the trauma. It demands that

readers reclassify and reorganize the kaleidoscopic images before them in order to expand the redemptive narrative and make it more flexible.

The story contains obvious autobiographical elements: Mahmoud al-Rimawi was born in 1948. He spent most of his childhood in Jericho, until he was uprooted in 1967. For more than a decade he moved between Beirut, Cairo and Kuwait, working as a journalist. Today he lives in Amman. His travels resemble those of the Abu al-'Abd family, who were uprooted in 1948 from Bayt Dajan, a Palestinian village located on the road between Jaffa and Ramleh. The village, which had some 4,000 inhabitants, was captured in April, 1948, and four Jewish towns were established on its lands: Beit Dagan, Mishmar HaShiva, Hemed and Gannot. There is no doubt that the 1948 trauma has been dominant and ongoing in the course of al-Rimawi's life, as it has been for Abu al-'Abd: "In 1948 a bullet had ended the youth of his first born, al-'Abd [and for] many years he had been grieving, tormented by nightmares and attacked by misgivings." He still yearns for Bayt Dajan, where he first fell in love with Imm al-'Abd: "Again he recalled the image of Bayt Dajan, now so distant."

The family in al-Rimawi's story was uprooted from Bayt Dajan during the war and found itself in the Al-Nu'ayma refugee camp, about five kilometers north of Jericho, "where [Abu al-'Abd] lived for twenty long years... Hasan had been born there, and there he had built a three room house with dahlias and a white poplar in the courtyard." In 1967 the family was uprooted again. The story does not specify the reason, which remains vague: "There had been something driving them—specifically, from the rear—to move out"; "Behind them, Jericho had been engulfed in billows of smoke." From Al-Nu'ayma, the family made its way east with difficulty ("The way from the Nuweimeh refugee camp to the east bank of the river is long and thorny") to

Suwaylih, thirteen kilometers northwest of Amman. Here the narrator shifts from third-person plural to third-person singular. The family had been scattered a little while earlier, but it was not clear where they had gone. Al-Rimawi writes:

As if carrying out a prior decision the three of them disbanded, each having in his mind an idea that was simultaneously both clear and obscure: an idea as translucently radiant as a dream. For one intense moment their eyes met, the language of their eyes voicing their agreement. They went on their separate ways, filled with the sensation of a promise that they would meet again.

Regardless of whether or not this meeting will ever take place, the definition of meeting necessarily includes time inseparably connected to space. This line of reasoning is also true of parting – the inversion of meeting – in that the greatest tragedy of the nakba is the scattering over time of a people throughout a vast expanse of space, together with the irreversibility of time and the irreversibility of this filled-up space.

In Suwaylih, Abu al-‘Abd dresses his “thin body” in the UNRWA “agency uniform,” which symbolizes his continuing refugee status and the persistence of the catastrophe. In the ongoing process of the disaster, space has “doubled,” “multiplied,” “deteriorated,” and the Gordian knot that tied two places together (“a great place” and “a small place”) in binary opposition at a single point in historical time is severed. The relationship between the two places is disrupted because time has made the original space so dense it has become unrecognizable. Even if these three actual spaces (Bayt Dajan, Al-Nu’ayma, Suwaylih) appear separately, they simultaneously reflect spatial multiplicity and movement within the multiplicity of remembering and forgetting.

Abu al-‘Abd cannot remember the house nor recollect his connection to the land. His memories are anchored in the recent past of the journey and in Jericho’s ashes (the story was first published in 1972). Abu al-‘Abd is always either fully awake or sound asleep, an expression of his inability to completely remember or totally forget. His inability to remember, like his inability to forget, prevents him from rebuilding his home; he is left with a tent with no door. The same is true of the land: instead of being a symbol of belonging, it becomes a symbol of displacement and isolation. Time is central to the allegory: the inability to distinguish between past and present, between remembering and forgetting, between a life of wandering and one rooted in the land – all these transform the return into an ongoing tale with no clear beginning or end.

It is important to note that extreme trauma and insidious trauma are not necessarily mutually exclusive. I focus on Abu al-‘Abd’s trauma and on its melancholy aspects. But, at the same time, his son, Hasan, is described and conceptualized as someone who has been recruited to the armed struggle and the battle against the occupier. In other words, even though al-Rimawi focuses on the contemporary insidiousness of the trauma, he assigns to the generation of younger men the task of fulfilling the narrative of “from destruction to redemption.” The older men and the women are steeped in melancholy, and it is this melancholy that must be understood in political terms.

THE GEOGRAPHY: HETEROTOPIA AND NETWORKS OF RETURN

To where does Abu al-‘Abd want to return? What is the destination of return? It seems to me that the melancholy author knows the tragedy has no single resolution. The solution must take the form of a network,

even a rhizome, for this is the nature of the tragedy. It is expressed in the fascinating colloquy recorded by Sandy Hilal, Alesandro Pati and Eyal Weizmann as part of their “Present Returns: Al Feneiq” project:

Amal: Abu Khalil, when will we return home to our villages of 48?

Abu Khalil: We are still looking for enough buses to take you home.

Amal: We already have the Ibdah’bus of return! The bus that Ibdah Center bought for Deheishe camp refugees in order to be ready when it is time to go back home.

Salma: But I don’t really want to leave Deheishe! To whom shall we leave the camp? Is there no way to have both - our village, “our right” and the camp, “our life”?

Abu Khalil: Maybe we need a bus of the return also able to get the camp back and not only the refugees.

The discussion between Abu Khalil, Amal and Salma challenges the narrative of redemption by distinguishing between the “right of return” and “life.” This opposition is illuminating and, as we learn from the project, the distinction between the two is included in the political model. It requires us to take the archaeology of the space seriously. It is a space that is never ordered in binary terms, for each such polarity removes space from its own time and does not allow the plot to develop. Bakhtin writes: “In order for the adventure to develop it needs space, and plenty of it” (99). The idea emerging from the dialogue – to relocate the camp with its residents – provides the space for the development of the plot. It invites a networked discussion about the geographical configuration of the return and its political resolution. The words of one of the project’s participants illustrate heterotopia’s potential power not only as a simulacrum, but also as a concept governed by concrete spatial logic:

I was really impressed by this centre and by their power - and I think also his power - to create this out of nothing. Never before had I seen the power of heterotopia so clearly...I said it was very political but in an indirect way.

The project defines the location of the return as extraterritorial, as having ongoing ties to an imagined place. “Present Returns” are also defined as those that include daily life in the various refugee camps, a space whose continuity with the places of origin has been broken. They reflect trauma in the past, impermanence in the present, and the dismantling of sovereignty formation in the future.

What, then, will be the space that makes the return possible? Adi Ophir (2009) writes: “The place that makes the return possible will be a different place. The return will not be to a place that existed sixty years earlier. That place disappeared and no longer exists. It cannot be reconstructed...The map of the return must be fractured. Without such fracturing it becomes an enslaving hammer.” Ophir describes the heterotopic nature of the return: “The country mapped anew by the discourse of return is a doubled place. That which exists now, and that which once was.” Heterotopia works its effects when people find themselves completely cut off from their accustomed time. Foucault uses the metaphor of the mirror to define heterotopia: “The mirror acts as a heterotopia, making the place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal” (24). In the mirror Abu al-’Abd sees himself reflected in the place where he is not. He looks at himself and also sees the place from which he is missing. It is a space simultaneously mythic (rooted in a frozen past) and real (rooted in the present). Heterotopia permits the reversal of the chronology of events. It allows us to transform utopia

into heterotopia, a material realization that is a good enough approximation of the original place and time.

The significance of heterotopia is that it is a network – a network composed of times, spaces, and communities of people in motion. Some of this motion remains faithful to the original geographical space. However, the motion in space is also evolving, and it moves through real time. “Present Returns: Al Feneiq in Miska” proposes a networked solution, such as the account of the Daheisha Cultural Center. Here is what its director has to say about its name, “The Phoenix” (الفونيكس) :

we need to think about a model for the return....Al Feneiq is a Novel that we have created; it represents a collective cultural process able to innovate, change and reverse itself. Indeed the first Feneiq was created in Deheisha, but we succeeded in also creating another center in Aroab camp...a Feneiq could also be created in Deir Aban, my village of origin.

The Phoenix rises anew from its ashes. It is a metaphor of cyclical birth-death-rebirth that problematizes the modernistic chronotope. This account is remarkably consistent with the Bakhtian formulation of the phoenix:

There is no first or last word, no limits to the dialogic context: it dives to the depths of the limitless past and the limitless future....Forgotten meanings are recalled and live again (in a new context) in a renewed likeness. Nothing is completely dead: every meaning will have its own celebratory rebirth. (Rimon 2007)

The replication of the original village in Daheisha and throughout a network of additional extraterritorial locations enables a multiplicity that preserves the complex landscape of time-space. On the other hand, it

does not remain simply a naïve simulacrum or symbolic gesture. The idea of the phoenix can be included in the design of complex, non-binary maps of return. This is also true, for example, of the “Re:Form-a model” project, in which Hana Farah Kufr-Bir'im rebuilds Kufr Bir'im. Norma Musih (2010), the exhibition's curator, writes about him:

Hanna Farah builds Bir'im, the village where his father and grandfather were born, but where he never lived. He reconstructs it in his own name, imprints it in his identity card, and erects it on ruins using models, etchings, various acts, videos, and photographs. From all these he spins a new village, which exists simultaneously as fragmented memories and dreams, and as a detailed, practical proposal for return...

Bir'im's refugees are scattered. Some live as internal refugees within Israel – in the neighboring village of al Jish, in Haifa, Acre, Nazareth, Tel Aviv, and Jaffa; some live in Lebanon and elsewhere in the world...

Farah's model incorporates the remains of the old village within and as an integral part of the new one. His work reconstructs not the village, but its layout. He does not preserve the existing remains as such, but rather sprouts new structures from them. Farah proposes locating the new village's communal and cultural center in the historic village core, the site holding the memories of those who once lived there and became refugees. Refugeeism will be present as part of the identity of the place, but, rather than dominating, it will become a part of its daily life. Farah, then, does not perform an act of conservation/reconstruction; he builds something new from the memory of the place. He creates the conditions that make creation and a new life possible.

Musih is well aware of the chronotopian and

heterotopian aspects of this account. Emphasizing the fact that this is not an example of “reconstructed conservation,” she stresses the networked structure of communities that have already settled at different times. She insists on the “simultaneity” of the model as both dream and tangible map. But is return only awareness and collective memory? Collective memory is a powerful motivating force. It enables articulation of the struggle and stores within it the archaeology of the disaster. However, if the geography of the place is not taken into account, the return will not be realized. This is why new political thinking about sovereignty is needed, the kind that will preserve the heterotopic character of the return but also require the country’s Jews to relinquish sovereign privileges. I call this new arrangement “post-Westphalian sovereignty.”

THE POLITICAL CONDITIONS REQUIRED FOR RETURN: POST-WESTPHALIAN SOVEREIGNTY

Sovereignty, which Thomas Hobbes viewed as the Leviathan’s life-breath, may be the most important concept of modern political theory yet to undergo a process of systematic theoretical critical deconstruction. Its definition in international law (at least since the end of the nineteenth century) as a monopoly over territory is anachronistic and limiting. As Isaiah Berlin noted pointedly in his essay on nationalism, it is a definition of sovereignty subordinated to the rapacious Moloch of legal and territorial necessity – and, we may add – of the victor.

We should recall that sovereignty, grounded as it is in political theory and practice, is based on the European model of territorial exclusivity. This view originated in the political lessons of the Peace of Westphalia (1648) and culminated in the development of the concept of citizenship two hundred years later. In the seventeenth century, space appeared as sovereign territory; in

the nineteenth century, with the development of history as an academic discipline, space also became subordinated to temporality. Since the end of the nineteenth century, European political thought has been based on the holy trinity of sovereignty-territory-citizenship. This is the trinity that established the European nomos as a theology of territorial law and defended its achievements. This trinity finds support in the modernist discourse that subordinated the concept of sovereignty to territory, war to international law, society to state sovereignty, and civil rights to the nation state. Foucault characterizes this chain of logic as an “over-determined discourse on sovereignty,” regretting that Westphalian sovereignty became the starting point as well as the essence of political thought. This overdetermination has taken over political thought and prevents us from thinking about the concept of sovereignty as anything other than a fabrication of the Leviathan as “mortal god.”

Deconstructing sovereignty will enable us to present it as a multifaceted concept rather than a stable, unitary category. Sovereignty is a porous, discontinuous spatial and temporal practice covering vague regions and based on a racialized state of emergency as a permanent regime strategy. These features are not deviations from the “ideal model” of sovereignty, but the opposite: they reflect the anomalies on which the definition of territorial sovereignty was initially based. The responses to the wave of terrorism that began with 9/11 have exposed again and again that the use of “exceptions to the law” has become the accepted practice of western democratic states, and that the exception is in fact an integral component of the preservation of sovereignty both “internally” and “externally.” It is a mirror image – even if inexact, because of changes over time – of the violent means with which sovereignty was initially established. Exposing this violence teaches us that territorial sovereignty is not truly unitary

and homogeneous, and that it is based on violence organized along racialized lines.

I propose that we think of sovereignty as a concept having heterotopic aspects that call into question the “naturalness” and “normality” of territorial sovereignty. Contemporary critical literature proposes, with varying degrees of success, a number of alternative concepts that could be called “post-Westphalian” sovereignty: “liquid sovereignty;” “sovereignty gaps;” “porous sovereignty;” “multiple sovereignty;” “crossed sovereignty;” “shared sovereignty.” These conceptualizations are based primarily on the global logic of massive migrant streams throughout the world and the shifting of boundaries between racial groups, so that they no longer easily correspond to existing territorial borders and territorial homogeneity. Many additional elements create various spheres of sovereignty that cross both territories and the logic of fixed national boundaries: corporations, international financial institutions, communication technologies, theologies and ecological networks. Today, states – including Israel – are likely to divide sovereignty: privatizing state institutions, for example, and transferring trusteeship to a third party (Gross 2009). The members of the European Union have also established joint sovereignty in certain areas. While the need for post-Westphalian sovereignty in these instances stems from globalization, these examples can provide inspiration for other cases as well.

The idea of joint sovereignty has been proposed more than once in the context of the Zionist-Palestinian conflict, but has never been taken seriously because of paradigmatic blindness. If we think about joint sovereignties of Jews and Palestinians, we must admit they will not be based on linear territorial contiguity but on joint, intersecting spheres of sovereignty that will provide solutions to the national, cultural,

religious, economic and political aspirations of diverse communities. Mathias Mossberg, a Swedish diplomat, suggests thinking about sovereignty as political authority delegated to a series of institutions such as parliaments or councils administered autonomously and subordinated to a non-linear sovereign structure (Mossberg, 2010). Mossberg refers, for example, to the idea of a condominium or a federation. A condominium permits joint sovereignty over a territory, with political authority assigned horizontally. A federation permits joint sovereignty over a territory, with political authority assigned vertically. Some sectors of society would be under the authority of international institutions, whose incorporation in the various sovereign spheres would permit considerable political flexibility. Lev Grinberg proposes a fascinating hybridization of two democratic nation states and seven provinces (or federations) that are part, to some degree, of the nation states. This division would be based on a distinction between sovereign authority that is divisible and sovereign authority that is indivisible (Grinberg 2010).

These ideas of joint sovereignty are also based on my view that the Jewish territorial sovereignty achieved in 1948 as the ultimate aim of Jewish emancipation and “re-entry into history” had paradoxical consequences: rather than returning the Jews to history, as promised, it imprisoned them in a mythic conception of time and space external to both world history and the history of the region. Perhaps this is what Tony Judt meant when he described Zionism as “anachronistic.” The violent perception of Jewish territorial sovereignty led to the adoption of an insular, myopic approach. Jews and Judaism once again became “an autarkic diaspora economy” that had lost its sense of history and neglected the rights of the Jews themselves, while creating a sovereignty that preserved master-slave relations between Jews and Palestinians. Against this picture, post-Westphalian sovereignty would

require Jews to forgo some of their privileges – as did Afrikaners in South Africa in 1994. Rephrased as a gender analogy, the post-Westphalian model proposes that men relinquish the patriarchal power structure of society for the benefit of a social order characterized by gender fluidity. Such a structure differs from the 1967 paradigm adopted by the Zionist left, which proposes (perhaps) mutual recognition but preserves the master-slave structure.

This is the point to refer to my place as a speaker in the discourse of return. My argument that any return must also consider the Jews and their geography may sound hypocritical by virtue of the fact that I am a privileged Jew. As a Jew, I am prepared to relinquish a substantial number of these privileges out of willingness to reallocate space because I view the return of the refugees as a political goal that must be realized – and not only symbolically. Nevertheless, I believe that the narrative of destruction and redemption as a powerful ideological mechanism must be separated from formulations of the return as a multivalent process not only intended for one specific community, or as a way to stubbornly hold on to a specific place. Thinking in terms of networks can prevent us from falling into the trap of political polarity that could lead to symbolic recognition of the nakba in the absence of actual political practice. This is why I also formulate the conditions for a possible return within the theoretical framework of sovereignty.

If the new structure of sovereignty is just, it will be possible to construct a shared constitution as a mechanism defining the nature of the spatial solutions. Creating a just structure will require a radical transformation of the Israeli land regime: the present structure that grants Jews exclusive preference will have to change. A shared Jewish-Palestinian constitutional court, reflecting the country's heterogeneous

ethnic, national and religious structure, will also be established. This constitutional court will formulate general principles to be implemented, including the following: the right of return is, first and foremost, a moral right, and not only a legal right; return is not a symbolic event involving the recognition of injustice but an action that must be implemented; and the country's geography, as it existed before the 1948 war, will be taken into consideration when implementing the return. Nevertheless, redress of the moral and political injustice must not create new injustices – villages that were destroyed and resettled by Jews will not be destroyed again.

The Counter-Mapping project, in the way Einat Manof describes it, is an attempt to take “the superior perspective” away from the Jewish state and the experts. One of the central principles on which participants in the workshop agreed is that “we’re not talking about plans to demolish what now exists, or recreate what existed in the past. That is, ‘no home will be demolished.’” This conclusion takes into consideration the existing Jewish geography, thereby rejecting the narrative of total redemption. Thus, the return will not be to the place from which people were uprooted, but to somewhere else, as nearby as possible. This proximity will permit a combination of both tangible and symbolic return modeled on the phoenix, or on the model proposed by Hana Farah Kufr-Bir'im.

While the geography of 1948 must serve as the moral compass for the return, it cannot be reconstructed during the return. Implementing the return (which in al-Rimawi's story will be brought about by armed struggle) must take into consideration the fact that many areas have been taken over – violently – by Jews. The new communal structure will take the geography of destruction into account, but will merge it with the new communities created during the refugee years.

The existing refugee communities are, moreover, larger than the original village communities, a given situation that will also require a decentralized organizational structure. The model of the phoenix could provide a solution while enabling the creation of community centers that preserve the multidimensional structure of the original nakba landscapes. The project will be constructed on a foundation of complex cultural “mirrors” connecting and intersecting a network of villages, towns and community buildings designed to preserve the genealogy of the nakba and mirror the new geography.

In addition to the return of communities based on the heterotopic network structure, individuals will also return to large cities like Jaffa, Haifa, Lod, Ramla, and Jerusalem. If the building from which the refugees were expelled is still standing, they will be able to demand it. If the present residents agree, they will be generously compensated. Very large sums of money will be required to pay for such compensation and to resettle the refugees; but shortage of funds must not be an excuse for failure to implement the return inasmuch as the return and its implementation will be fundamental principles of the regime. Disputes will be brought to the constitutional court. The court will base its decisions on liberal-individual principles as well as on political-national principles. It will have to consider all aspects of the nakba as well as changes that have occurred in the ethnic, national and religious structure of the population since 1948.

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Sedek – A Journal on the Ongoing Nakba, Issue no. 6, May 2011
Towards return of Palestinian refugees

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