

Miracles and Snow in Palestine and Israel: Tantura, a History of 1948

ABSTRACT

On a beautiful Mediterranean coast, in the newly-established state of Israel, one way of life violently and abruptly ended and a new one began, when the inhabitants of Tantura squarely faced the war on 22–23 May 1948 for a brief period of 25 days—from the Jewish occupation of the village, the arrest of the men and the expulsion to Furaydis of the rest of the population, via the second expulsion to Jordan, to the settlement of Kibbutz Nachsholim. How did this happen exactly? Why did the Jews act as they did, and how did they construct their cultural world and mental horizons? And how are we to tell this story?

WE ALL NEED A MIRACLE FROM TIME TO TIME. THE BELIEF IN A (divine, secular, or historical) miracle makes it possible for us to give meaning to our world, to make sense of a particularly intractable problem that got unexpectedly and felicitously resolved, and especially to explain, and at times explain away, our own role in what happened and why.

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For Jews during the 1948 war sentiments of post-extermination existential anxiety mixed with a sense of wonder that was connected, but not reduced, to the foundation of the state of Israel. Explaining shortly after the end of the war why he opposed the return of Palestinian refugees to their homes, Avraham Granott, among the signers of Israel's Declaration of Independence and the director of the Jewish National Fund (JNF) between 1944 and 1960, mused: "One should correct mistakes, but one should not correct a miracle."¹ This sentiment was widely shared among Jews. In a May 1948

meeting of the Central Committee of the Labor Party Mapai, the leading political force in the Yishuv and later in the nascent state of Israel, Avraham Hartzfeld, an expert on settlement, talked about the departure of the Arabs as blessed surprise, perhaps even a divine intervention: "The panicked flight of the Arabs and their mass fleeing has solved many problems [. . .] in many places as if by themselves, as if it fell right from the sky. There are communities where the joy is so profound."²

1948 as a cultural history of miracles: it may not be how we commonly write the history of the war but it was certainly one of the images Jews had of what happened to them. The historiography has made important advances in the last generation in recounting the history of 1948, as well as the history of the Arabs' departure. We know much more today than ten or twenty years ago about these topics, although much more work is still needed to fulfill the basic task of all history writing—namely to tell what the case was.³ I use the notion of miracles in this text as a way to construct *one* story of the history of 1948, focusing on the Jewish role in the forced migration of the Arabs from Palestine.

Four points are worth considering as we think of 1948 as a history of miracles. First, the essence of miracles is that they are astonishing and often unexpected. The story of 1948 is not one of certainties and coherence but of the unpredictable and the contingent, of the different possible developments and the sense of open-endedness that was inherent in the situation, for Arabs and Jews. The majority of Jews thought before the war that a land without Arabs was not possible and many thought it was not desirable either. However, to capture how the Jews became part of the expulsion of the Arabs cannot be reduced to archival evidence of state institutions. Instead, how pre-war imagination changed during the war and enabled the expulsion should be explored. This sense of marvel reveals different, even opposing sensibilities among Jews: having the country largely to themselves came unexpectedly, but was an intimate fantasy that preceded the war; it was miraculous because it seemed out of reach in terms of the political, military situation and beyond the pale in terms of morality. In addition, it expressed a commingling of profound joy and moral uneasiness. All this is not some background to the more important political and military events; it is rather one important drive that made these political and military events possible to begin with. Differently put, the value of this approach is that it tells us not only what happened but also what people thought was happening.

Second, by paying attention to miracles the historian puts front and center not only mentalities but also human actions. Jews evoked miracles to interpret the war and give meaning to their actions. By using this, Granott

and Hartzfeld described the departure of the Arabs as devoid of Jewish agency and of relations of cause and effect, thus showing a basic reluctance to acknowledge one essence of what had happened: that the Jews had not been simply the lucky beneficiaries of heavenly miracle but that their agency contributed to bring about the Palestinians' departure. What is missing from their account is the violence embedded in the departure of the Arabs. It is important, therefore, to capture not only what Jews said they were doing but also what they actually did.

Third, the notion of miracle puts in sharp focus the real and perceived existential fear of the Jews following the extermination in Europe and given the consequences of defeat in the war. The perceived miracle of the Arab departure was complementary to the perceived miracle of Jewish national rebirth after Auschwitz. The two "miracles" were complementary, not contradictory; they gave meaning to each other. The history of the Palestinian tragedy makes sense only by considering the state of mind of the Jews of existential fear. 1948 is often a commingling story of victims and perpetrators that at times were united in the same person.

Finally, while 1948 was a particular story of Jewish and Arab violence specific in place and time, it was not exceptional. It belongs within a global history of the breakup of the British Empire, of decolonization and partitions, and, in particular, of a modern history of forced migration that peaked in the 1940s with multiple cases in Europe, India/Pakistan, and Palestine/Israel. A global perspective serves as a corrective to both Israeli and Palestinian histories that view their national story in 1948 as exceptional.

What emerges from these reflections is an awareness of the fundamental incompleteness embedded in any narrative of 1948. Not because we cannot provide a good history of 1948, and improve it over time. Of course we can. But because instead of insisting on the absolute truth of my explanations, I seek to capture the history of 1948 as a story of ambiguities, complexity, and contradictions, while realizing that any investigation will come short of a comprehensive narrative of the fear, hope, and tragedy embedded in this story of violence exercised by Jews and Arabs. In this, too, the history of 1948 is similar to all history writing, which is bound to be incomplete. I thus attempt to provide not a hermetic narrative, but to focus on the limits, cracks, and uncertainties of the narrative offered. I am as concerned with how to construct my narrative as with evaluating the selection of evidence and my methods of interpreting it. I use regular historical sources and cull evidence "proven" by its repetition, but I am also interested in evidence that does not fit overarching patterns and that is revealing because of its uniqueness.

A narrative that embraces complexity, then, but one that is firmly situated within the historical record and the explanatory questions it raises. Something happened in 1948. One of the things that happened was that at the end of the war there were expellers and expellees. Jews expelled Arabs; it could have been the other way around, but it was not.⁴ This needs to be historically accounted for and explained. In this essay I seek insights to the question, why did the Jews act as they did, and how did they construct their cultural world and mental horizons?

The present essay is part of a larger project about the war of 1948. In the short space of this essay my arguments are necessarily suggestive more than comprehensive. I cannot possibly discuss many topics in the significant historiography of 1948. I ask the reader to bear this in mind. Still, I believe that the arguments presented here have the potential of crafting new narratives of 1948 that challenge our usual perceptions.

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We begin with a village nestling on a beautiful Mediterranean coast. Tantura, about 1500 souls in 1948 and located some thirty kilometers south of Haifa, was occupied by the Alexandroni Brigade of the Haganah (the main Jewish military force) on 22–23 May 1948. The village, which made a living from fishing, agriculture, and menial jobs in nearby Haifa, was included in the territory of the Jewish state according to the UN partition plan of 29 November 1947, and now, a week after Israel's Declaration of Independence on 15 May, was part of the state. That much is agreed by all. Some years ago several Alexandroni veterans sued for defamation a researcher from Haifa University, Teddy Katz, who argued in an M.A. thesis that after the battle soldiers massacred some 200 unarmed inhabitants, mostly young men. The Israeli court was thus asked to arbitrate on a matter of history and evidence. It did not come to pass because Katz, under pressure from family and friends, retracted his claim and published an apology. I do not intend to discuss this case here. Instead, I use it as a point of departure to consider the relations among the judge, the historian, and evidence in the case of 1948.⁵

It is not surprising that the historiography of 1948 ended up in the court room, because it has often developed over the years in a prosecutorial, court-like atmosphere that sought to blame and score ideological points more than honestly reckoning with the complexity of the past. The Alexandroni soldiers took to court a particular case: they argued what they did *not* do, but kept silent about that which they did do in Tantura. Massacres of unarmed civilians did happen in 1948, although the war was not a scene of mass murder and rape as happened in Europe and India several years

earlier. But expulsion was common; it typified this war. By keeping quiet on their actual deeds, they conform to a pattern of silence of the generation of 1948 that enveloped in stillness its disturbing war experiences, stillness embedded partly in feeling of shame precisely because the violent acts contradicted a personal and collective moral identity as Jews, especially after the extermination in Europe.⁶ Of course, no silence is hermetic and over the years stories were told by veterans of 1948 of crimes committed during the war, and atrocities have been public knowledge through authors, poets, and historians. But as a whole and as a group, the generation of 1948 has chosen to keep to itself a fundamental part of its experiences (expulsions and massacres), which is the first indicator for the historian that there is something to hide. Here lies a key difference between the judge and the historian. For the judge in the Alexandroni case a lack of evidence (by Katz, for example) or a lack of events can lead him or her to acquit or to dismiss the case, while the historian can still find significance in what didn't happen, what can't be proven, and what is kept under wraps.⁷

I would therefore like to focus on those events in Tantura the soldiers did not speak openly about. We do know that the inhabitants of Tantura ended up losing their home, village, and coastline. How did they leave, and why? What happened to the property they left behind? Following the occupation all able-bodied men were separated from the women, children, and elderly; we know that because one of the soldiers documented this action with his camera. Men, including young adults, whether or not they were fighters, were sent to a POW camp and were used at times for labor. Some were to stay there for a year and a half.⁸ We also know that the women, children, and elderly found themselves immediately after the occupation in the nearby community of Furaydis, but we have no evidence from any of the soldiers on what happened between Tantura and Furaydis, no picture or document. We cannot find an answer in the Israeli official literature on 1948 such as the official history books of the Haganah or of the Alexandroni Brigade.⁹

Years passed. Memories were different with the passage of time. For many years, the Alexandroni unit commemorated its 13 fallen soldiers in the battle of Tantura in a ceremony each May in Kibbutz Nachsholim built on the territory of the Arab village. On 5 May 1996, the veterans gathered in the kibbutz communal dining room for the traditional meal following the ceremony. The indefatigable archivist of Nachsholim, Hava'le Mager, conducted oral interviews about the battle. One of the soldiers, Avraham Amir (his family name then was Tawil), asking Mager to switch off the tape recorder, recounted the trucks carrying in one direction the women,

children, and elderly expelled from Tantura to Furaydis as they passed the trucks of the men transported elsewhere in the opposite direction. The crying, shouting, and lamentation that went on there he will not forget all his life, added Amir. He then gave the story a pictorial shape, and made a drawing.¹⁰

The historian was not supposed to have possession of this document. Amir did not think that Mager would keep it, and that I, many years later, would find this small piece of paper in the Nachsholim archive. Not quite an “archive”, in fact: this is one small room with piles of boxes and documents, and a living catalogue, Hava’le. But here it is: one witness, not of what the soldiers allegedly did not do, but about what they did; one drawing, and a bottled-up sense of guilt expressed after all these years. A little crack in the wall of silence. “Just one witness”: Carlo Ginzburg wrote an essay with this title, published in Saul Friedländer’s collection *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “Final Solution”*, about two Jewish witnesses who survived the extermination of their communities in fourteenth-century France.¹¹ Ginzburg brings forth the most radical argument against the historical relativism espoused by Hayden White, which sees history as a form of literary narrative with no claims to truthfulness: the voice of one single witness is enough to reach a certain historical reality and therefore some historical truth.

The expulsion of the women, children, and elderly of Tantura had no military reason; its only purpose was to make Tantura part of a homogeneous Jewish nation-state. Who called the trucks that transported the Tanturians to Furaydis? Did the trucks belong to the army or perhaps to a vehicle company in Haifa that presented the state a bill for the service of expelling the villagers? Who were the drivers and what did they think of the desperate wailing of the women? What did the soldiers think they were doing, if at all, and how did it merge with their sense of self and of Jewish identity? What images of their personal or collective pasts did the crying of desperate refugees evoke in them, if any?

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In the meantime, the soldiers’ actions on the ground commingled with administrative actions of the Jewish leadership. Already in March 1948 the Haganah had established special committees aimed at expropriating the property in communities occupied by the Jewish forces and emptied of their Arab inhabitants. Similar committees were founded for the towns occupied between April and June. This was a key period for the departure of the Arabs, with Jewish victories in Tiberias, Haifa, Jaffa, Safad, Beisan,

and their environs resulting in the massive departure of 200,000 to 300,000 Arabs and the abrupt end of Palestinian urban society. The conquering of Ramla and Lydda followed on 12 July, with the expulsion of their civilian population of some 50,000–70,000, of whom some 15,000 were refugees who had previously fled from Jaffa and the surrounding villages. On 21 July the government established “The Custodian for the Abandoned Property” with full power to record and distribute property left behind.¹²

The Haganah special committees designed to expropriate the Arab property created new conditions as well as reacted to pressure from Jews in local communities who shaped a new reality in Palestine in an amazingly short time. Kibbutzim and other agricultural communities (moshavim, where property was privately owned) had already begun to work deserted Arab lands in April 1948. In towns, looting and plundering joined extemporaneous local initiatives to expropriate the massive property left behind. What characterized local and national Jewish policy during these months was improvisation in the face of the unexpected vast departure of the Arabs.

The kibbutzim and moshavim clamored for Arab land. In September, the state leased to them the bulk of it; in effect, the expropriation became permanent. Localities where Arab houses stood empty clamored to use them for the wave of Jewish immigrants. Different government committees produced various laws and definitions of those Arabs who were “absent” and who were entitled or more regularly not entitled to their property. But starting in April and intensifying after 15 May, the policy of Jewish authorities as well as popular actions was a combination of propelling forward the departure of the Arabs, physically destroying their villages, looting and expropriating their property, and preventing their return.

On 8 November the State used a classic practice of population control by conducting a census from house to house. Anyone who resided within the borders of the state, whether Jew or Arab, received Israeli citizenship. On 12 December the government published the Law for the Property of Absentees, which in effect prevented Arabs from reclaiming their property. The Law was a response to the 11 December UN resolution 194, which stated that

Refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible.

Ben-Gurion feared a wave of refugees seeking to return and others claiming compensation. He wanted to expropriate Arab property for the new state—Israel had under its rule now about 4.1 million dunams of Arab land that belonged to those who were uprooted, as well as their houses and property—but he was also conscious of the legal implications were the state of Israel become its direct owner.¹³ This would constitute a defiance of the UN and a possible case for legal action against the state. The main solution was to transfer the land to a company of public ownership, the JNF, which immediately bought more than one million dunams of Arab lands. This was the biggest real estate deal in Israeli history, and certainly the most lucrative. Granott, the director of the JNF, saw clearly that the Law was based on “a legal illusion” aimed to prevent international criticism and accelerate the expropriation process: it permitted the state to expropriate the land and use the money gained from it, without legally being the owner of this property.¹⁴

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By that time, for the Tanturian women, children, and elderly, to return to our story, all this happened in a different land. After spending some three weeks in Furaydis, most of them were transferred on 18 June to nearby Tul Karem in Jordan. Israel pressured the leaders of Furaydis, a big Arab community that was allowed to stay, to transfer as many of the refugees who gathered in town from nearby villages. The Red Cross was enlisted to help secure the safety of 1004 refugees (the numbers vary), but also, importantly, to provide international legitimacy to the forced expulsion. It appears that Tanturian women had to sign a declaration that they were leaving of their free will, and that most signed, while a significant minority did not.¹⁵ I could not verify this information. If it did happen this was merely a way for the state to couch expulsion in legality. No one really asked for or was interested in the opinion of the Tanturians, although their homes were merely a bow shot from Furaydis and, strictly speaking, they were residents of Israel.

Expulsion was documented and well organized. On 16 June, A. Goldfarb, an Alexandroni officer, described the procedure in a memo to key officers in the brigade as well as in the General Command of the IDF:

The removal [*ha'avara*] of the women and children of Tantura behind Arab lines. 1. According to the order of the General Command all the Arab women and children from Tantura who are in Furaydis will move behind Arab lines, as well as all the elderly and sick who are in the temporary prison camp in Um-Walid. 2. The removal will take place on 18.6.48. 3. The transportation officer

will provide vehicles to transport some 1800 souls from Furaydis to Kfar Yona [on the Israeli side of the border, opposite Tul Karem] . . . 4. The medical officer will provide an ambulance and medics to accompany the convoy. . . . 7. All the vehicles and the accompanying personnel will report at the entrance to Furaydis on the Tel Aviv-Haifa road no later than 8:00 AM on 18.6.48 . . .

The Israeli authorities wanted to control who moved when, where to, and where from, so Goldfarb finally requested an exact list of the people who were removed, including their name, family name, age, and also “place of residence”, by which he meant their former place of residence.¹⁶ Arab Tantura was already consigned to the past.

The expulsion took place in broad daylight, using thirty buses of the Israeli bus company Egged, with journalists and photographers in tow. The newspaper of the Labor party, *Davar*, represented the event as an act of humanitarianism: “Only those who wanted to leave of their free will” did so. But the reporter did seem to have a second thought about this happy-ending:

I was told by the Egged drivers that even those who expressed their consent to move to the Arab territory did not seem to show great enthusiasm when they were about to be put onto the buses. One woman started wailing, and crying immediately griped the entire group of women and children.¹⁷

From the agony of expulsion, a new life was born even before the Tanturians moved to Jordan. On 13 June, merely two weeks after the occupation of Tantura, a collective (*gar'in*) of young Jewish men and women was sent to the village to build a community. The group lived together for a while in Kiryat Hayim and waited to receive from the authorities land to found a kibbutz.¹⁸ In the first six months in Tantura the community was regarded as a military outpost and received supplies from the army. Life was not easy, but members of the collective also found some of the abundance left behind by Tanturians, although most of it was by now looted by soldiers and residents of nearby Zichron Ya'akov. *Davar* reported on 11 June that houses were characterized by “plenty: rugs, carpets, modern cupboards of cloths, refined porcelain, and expensive glass objects.”¹⁹ “The land,” noted the reporter Sh. Shhori, “is remarkably fertile and the crops are excellent.” And the houses were still standing, big and pleasant, and much better for the coming winter than the tents regularly provided by the government for settlements. This gave a good foundation for getting started on building a prosperous new kibbutz, Nachsholim (Breakers).

A process of emotionally owning the village started at the occupation, and proceeded extremely quickly. Only several days after the expulsion of the inhabitants, on 8 June, Haim Gvati, a member of Kibbutz Beit Ha-Shita and leading activist of Mapai on issues of land and settlement (and a future Minister of Agriculture) wrote his wife Batya:

Yesterday I visited Tantura. This village was conquered several days ago. The suggestion arose to build a community there . . . this is an extraordinarily lovely site. It has all the elements for establishing a fishing community endowed with fertile land and plenty of irrigation water. On the beach—a promenade whose beauty is rare in our country. The development of this beach has great future. All this is great. But there is only one disadvantage: all this is not ours. The land is Arab property and although the village is empty of its inhabitants we cannot yet view this place as one for our settlement plans. . . . Today was the meeting of the Central Committee of the kibbutz movement . . . After 14–15 hours of work, mostly without a break, I am totally exhausted. Write, Batya, on how you are doing . . . Haim.²⁰

Gvati described the emptying of Tantura in the passive voice, as an activity with no human agency; the truth, as we saw, was different. Revealing is Gvati's sensibilities about Tantura as home and homeland. Conveying the process of emotionally-owning Tantura, he writes that "we cannot *yet* view" the village as ours, thus revealing a tension between the words "cannot" and "yet". Five days later the *gar'in* group moved to Tantura.

Three days after Gvati's letter, on 11 June, the *Davar* article exhibited none of this tension: a man from Hachsharat Ha-Yishuv (founded in 1909, the company's aim was to purchase land and establish Jewish agricultural settlements in Palestine) came to inspect the lands, "calculating how many kibbutz communities it is possible to settle on the 15,000 fertile dunams of Tantura."

The inhabitants of Tantura squarely faced the war on 22–23 May, for a brief period of 25 days—from the Jewish occupation of the village, the arrest of the men, and the expulsion to Furaydis of the rest of the population, via the second expulsion to Jordan, to the settlement of Nachsholim—a period that marked the violent, abrupt end of one way of life and the beginning of another.

In Tantura, a lonely horse was still seeking his old owner. He "was standing motionless near the water trough at the entrance of the village. The guys, I have been told [writes the journalist Shhori], expel him to the

centralized area [for animals and other village stuff] but he keeps coming back as if to keep guard.”²¹ Who left the horse alone?

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What are some of the insights that emerge from this story? We note the primacy of contingency in the historical explanation of the departure of the Arabs. It came in spurts and outbursts. It did not come gradually, like a gathering storm, nor was it a steady progress of escalation or a lengthy, gradual process. It came in a series of earthquakes.

First was the early, haphazard departure of Arabs in key cities in the early months of the war. In Haifa, in late November 1947 the number of Arabs and Jews was almost identical, some 75,000 Jews and 65,000 Arabs. By the end of March, between 20,000 and 30,000 Arabs had left as the in-fighting grew.²² Initially, Arabs from the neighboring countries left in December-January, as well as peasants from the periphery who came to the big city to look for jobs and did not want to risk their lives. Much more significant to local politics and morale was the departure of affluent Christians and later in February-March also affluent Muslims who went to big cities in the region. There was also a joint Muslim-Christian initiative to evacuate women and children from the city, via the sea. In Jaffa and West Jerusalem (in Katamon, for example) many of the local elite left.²³ Supported by family and professional ties in Beirut, Amman, Damascus, Cairo, and other cities, they sought a temporary safe haven, and left with clear intention of coming back. But their departure left Arab urban society without local leaders in times of crisis. By leaving they denied their communities a sense of solidarity, and indicated that they were not to get involved in the fighting, but wait it out in sheltered localities.²⁴

The departure of the Arabs, commingled with Jewish victories, signaled to the Jews in March-April a possible larger mode of action: the opportunity to partially empty the land. The Jews did not foresee the ease with which they would slice through the land, witness the total collapse of Palestinian society, and have the possibility to change the country's demography. The surprise was genuine. Moshe Sharett, the minister of Foreign Affairs, confessed in a meeting of the Provisional Government on 16 June: “For me this is the most surprising thing: the emptying of the Arab community [in Palestine]. In the history of the land of Israel—this is more surprising for me than the foundation of the Jewish state.”²⁵ When it became clear to the Jews during March-April that conquest and expulsion were working out surprisingly well, with little or no opposition, and at times with Arabs' own initiatives to leave, they increasingly (though selectively) adopted the

practice by April 1948. It was not premeditated but a confluence of particular circumstances in specific time and place: the early voluntary departure of local elite, Jewish victories, collapse of Palestinian society, and long-standing Jewish fantasies on emptying the land. The temptation to clear the land was too strong for Jews once the opportunity presented itself.²⁶

Second came the massive departure commingled with expulsion of March-April 1948, with the fall of the metropolis of Haifa and Jaffa, as well as other cities and their surrounding villages. And finally, after 15 May, there was a clear though selective pattern of expulsion, from Ramla and Lydda right down to the later months of the war, especially in the Galilee during Operation Hiram (but not in Nazareth, for example).

Each earthquake—the early Arab departure, the fall of Tiberias, of Haifa, of Jaffa—opened unprecedented and unpredictable new possibilities of development and of thinking. History is (at times, not always, there is no one way to describe history) a balanced ensemble of human forces that is interrupted by abrupt tremors, which open up, but give no indication of, the unanticipated violence, imagination, and future that lie ahead. Under these conditions, people do things they could not even imagine doing, they don new beliefs and enter a “threshold of revelation” that they themselves had opposed, ridiculed, or simply could not even imagine a fortnight ago.²⁷

When Jews in local communities began to understand during the early months of 1948 that the departure of the Arabs did not represent isolated cases but a social pattern indicating the potential breakdown of Palestinian urban society, they rushed to make the temporary permanent by preventing their return and seizing their property. These local initiatives often preceded government actions, while military actions in turn extended the Arabs' departure, and government actions provided legal authority to often fait accompli local expropriation. Things happened simultaneously on these levels. Such an approach is a remedy to the artificial dichotomy between actions from above and from below by exploring the Jewish role in the Arab departure as a process made by Jews from all walks of life as they redefined their concepts of space, time, and homeland. It also follows that the archival search for a document that explicitly ordered a comprehensive policy of total expulsion is spurious. Some historians believe that a Jewish written master plan to expel the Arabs explains everything.²⁸ Even if such an order had existed (and it does not) it would have told us precious little about the mental horizons that made the expulsion possible among Jewish soldiers and civilians in battle fields, towns, cities, and agricultural communities.

The narrative I propose of the departure of the Arabs, which emphasizes a process, contingency, subjective experience, and reciprocal Jewish-Arab

relations, builds on but is also different from other interpretations offered by some scholars in the field.²⁹ Ilan Pappé argues that a Zionist “master plan”, Plan Dalet, consisted of a “clear-cut case of an ethnic cleansing operation . . . [with] a systematic planning . . . [by] a cabal [of leaders] assembled solely for the purpose of plotting and designing the dispossession of the Palestinians.” According to Pappé, “The story of 1948, of course, is not complicated at all,” for its meaning is “the enormity of the crimes the Israeli soldiers committed.”³⁰ His book contributes by seeking to understand 1948 within a framework of forced migration (more on the issue of terminology below). But the stark division of the history of 1948 into mutually exclusive good and bad actors is inadequate to capture the contingency and vicissitudes of human affairs embedded in the war. It denies Arabs agency, for these are merely puppets in a world meaningfully inhabited and controlled only by Jews. In the end, it does not convincingly explain why the Jews acted as they did, because Pappé had determined their criminal cultural world before he set out on his investigation. It is thus not insightful about how the Jews constructed their world as they went along and how the Arabs contributed to their demise via the weaknesses of their society.

Benny Morris has provided over the years essential evidence on the topic of the Arabs’ departure. His celebrated conclusion has become a mainstay of the historiography, namely that “The Palestinian refugee problem was born of the 1948 war.”³¹ In contrast to Pappé who views the expulsion as predetermined, then, this interpretation is all about context and circumstances. On one level this argument is unassailable. But it is precisely because this argument is correct that it is also insufficient. Forced migrations usually take place in the context of war, and therefore while the war is a necessary context to describe the conditions in which people acted, it is not enough to tell us about a broader culture—about sensibilities, memories, and notions of morality—that made this context possible and imaginable to begin with.³² Whatever Jews did in 1948 was linked to mentalities and imagination that existed before the war. The simplest argument is the following: context and circumstance are crucial to understand 1948, but they cannot by themselves explain what happened. A narrow focus on the context of the war reinforced by minute empirical evidence simply transfer historical initiative and responsibility to impersonal forces and away from Jews (as taking part in the expulsion) and Arabs (as accountable for the collapse of their society). Indeed, while Morris has brought to light crucial evidence on the Arab exodus, he shied away from drawing the evident conclusions that emerge from his sources: that the Jews’ widespread practice of forced migration—involving all walks of life, local and government

agencies, civilians and soldiers—cannot be reduced to a military and political tale determined by wartime circumstances, but calls for an investigation of Jewish culture that made expulsion imaginable and justifiable.³³

In terms of method and theory, I propose, we should move the historiography of 1948 in the direction of what we vaguely but fruitfully call cultural history. There is a world of meaning that is lost when we ignore in our accounts the ground of culture, memories, feelings, and sensibilities that made Jews and Arabs behave as they did, for our stories should tell not only what happened but also, and in particular, what Jews and Arabs thought was happening. Jews had different ideas about the Arab population, which often existed in tension: a Palestine without Arabs was part of Zionists' dreams, *together* with other dreams that included peaceful relations and collaboration with Arabs, including in a confederal political framework. These and other contradictory dreams co-existed. Every history of 1948 must therefore deal not only with the impact of circumstances on the Jewish role in the departure of the Arabs but also, and primarily, with the manner in which these circumstances were imagined and brought into being by the Yishuv before and during 1948.

The imagination of a Palestine without Arabs was in the air before the war (together with other imaginations of co-existing with Arabs)—not as inevitability but as a possibility. Jewish expulsion of Arabs was not a pure accident created by circumstances nor was it an absolute necessity logically inscribed in the history of Zionism. The symbolic universe of the Jews between 1945 and 1949 that made the Arab expulsion possible should be submitted to investigation. It was multifaceted, involving Jewish post-Holocaust sense of victimhood and fear of being driven themselves out of their homes in case of defeat, commingling with a sense of moral unease. Jews sensed an extreme historical juncture that led either to redemption or to total annihilation. Under these conditions, the opportunity to create a homogeneous Jewish nation state trampled all considerations, including collective understanding of what constituted Jewish morality.

That Jews in 1948 overall refused to acknowledge their role in the expulsion, while at one and the same time sensed a moral shame for doing it—for what else is the meaning of viewing the expulsions as a taboo, a miracle, or as falling from the sky—was not at all particular. For, in truth, the history of 1948 shared important features with events around the globe in the same period as part of a broader history of national self-determination and forced migrations in the modern world.

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1948 fits and cannot be understood outside of the history of modern forced migration, that is those events designed to create homogeneous nation states by violently removing thousands and at times millions of human beings. Its occurrence across the world as a mass phenomenon related to the constitution of states, especially in times of crisis connected with war, colonization, and decolonization, is peculiarly modern.³⁴ Some of the notable cases include the Armenian forced migration that turned into genocide in the Ottoman Empire in 1915 and the millions expelled as a result of the Greco-Turkish War of 1921–22. The Soviet Union forcibly removed Koreans, Germans, Chechens, Crimean Tatars, and others from their home regions to Central Asia and Siberia during the late 1930s and early 1940s. In Europe, the most radical demographic change in the area since the Middle Ages and perhaps ever, took place during 1943–1948, when about thirty million people, Germans, Poles, Ukrainians, Czechs, and Hungarians, were forced out of their homes. In India in 1947–1948, twelve million were uprooted between the new India and the two parts of new Pakistan, while an estimated 75,000 women (the exact number is not known) were abducted and raped in the process. In Palestine, 750,000 Palestinians were uprooted between 1947 and 1949. This is a sobering if incomplete list, a testimony to the ravages of the twentieth century.

A word on definitions is in order. Genocide is a concept and a practice that is related to forced migration but is not identical with it. In contrast to the exterminatory intent of genocide, the intent rooted in forced migration is on removing a group of people rather than killing them. (The terms genocide and forced migration exist on a conceptual and historical spectrum, where forced migration at times turn into genocide.) Since the wars in Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the term “ethnic cleansing” has been used by some scholars. The value of the concept of forced migration is that it allows considering together practices that previously have been treated as unrelated, for example, the mass deportation of Germans after WW II, the relocation of Native Americans in the United States, and the expulsions of settlers from former colonies as in the case of the French *piets noirs* from Algeria. Using the term forced migration does not limit such an event only to ethnic groups, but broadens it to include religious and other groups. Moreover, the term ethnic cleansing is now often associated in public and scholarly discourse with creating a tribunal, prosecutorial atmosphere. Under these conditions, using the term often causes an immediate scandal and reflexive denials. It blocks historical understanding instead of enriching

it. Ultimately, we use a certain term over another because of its interpretative utility, to learn new things about the past, and to initiate a discussion. In all these respects, forced migration is a more useful term.

Three major bursts of forced migration are viewed as crucial to modern European history, being connected to borderland regions of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe and to the meeting zones of the Russian, German, Hapsburg, and Ottoman empires: the eastern crisis of 1875–78 when the Ottoman Empire lost its European territories; the decade around WW I, extending from the Balkan Wars of 1912–13 to the Greco-Turkish War of 1921–22; and the period of WW II, 1936–49.³⁵ The historical context of forced migration was the disintegration of the European empires, from the Ottoman to the Nazi to the British Empire, and the establishment of nation states organized around the idea of exclusive national identities. The 1940s are of special importance, with the end of the war in Europe and decolonization around the world.³⁶

The case of Palestine fits within several key general characteristics of modern forced migration. The stories of forced migration are rarely clear-cut morality tales whereby the past can be ordered in mutually exclusive categories in which perpetrators and victims were never the same people. The Germans who had left or been driven out of Eastern Europe by the Red Army at the end of WW II, and those deported from Poland and Czechoslovakia in 1945–47, supported and benefited from Hitler's empire of terror. In India/Pakistan, Hindus and Muslims were both expellers and victims, as it was in Palestine, when former victims of the Holocaust at times donned the role of expellers.

Cases of forced migration show a commingling of state power, which is instrumental to move people away, and of the role of people on the ground. States alone cannot move hundreds of thousands of people. No single governmental order can bring a forced migration into being, in a sort of a fiat. There is always a web of symbols, mentalities, and memories that make it imaginable, conceivable, and allegedly moral. Ultimately, there are people behind these actions, often former neighbors; these are always public events, for it is impossible to hide the violent movement of throngs of people, and they are often reported in the media. The popular elements of forced migration are most keenly visible in the issue of property that belonged to the victims: this is looted, used, and expropriated, be it a rug, a cupboard, a lamp, or houses and lands. Once a forced migration of a minority is set in motion—by the panicked flight of inhabitants, the violence of an army, or both—it is rare for a state to let the deportees back. The act is often seen as permanent, a demographic fait accompli, a miracle.³⁷

There is no one, single pattern to force a group of people to leave its homes and territory. In some cases people run away out of fear before the advancing armies actually arrive (Germans in Eastern Europe, Arabs in Palestine). While the issue of gender is always important, in some cases it was of paramount consequence when tens of thousands of women were being systematically raped, as happened in India and in Eastern Europe, with the sexual violence of the Soviet soldiers against German women. At times, transfer of populations is agreed upon by the international community and hailed as a humanitarian achievement: the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne between Turkey and Greece, which ended the series of post-WW I agreements of the Versailles Peace Conference, legitimized and made compulsory the deportation of more than a million Christians from Anatolia to Greece and around 350,000 Muslims from Greece to Turkey. No one asked the deportees for their opinion on the matter.

But there is one common denominator to all these cases: the ideal of creating a homogeneous nation state based on the principle of self-determination. Enshrined in the Versailles Peace Conference was the modern idea of territories along supposedly ethnic, national, and religious lines, where states were representative of one nation. This idea legitimized forced deportation as a means to secure the stability of the state and by extension of the international system. It is from these principles that the violent transfer of hundreds of thousands of people in the Aegean was viewed as humanitarian, as a way to protect minority rights. The international community thus sanctioned a practice whose essence was about a sense of belonging: forced migration was carried out by one group against another that was deemed not to belong within the national community. The justifications could be diverse: ideological, economic, strategic, or religious; fuelled by revenge, military concerns, anxiety over separatists movements, or by existential fear of the loyalty of the group in question; propelled by questions of identity, memory, and historical past. Be that as it may, “they” have to disappear from a particular political and geographical space for “us” to prosper nationally.

For the history of forced migration in the 1948 war, the issue of timing is paramount. Before 1939, many Zionist thinkers and politicians, including Ben-Gurion, Berl Katznelson, and Ze’ev Jabotinsky, imagined Palestine’s future political complexion more often than not within a confederal political framework that included Jewish and Arab autonomous entities.³⁸ For the Jews, this served also as a model and a legitimacy to claim from the League of Nations minority rights for the Jews of central and eastern Europe. The 1940s changed all this. The extermination of the Jews in Europe deprived Zionism of its Jewish hinterland and potential immigrants; a

confederate political model in Palestine became irrelevant to remnants of Jews in central and eastern Europe. For Jews in the Yishuv, most of them from these regions, there was nowhere to return to in Europe, and their community in Palestine seemed the only guaranteed future of the Jewish people. These perceptions commingled with the vast practice of forced migration in Europe and India/Pakistan after 1945, which was sanctioned by the international community and closely followed by Zionists. This is a central context for Palestine as a case of forced migration. I draw two important consequences from this brief account, one about Zionist, the other about Palestinian, historiography. The notion that Zionism right from the start intended exclusively (also before 1939) to create a Jewish nation-state in Palestine is a Zionist teleology that emerged after the foundation of Israel in 1948. The notion that Zionists right from the start intended to expel Arabs is a Palestinian teleology that emerged after their loss of homeland in 1948.

What would have happened had the Arabs won the war against the Jews? We cannot provide a precise answer, but we can provide an educated speculation based on historical precedents. The Arab majority would have aimed to limit the number and influence of the Jewish minority in the new state (or states, in case Palestine would have been carved among various Arab countries), which it is safe to assume would not have been democratic. Cases of bloody revenge cannot be excluded. With the Zionist idea of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel gone, some, perhaps many, Jews would have left for Europe (in spite of recent events, but not to eastern Europe), the United States, or other countries, not wishing to live as a discriminated minority in an Arab state. The Arabs may have destroyed Jewish communities and expelled their inhabitants to a designated area where Jews would be permitted to live, and where the state could control them more easily.

Contemporaries in the 1940s were well aware of precedents of transfer and of recent histories of forced removal. The Greco-Turkish precedent was seen as a model by leaders in central Europe, India/Pakistan, and the Yishuv. Each case provided a certain sense of legitimacy to the next one. In a key meeting of the Interim Government on 16 June 1948, Sharett compared the departure of the Arabs to the recent expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia and to the transfer of populations between Greece and Turkey. As for the Arab property, he presented two different opinions, one emotional the other more statesmanlike: he claimed the property should pay for the “blood spilled, for the destruction, for the heavy expenses we had to pay not only in human lives but also in property in order to fight and defend ourselves . . . we were attacked, we deserve compensation, and this is the

natural one.” But he also talked about the need to compensate the refugees following a negotiation. At any event, he ended, “. . . they are not coming back . . . they need to get used to the idea that this [a possible return] is a lost cause and this is a change that cannot be undone.”³⁹ On that same day, elsewhere in Israel, A. Goldfarb wrote his memo.

When Ben-Gurion asserted on 21 October, on the eve of the battles in the Galilee, that “The Arabs in the Land of Israel are left with only one role—to flee”—he took a page from the history book of modern forced migration.⁴⁰

* * *

I have told one story. Of course—is it really necessary to emphasize this?—there were other stories and other modes of action that made up what laypersons and historians call the history of 1948: the Arab rejection of a Jewish national state; the fate of the Jews in case of defeat; the Jewish post-Holocaust trauma; the sudden collapse of Arab society in Palestine; the role of the British Empire; the transnational Arab element of the conflict, with parts played by Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Jordan; the onset of the Cold War. The story of the Jewish role in the Palestinian exodus is one story of the war, as important as others, more important than most.

One argument of this paper has been that an exact description of the unfolding of events and the effect of empirical evidence cannot by itself carry its own interpretation and truth. Meanings of the past emerge when a historian commingles evidence with an opportunity of art, with a poetic act that brings human life to the course of events. It means to capture the historical sensations of a given past. Historical sensation is part of all historical reconstruction, which requires going beyond the logical association of events into human elements of the period; it is not separate from historical investigation, but together they comprise historical understanding. Johan Huizinga described well this historical sensation:

There is in all historical awareness a most momentous component, that is most suitably characterized by the term historical sensation. . . . [T]his contact with the past . . . can be provoked by a line from a chronicle, by an engraving, a few sounds of an old song Historical sensation does not present itself to us as a re-living, but as an understanding that is closely akin to the understanding of music, or, rather, of the world *by* music.⁴¹

I tried in this essay to present one such historical sensation from the war of 1948. Let me capture it again, this time in images (Figures 1–22).⁴²



Fig. 1: Tantura, 22 May. Following the battle, one of the soldiers photographed the goings-on. Was he motivated by a desire to have a souvenir of the historic war and of his personal experience, capturing the shrill of battle, killing, and conquest? The Jewish soldiers separate the able-bodied men from the women, children, and elderly
Courtesy of Yossi Ofer Archive—Diaspora, Zionism, Resurrection

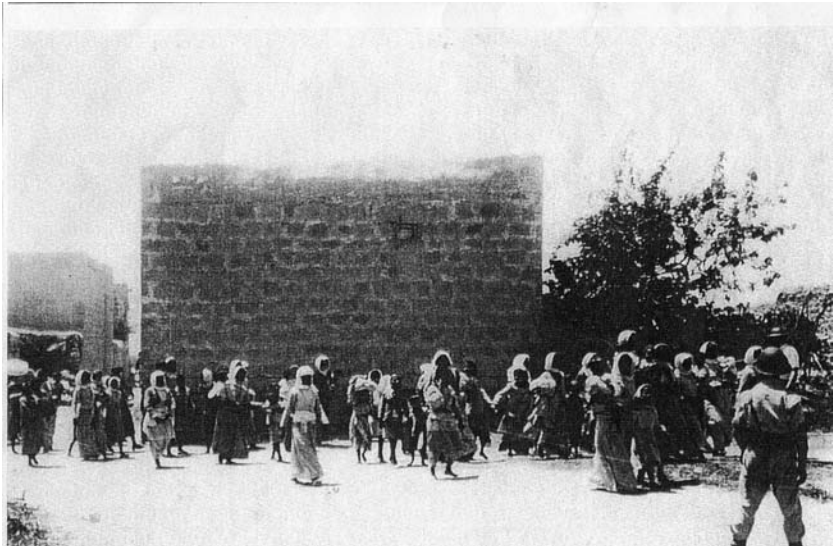


Fig. 2: who are assembled in a separate part of the village.
Courtesy of Kibbutz Nachsholim Archive



Fig. 3: in a field near the Mizgaga, the factory established in 1891 by the Baron Rothschild. The soldiers are visible, as are two cows and a fancy car. Who owned the car and how did it get there?
Courtesy of Kibbutz Nachsholim Archive



Fig. 4: Assembled to be expelled to Furaydis
Courtesy of Yossi Ofer Archive—Diaspora, Zionism, Resurrection



Fig. 5: waiting, with several soldiers and a jeep in the background.
Courtesy of the Israel Defense Forces Archive, photographic collection, 20296

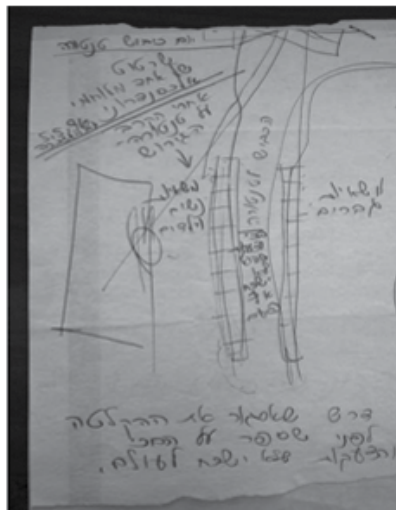
The day of Tantura's conquest.

A drawing of one of the soldiers of Alexandroni, May 5, 1948, day of the commemoration ceremony

After the battle on Tantura—the expulsion ↘

Trucks of Women and children	The road to Tantura. Wailing and yelling he will never forget	Trucks of men
--	---	------------------

He demanded that I shall turn off the tape recorder before he told of the wailing and yelling he will never forget.



The expulsion to Furaydis. The drawing of one of the soldiers and the written explanations of Hava'le Mager (figure 6).

Fig. 6: The expulsion to Furaydis. The drawing of one of the soldiers, and the written explanations of Hava'le Mager.

Courtesy of Kibbutz Nachsholim Archive



Fig. 7: 13 June, the expulsion of Tanturian women, children, and elderly from Furaydis to Jordan. The Red Cross is supervising
Beno Rothenberg collection, 137 4 3437, *Courtesy of the Israel State Archives*,
All rights reserved



Fig. 8: while some have time for romance
Beno Rothenberg collection, 137 4 3443, *Courtesy of the Israel State Archives*,
All rights reserved



Fig. 9: and for careful documentation of the event
Beno Rothenberg collection, 137 4 3442, *Courtesy of the Israel State Archives*,
All rights reserved



Fig. 10: as the Tanturians leave,
Beno Rothenberg collection, 137 4 3451, *Courtesy of the Israel State Archives*,
All rights reserved



Fig. 11: all the while being photographed,
which later allows the historian to reconstruct the past.
Beno Rothenberg collection, 137 4 3449, *Courtesy of the Israel State Archives*,
All rights reserved



Fig. 12: Jewish soldiers offer water to the expellees
Beno Rothenberg collection, 137 4 3439 2, *Courtesy of the Israel State Archives*,
All rights reserved



Fig. 13: for a moment of human companionship
Beno Rothenberg collection, 137 4 3436 I, *Courtesy of the Israel State Archives*,
All rights reserved



Fig. 14: lost in the broad scope of things, as Tanturians are shown the way—
forward, away, and far from their home—by Jews and also by the head
(mukhtar) of Furaydis (on the left with a kafiya).
Beno Rothenberg collection, 137 4 3438, *Courtesy of the Israel State Archives*,
All rights reserved



Fig. 15: From the transport by buses of the Israeli bus company
Beno Rothenberg collection, 137 4 3436 I, *Courtesy of the Israel State Archives*,
All rights reserved



Fig. 16: to the crossing over to Jordan, the exodus is complete.
Beno Rothenberg collection, 137 4 3444, *Courtesy of the Israel State Archives*,
All rights reserved



Fig. 17: From the agony of expulsion, a new life is born. From 1948 to 1952 the kibbutzniks lived in the Arab village, before they moved to a designated area slightly north. In 1949, members of Nachsholim clean the terrace of the new communal dining hall, which was the house of Tantura's head of the village
Courtesy of Kibbutz Nachsholim Archive



Fig. 18: while children of the kibbutz pick apples in 1949 in a grove tended by Tanturians just a short while ago (the kibbutz used the groves in its first years, before they were uprooted and the land used for other purposes)
Courtesy of Kibbutz Nachsholim Archive



Fig. 19: and others make the roads of Tantura bloom.

Courtesy of Kibbutz Nachsholim Archive



Fig. 20: Life springs in the village, as young Jewish immigrant girls from Turkey—a group called Magshimim, those who fulfill their destiny or dream—run in a deserted alley in 1950 or 1951

Courtesy of Kibbutz Nachsholim Archive



Fig. 21: and the kibbutz celebrates in the midst of the Arab village the holiday of Shavuot (Pentecost), which commemorates the fertility of the land,
Courtesy of Kibbutz Nachsholim Archive



Fig. 22: while the youth attempt to develop fishing as a key part of the economy.
Courtesy of Kibbutz Nachsholim Archive

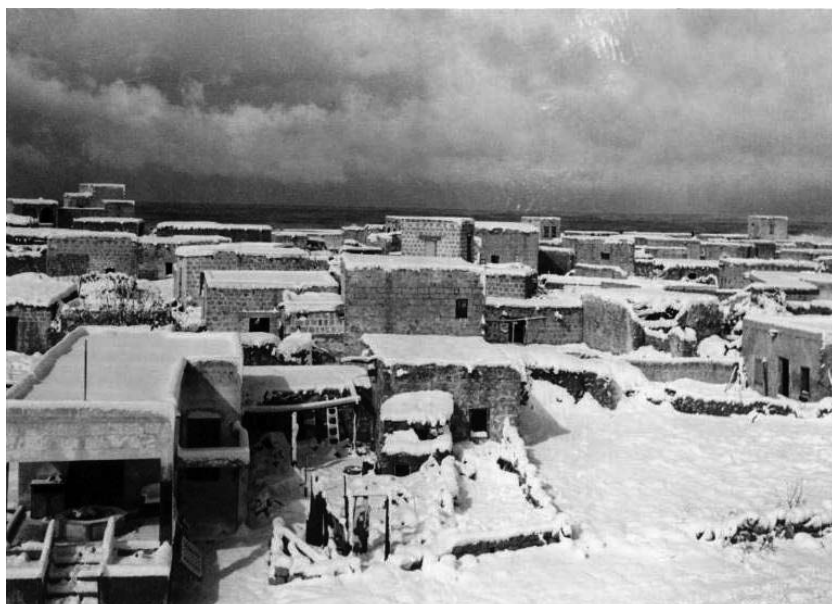


Fig. 23: December 1950—Tantura under the snow.
Courtesy of Kibbutz Nachsholim Archiv

The reader may ask now what lessons we can draw from this story in images. My immediate response, on the level of history and memory, is the following. Israeli Jews can draw two conclusions from their role in the 1948 forced migration of Palestinians placed in global perspective. One is to express a sigh of relief, “Well, everybody expelled people in the 1940s, that’s life, what can we do, just leave us alone.” Of course, such a cavalier attitude would be rejected when dealing with injustices perpetrated against Jews, such as the Holocaust. A second conclusion would be to view Zionist and Israeli history in general, and 1948 in particular, in a broader perspective, not as a unique story, but as a story of human beings acting within specific historical time, place, and circumstances. From this perspective, forced migrations happened in various places in the first half of the twentieth century and especially in the 1940s. They had general causes, while they were acted out in specific historical contexts. But they did happen; they constitute a human tragedy that has to be acknowledged by those who are fully or partly responsible for them.

The implications of this acknowledgement are diverse. It is a common perception among scholars and laypersons on the Left and on the Right that acknowledging the expulsion of the Arabs leads inevitably to sanctioning the political demand of the return of the refugees.⁴³ This is a misunderstanding of the relations between history, memory, and politics. History and memory are endowed with political meaning, but they are not endowed with one, single meaning; different, viable meanings can be drawn. For the Jews, acknowledging their role in forcing the Palestinians out does not mean that Jews have no right to live in the land of Israel. President Vaclav Havel certainly did not draw the conclusion that Czechs have no place in Czechoslovakia when he apologized in 1990 for the expulsion of the Germans after WW II. Studying history—and remembering an injustice committed by your group—is not a blueprint for a given political result. Indeed, studying history is fundamental precisely because it provides much more: the task of history is to teach us how we got here and where can we go from now on. It provides us with the wisdom that comes from exercising self-criticism about our past, which is a key to self-consciousness. Studying history calls into question totalizing views of society as governed—and as should be governed—by an absolute coherent voice, and instead does justice to the multiplicity of human voices in society, often contradictory and opposed to each other, and to the complexity of human behavior.

It is from this perspective that Israeli Jews should acknowledge their role in the forced migration of the Arabs: because of the simplest of reasons that it is part of their history, and an important one. It is part of them, it

has always been: Israelis remember the expulsions whether they deny it in a tale of Jewish victimhood, forbid to speak about it in a law enacted by parliament, obfuscate it in vague rhetoric in history books, or recount it in prose, poetry, and social activity. The attempt to erase the memory of the expulsion has been itself an active social force, a result of enormous mobilization of political and cultural effort. The erasure of memory is the result of an all-too-wakeful consciousness. Israelis are, in a sense, destined to remember, and remember, and remember the Palestinian loss of home and homeland, to tell the tale in different ways, because it is inextricably linked to their own gaining of home and homeland.

Forgetting the Nakba, the Catastrophe, as 1948 is known in Palestinian history, itself needs memory: one must remember in order to decide what to forget; one needs to forget in order to remember. Tell me what you forget and I shall tell you who you are. In reality, I would risk setting up the following formula: Israelis are crafted by Palestinians, and Palestinians are crafted by Israelis, as the outline of the sky at night is made by the stars.

But on a different level I am reluctant to draw lessons from the story in images. I don't think we need to hear another lesson about 1948, from this or that side. There have been many of those. Historians are supposed to point out larger implications, to place their story in a larger context. Sometimes less is more. I prefer to hold back from the usual practice of historians to explain and interpret for their audience the meaning of the story in images. The power of some stories is by being presented at all as a trigger for thought. I leave it to the reader to give meanings to this story, to open up a discussion of how it illuminates and fits within the history of 1948.

One meaning I take from this story is about the value of humility in front of the past. People should not ask the past what it cannot deliver. The past cannot redeem and justify any action. When people vandalize the past and instrumentalize it, there lurks the danger of ignorance and injustice. Humility in front of the past provides us with that self-consciousness that comes with doubt and a sense of perspective; it is one way to be able to appreciate the humanity of others as much as we want others to appreciate our own humanity.

As a historian, this is an ending I feel comfortable with: to uphold the importance of handling the past with care, sensitivity, and respect.

* * *

I could have concluded the essay here, but I chose to end it differently: with an image that evokes a dissonance, a memory scar, with Tantura under the snow (Figure 23). I found this photograph at the archive of Nachsholim. I

looked at it with a sense of wonder, at the snow on the Mediterranean coast. I turned it over. On the back was written “Tantura December 1950.” Then came to me the memory of the melody. Yehuda Poliker, in his masterpiece album *Ashes and Dust*, sings texts he composed together with Yaakov Gilad about the experience of their Polish and Greek parents who survived the Holocaust. In “A Window Unto the Mediterranean” he sings: “1950, the end of December/ A war of winds rages outside/ Suddenly snow descended here/ White reminds me of long forgotten memories./ The wound is still open/ If only you were now with me / I would have simply told you/ What cannot be conveyed in a letter.” For Tanturians, the snow must have also raised heartbreaking memories, imagining the unique sight of their homes. Perhaps it also raised a disturbing sense of the recent unexplainable deep tremors, first the extraordinary historic occurrence that so abruptly ended their way of life and now the extraordinary climatic occurrence that had never been seen in living memory, and above all, probably, it raised a sense of deep, human longing, not dissimilar to that evoked in the song.

NOTES

An earlier version of this paper was presented at the conference “Myth, Memory and Historiography: The Case of the 1948 War” at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute in December 2010. I am indebted to the organizers and the participants of the conference and especially to Efrat Ben Zeev and Jay Winter for their stimulating comments. Parts of this article were also presented at the symposiums “Writing Space” at Stony Brook Manhattan Campus and “1948 in Palestine” at the University of Virginia, and at the meeting “History and Memory” at the Dahlem Humanities Center at the Free University at Berlin. I am grateful for the ensuing discussions. I am also grateful for the members of the interdisciplinary research group “forced migrations in the modern world” at the University of Virginia, where I could test my ideas. I am indebted to Hava’le Mager, the archivist of Kibbutz Nachsholim, and to Yossi Ofer, who shared with me his archive “Diaspora, Zionism, Resurrection.” Doron Aviad was invaluable at the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) archive. I thank Ilan Troen for his comments on the paper. I am especially grateful to Yael Darr, Amos Goldberg, and Moti Golani who read an earlier draft of this essay and shared with me their customary wisdom.

1. Avraham Granott, *Agrarian Transformations in Israel and the World* (Tel-Aviv, 1954), 94 [Hebrew]. The Jewish National Fund was founded in 1901 with the aim of buying and acquiring land in Palestine, to “redeem” it, in the language of Zionist ideology.

2. Labor Party Archive, 23-2-1948-49, Mapai Central Committee, 12 May 1948, 1-2.

3. Key recent studies on 1948 and its origins are Benny Morris, *1948* (New Haven, 2008); Eugen Rogan and Avi Shlaim, eds., *The War for Palestine: Rewriting the History of 1948* (Cambridge, 2001); Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston, 2006), 105-39; Avi Shlaim, *Israel and Palestine: Reappraisals, Revisions, Refutations* (London, 2009); Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oxford, 2007).

4. This sentence should be qualified: also Arabs expelled Jews in Gush Etzion, the Old City of Jerusalem, and the area near the Dead Sea (Beit Ha-Arava). However, these cases did not amount to a large scale phenomenon.

5. Carlo Ginzburg, "Checking the Evidence: The Judge and the Historian," *Critical Inquiry* 18.1 (1991): 79-92. On the Katz affair, see the comprehensive website, which includes newspaper reporting, legal documents, and academic publications: <http://www.ee.bgu.ac.il/~censor/katz-directory/>. Entering the controversy on the massacre will take me adrift of the story I want to tell.

6. Efrat Ben Ze'ev, "Imposed Silence and Self-censorship: Palmach Soldiers Remember 1948," in *Shadows of War: A Social History of Silence in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Efrat Ben Ze'ev, Ruth Ginio, and Jay Winter (Cambridge, 2010), 181-96; Uri Ram, "Ways of Forgetting: Israel and the Obliterated Memory of the Palestinian Nakba," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 22.3 (2009): 366-95.

7. Participants from all sides in the Katz case focused on whether a massacre did take place. The question of what happened to the villagers and why, regardless of whether a massacre took place or not, was not discussed. This silence in itself corresponded to patterns of history and memory of 1948 by Jews.

8. Mustafa Kabha from the Open University in Israel is working on a book on the experience of the Palestinians taken prisoners during the war.

9. Gershon Rivlin and Zvi Sinai, eds., *The Alexandroni Brigade in the War of Independence*, 2nd rev. ed. (1964; Tel-Aviv, 1992), 131-6 [Hebrew].

10. Kibbutz Nachsholim archive.

11. Carlo Ginzburg, "Just One Witness," in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the 'Final Solution'*, ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge, MA, 1992), 82-97.

12. Noga Kadman, *Erased from Space and Consciousness: Depopulated Palestinian Villages in the Israeli-Zionist Discourse* (Jerusalem, 2008), 17-23 [Hebrew].

13. A dunam is about a fourth of an acre. On various estimates of the total land confiscated see Kadman, *Erased from Space*, 21.

14. Granott, *Agrarian Transformations*, 100-5.

15. Ariella Azoulay, *Constituent Violence, 1947-1950: A Genealogy of a Regime and "A Catastrophe from Their Point of View"* (Tel-Aviv, 2009), 165 [Hebrew]. This book was recently published in English: *From Palestine to Israel: A Photographic Record of Destruction and State Formation, 1947-1950* (London, 2011).

16. IDF (Israel Defense Forces) Archive, 49/2506/91/32.

17. *Davar*, 20 June 1948.
18. Kibbutz Nachsholim archive, Protocols Book, 14 November 1947–24 January 1950.
19. *Davar*, 11 June 1948.
20. Kibbutz Nachsholim archive.
21. *Davar*, 11 June 1948.
22. Yifaat Weiss, *Wadi Salib: A Confiscated Memory* (Jerusalem, 2007), 20 [Hebrew].
23. On Katamon see the impressive and tragic diary “*Such Am I, Oh World!*” *Diaries of Khalil al-Sakakini*, Trans. and annotated with an Introduction by Gideon Shilo (Tel-Aviv, 2007), 230–2 [Hebrew].
24. For a discussion of the collapse of Palestinian society see Rashid Khalidi, “The Palestinians and 1948: The Underlying Causes of Failure,” in Rogan and Shlaim, eds., *The War for Palestine*, 12–36.
25. ISA (Israel State Archives), Meeting of the Provisional Government, 16.6.48.
26. See the excellent short discussion of Issa Khalaf, *Politics in Palestine—Arab Factionalism and Social Disintegration, 1939–1948* (Albany, New York, 1991), 246–7.
27. “Threshold of revelation” is from Tony Kushner, *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes Part II: Perestroika*, rev. ed. (New York, 1996), 83.
28. Pappe, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*.
29. For a balanced evaluation see, Avi Shlaim, “Did they Leave or Were they Pushed?” in Shlaim, *Israel and Palestine*, 54–61.
30. Pappe, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, xii, xiii, xv, 5, xviii.
31. Benny Morris, “Examining Transfer: Zionist Thinking and the Creation of the Palestinian Refugee Problem,” in *Removing Peoples: Forced Removal in the Modern World*, ed. Richard Bessel and Claudia Haake (Oxford, 2009), 350.
32. For an elaboration of this argument in explaining the Holocaust, see my *Foundational Pasts: The Holocaust as Historical Understanding* (New York, 2012).
33. Benny Morris, *1948 and the Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949*. 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 2004).
34. My discussion relies on Richard Bessel and Claudia Haake, “Introduction: Forced Removal in the Modern World,” in Bessel and Haake, eds., *Removing Peoples*, 3–12.
35. Donald Bloxham, “The Great Unweaving: The Removal of Peoples in Europe, 1875–1949,” in Bessel and Haake, eds., *Removing Peoples*, 167–207, here p. 169; Eric Weitz, “From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions,” *American Historical Review* December (2008): 1313–43, here 1316; Panikos Panayi and Pippa Virdee, eds., *Refugees and the End of Empire: Imperial Collapse and Forced Migration in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke, UK, 2011).
36. Also significant in this period is the continued development of human rights, with the 1948 Genocide Convention, 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, and the 1951 Convention

and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. A recent contribution is Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, 2010), and Akira Iriye, Petra Goedde, and William Hitchcock, eds., *The Human Right Revolution: An International History* (Oxford, 2012).

37. Although there are cases of refugees who went back, they are usually members of the majority group within the state. See Elazar Barkan, ed., *No Return, No Refuge: Rites and Rights in Minority Repatriation* (New York, 2011).

38. The insightful work of Dimitri Shumski is important here. See, “Brit Shalom’s Uniqueness Reconsidered: Hans Kohn and Autonomous Zionism,” *Jewish History* 25 (2011): 339–53.

39. Israel State Archives, meeting of the Provisional Government, 16 June 1948.

40. Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949* (Tel-Aviv, 1991), 291 [Hebrew].

41. Frank Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience* (Stanford, CA, 2005), 120–1. I use Ankersmit’s translation. On the notion of historical sensation and the writing of history see my “Narrative Form and Historical Sensation: On Saul Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination*,” *History and Theory* 48 (2009): 199–219.

42. The stories behind those photos are themselves interesting, though they cannot be fully told here. Figures 1–5 present the hours after the battle of Tantura taken by an Alexandroni soldier and widely shared among the troops. There is little doubt about the authenticity of photos 1–5 as being taken in Tantura. Figure 3 clearly shows the imposing building of the Mizgaga, the glass-bottle factory founded by the Baron Rothschild in 1891, which still stands today. At the back of the photographs, in possession of Alexandroni veterans, there are handwritten indications of Tantura and the date of the battle. Figure 5 is in the ISF archive titled: “Third brigade, Alexandroni, landscapes and sites, with the Arabs of Tantura.” A key Alexandroni veteran, who was active in the legal case against Katz, confirmed to me that while the veterans contested the facts of Katz’s thesis, the photos were authentic.

43. On this opinion from the Left, see Joel Beinin, “Forgetfulness for Memory: The Limits of the New Israeli History,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* xxxiv, 2 (2005): 6–23, esp. 18.