

On Recent Hebrew and Israeli Sources for the Palestinian Exodus, 1947–49

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Since the Palestinian refugee exodus of 1948 a controversy has raged concerning its causes and circumstances, Palestinians have always maintained that the refugees were either directly expelled or terrorized into flight. They point out that simultaneous to the Haganah and Irgun Zvai Le'umi's (IZL) offensives of 1947-1948, a series of massacres was carried out against the unarmed Arab population, a tactic which precipitated population flight thus fulfilling the solution of population transfer long-advocated by Zionists.

Although the issue of the exodus is a critical turning point in the Palestinians' history, only a small number of Palestinian academics—'Arif al-'Arif, Walid Khalidi, Elias Shoufani, Nafez Nazzal—have investigated its roots and causes. And the official historians of the Haganah and Zionist apologists in the West continue to advance their claim that the Palestinians either left of their own accord or were advised and ordered to do so by their own leaders. These allegations, including the stories about Arab radio broadcasts, were examined and discredited by Walid Khalidi and Erskine Childers in the early 1960s as being part of an Israeli disinformation campaign.¹ However, extremely useful Hebrew and Israeli primary sources, both memoirs of the 1948 war by participants and archival materials, have recently become available and these irrevocably undermine the official

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Israeli version of the refugee exodus. Many references to the archival material have been made in recent books published in English, the latest of which are: Michael Palumbo's *The Palestinian Catastrophe* (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1987); Benny Morris' *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); and Avi Shlaim's *Collusion Across the Jordan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). It is ironic, yet certainly convincing, that the forty-year-old Palestinian claims that atrocities and incidents of direct expulsion were at the heart of the 1948 exodus have come from Israeli and Hebrew sources.

The purpose of this article is not to attempt to present a comprehensive review of these recent Israeli works on, nor to analyze the primary motives and causes behind, the exodus. Rather, using recently published Israeli material, the article will instead highlight certain aspects of the current discourse on the causes and roots of the Palestinian uprooting.

The Dayr Yasin Episode in the Wider Context of the Exodus

Most recent Israeli writers have no difficulty in acknowledging the Dayr Yasin massacre and its effect, if not intention, of precipitating the exodus. Some Israeli writers still claim that it was a unique aberration in the 1948 war. However, most of these writers take refuge in the fact that the atrocities were committed by the so-called dissidents of the IZL and Lehi, thus exonerating Ben-Gurion's Haganah, the military forces of mainstream Zionism.

This pro-Labor Zionism version has recently been undermined by an "insider" source, veteran chief intelligence officer of the Haganah in Jerusalem, Yitzaq Levi, who waited long time permission to publish his Hebrew-language book on the 1948 War.² Levi reveals two crucial pieces of evidence about the Dayr Yasin episode. First, that in January 1948 the village mukhtar and the notables had reached a non-aggression agreement—with the blessing of the Haganah—with the neighboring settlements of Giv'at Sha'ul and Montefiori. Second, the Irgun's assault on the village had the full backing of the Haganah OC (commanding officer) of Jerusalem, David Shaltiel. Shaltiel chose to break his agreement with the villagers and provided rifles and ammunition for the Irgunists. Furthermore, he contributed to the assault on the village with artillery cover from a Palmach company. Over 250 unarmed villagers were murdered, including many women, elderly, and children. There were also cases of rape and mutilation. It has been established that a Haganah intelligence officer, Meir Pa'il, was dispatched to Dayr Yasin to assess the effectiveness and performance of the

IZL forces.³ Although the actual murders of the non-combatant residents appear to have been carried out after the withdrawal of the Palmach company, the responsibility for the slaughter of the villagers must be shared by the Haganah and the Irgun.⁴

More significant, the recently published Hebrew material shows that Dayr Yasin was only one among several isolated and vulnerable Arab villages that sought non-aggression understandings with the Haganah, partly in the belief that this might secure them against other threatening forces in the *Yishuv* (the collective term used to describe the Jewish population in Palestine until 15 May 1948). The village of al-Shaykh Mu'annis (the present site of Tel Aviv University) was another case in point. Its mukhtars prevented the entry of Arab irregulars into the village and sought protection of the Haganah, Tel Aviv Command. This protection was sought in response to repeated threats of, and the actual kidnapping of the mukhtars by the Lohamei Herut Yis'rael (Lehi, or Stern Gang). The village elders maintained close contacts with Gad Machnes, a senior officer of the Haganah Intelligence Services (Shai) and a member of the country-wide Haganah Command in 1948. Machnes, who was an orange grower from Petah Tiqva, intervened to release the mukhtars abducted by Lehi, but was unwilling to guarantee the safety of the "friendly," non-belligerent villagers.

In fact, the fate of al-Shaykh Mu'annis was already sealed as early as December 1947 when the Haganah had begun clearing the coastal plain between Tel Aviv and Haifa of its Arab sedentary and semi-nomadic population. By the early spring of 1948, al-Shaykh Mu'annis villagers were given "friendly" advice/pressured by the Haganah to evacuate. Other coastal plain village and tribal settlements such as al-Mas'udiyah, Khirbat 'Azzun, al-Haram (Sayyidna 'Ali), Umm Khalid, Caesarea, Jammasin, 'Arab al-Hawarith, 'Arab al-Jaramlah, 'Arab Hijazi, 'Arab al-Nusayrat, 'Arab al-Shudkhi, 'Arab al-Kudh, 'Arab Abu-Kishk, 'Arab al-Rumaylat, 'Arab al-Sawalimah, 'Arab al-Falk, 'Arab al-Huwaytat, 'Arab al-Balawnah, were either attacked and expelled directly by the IZL and the Haganah or forced to evacuate under threats of such attacks between December 1947 and April 1948.⁵

The recently found Israeli archival material documents the Haganah's policy of forcing the evacuation of the Arab population from the coastal plain between Haifa and Tel Aviv, designated as the core of the Jewish state, as early as the beginning of December 1947. This material reinforces what is known about the Haganah's major role in the outbreak of the 1948 War. It provides new evidence about the provocative attacks by the

Haganah, IZL, and Lehi against the unarmed Arab population. It presents the Palestinian Arabs as largely defensive while the Zionist, well-organized and prepared, embarked on an offensive strategy. Moreover, the early December 1947 terrorist attacks of the IZL and Lehi in Jerusalem, Haifa, and Jaffa, invited Arab retaliation, which was then eagerly seized and capitalized upon by the Haganah to launch offensive strikes against Arab civilians. In Haifa, initial terrorist attacks against the Arabs were begun by the Irgun and Lehi. For example, on 29 December 1947 the Irgun carried out a bombing attack against Arab workers waiting at the gates of the Haifa oil refinery. This resulted in the death and wounding of many Arab workers and provoked a vengeful, yet spontaneous, Arab attack on Jewish refinery workers. Many unarmed Jews died in these clashes. The Haganah, vowing "reprisal," raided two Arab villages east and southeast of Haifa, Hawasah and Balad al-Shaykh, on the night of 30 December. Scores of Arab civilians were gunned down in these nocturnal raids. Evidently the aggressive Haganah command in Haifa was deliberately escalating its strike against Arab targets in and around the town despite the fact that the local Arab leadership was appealing for self-restraint and truce arrangements. The Haganah strategy in Haifa and other parts of the country was not aimed specifically at punishing individual Arab "culprits" but was, rather a psychological blitz of night raids aimed at widening the hostility. The objective was to shock, frighten, and throw the communities off balance, forcing Arab neighborhoods and villages to evacuate.

The Dayr Yasin assault took place in April 1948 and was in line with the offensive implementation of *Tochnit Dalet* (Plan Dalet). This represented an escalation and widening of the already aggressive Haganah strategy dating from May 1946. The Haganah's Plan of May 1946 contained clauses providing for the destruction of Arab houses and expulsion of villagers. Plan Dalet was envisaged and worked out as early as 1944 by Yigael Yadin, the Haganah Operations in 1944 and 1948.⁶ Plan Dalet provided for the occupation of Arab regions, the destruction of Arab villages, and the expulsion of the so-called hostile Arab communities. Yet, as was illustrated by the cases of Dayr Yasin and al-Shaykh Mu'annis, the inhabitants of scores of non-belligerent Arab villages were in fact expelled or forced to evacuate and their homes then destroyed to block their return. Both Plan Dalet and the Dayr Yasin episode, therefore, must be seen in the context of the escalation of the already offensively geared Haganah strategy beginning in December 1947. In many ways the Dayr Yasin assault was the extension and culmination of the early psychological blitz, which included attacks on Khisas, Sa'sa', as-Sumayriyyah, Qazzazah, Balad al-Shaykh, Hawasah,

Mansurat al-Khayt, Fajjah, Caesarea, Nasir al-Din, and other places, where scores of non-belligerent, unarmed Arab civilians were blown up or gunned down. Consequently, it must be concluded that within the wider strategy of forcing Arab evacuation from the would-be Jewish state, and in the light of previous atrocities committed by the Haganah, there was nothing unique about the Dayr Yasin episode.

From Dayr Yasin a few points may be made. The first concerns the hypocrisy and duplicity of the Haganah, which publicly condemned the massacre, while at the same time attempting to conceal its gruesome details. In fact, the Haganah refused access to the scene of the crime to the representative of the International Committee of the Red Cross, Dr. Jacques de Reynier, for at least two days after the event.⁷ Yet the actual and official collaboration or coordination between the Haganah and IZL forces in the Dayr Yasin attack in particular and the war in general has never been thoroughly investigated. For all practical purposes, and especially in the attacks against the Arab urban populations in Haifa, Jerusalem, Jaffa, Tiberias, and elsewhere, the official Zionists (i.e., the Haganah) and the so-called dissidents had already begun to coordinate activities as early as December 1947. There were historical differences and power struggles between these tendencies as well as the advocacy of different tactics toward the British Mandatory authorities and army. More importantly, the IZL and Lehi fiercely resented the Haganah's drive to impose its authority and military command on all Jewish underground forces in Palestine. Yet there were no differences between the official Zionists and the "dissidents" about the desired goal of creating a generally Arab-free Jewish state or about the tactics to be used to force Arab evacuation.

Like many other Israeli academic works, Benny Morris's book on the exodus addressed the above topic less than adequately. The prevailing tendency among contemporary Israeli historians—including those who are critical of the Haganah conduct in 1948—is to classify the 1948 events into "separate" Haganah and IZL-Lehi operations. Thus the Dayr Yasin attacks and the Jaffa offensives of the end of April are described as IZL-Lehi operations, while major offensives outlined in Plan Dalet and implemented beginning in March 1948 are attributed exclusively to the Haganah. Open-minded Israeli historians are still anxious to present the IZL and Lehi in a morally different light from the Haganah, and it may well be that only the tip of the iceberg has been revealed regarding the joint responsibility of the Haganah and the "dissidents" in many of the atrocities that precipitated the Palestine exodus.

Newly tapped Irgunist archival sources reveal the premeditated IZL-Lehi plan to liquidate the residents of Dayr Yasin.⁸ The episode itself has been portrayed by Menahem Begin as a “splendid” turning point in the history of the war. Contemporary Israeli historians, although referring to Dayr Yasin as an inglorious episode, seem to agree with this interpretation that the incident was the single most important factor in encouraging the exodus of April and May. However, in the wider debate on the exodus, there is still work to be done on the significance of Dayr Yasin in the context of the Haganah strategy, from December 1947, of forcing the evacuation of Arab villages west of Jerusalem and Arab neighborhoods west and southwest of the Old City. A strong indication of this emerging Haganah policy is found in Ben-Gurion’s *War Diary*. As early as 6 January 1948, Ben-Gurion declared that he had no qualms about clearing scores of Arab villages from what he called the Jerusalem Corridor.⁹ This was at a time when the war had presented an historical opportunity to Judaize that region which, Ben-Gurion admitted, the Zionist movement had failed to colonize in the past sixty years.

It should be remembered first that Ben-Gurion was here referring to almost exclusively Arab-inhabited regions which the partition resolution gave to the Jewish state. Second, he made this pronouncement four months before the assault on Dayr Yasin. Third, the idea of an Arab population transfer had exercised Ben-Gurion’s mind—and the minds of most of the Zionist leadership—for years before the 1948 War. A voluntary Arab population transfer was recognized by Ben-Gurion as a highly unlikely possibility, and a compulsory transfer was ruled out by the British before 1948, although in the Royal Commission (Peel) Report of 1937 there was a reference to compulsory transfer.¹⁰ Consequently, Ben-Gurion evidently believed that such a transfer could be implemented only in a wartime situation. Ben-Gurion’s *War Diary* mentions the Kemalist victories, which facilitated the mass transfer of the Greek population from Central Asia, as an example to be followed.¹¹

Recent Israeli accounts amass a large body of evidence which points toward a Haganah strategic-military and political plan to create an Arab-free west and southwest Jerusalem. This area included the neighborhoods of Rumayma, al-Talbiyyah, Musrarah, Qatamun, al-Shaykh Badr, and Lifta, all within walking distance of Dayr Yasin. The implementation of transfer schemes in these regions took place shortly after the partition plan resolution. Plan Dalet was in great measure only a consolidation and formalization of an actual policy that was launched in December 1947. To cite only one example, on the night of 4 January 1948, the Haganah blew

up the Semiramis Hotel in the Qatamun in which the Spanish vice-consul and several Arab civilians were killed. This attack precipitated the beginning of the evacuation of this prosperous Arab district. Under pressure from the British high commissioner, Sir Alan Cunningham, and a blaze of media publicity, the Haganah was forced to issue a statement in the *Palestine Post* (later the *Jerusalem Post*), claiming that the operation had been carried out mistakenly. The attack itself had been planned by the Haganah deputy OC in Jerusalem, Mish'al Shaham. On the day following the operation, Ben-Gurion met Shaham and recorded in his *War Diary* on 6 January that the Haganah's Jerusalem Command carried out the attack to boost Jewish morale in Jerusalem. Shaham also explained that the assault on the Semiramis Hotel was in keeping with the Haganah strategy of espousing/encouraging (*me'amtzim*) the Arab evacuation/flight from the Qatamun.¹² In tandem with this strategy, a psychological warfare campaign was launched, with loudspeakers in al-Talbiyyah and other places threatening Arabs to evacuate or face the consequences.

It is evident that the accounts in Ben-Gurion's *War Diary* are deliberately and typically vague regarding the emerging de facto expulsion policy. After all, Ben-Gurion was extremely anxious not to go down in history—which he was in fact attempting to write—as the “great expeller.” The Israeli archival sources, diaries, and notebooks, such as those of Yosef Weitz, director of the Lands Department of the Jewish National Fund, provide a clearer picture of the expulsion policy. However, Ben-Gurion's *War Diary*, which served as working papers for actions and operations, remains very useful in explaining various aspects of the war as far as the Haganah and IDF establishment were concerned.

New Revelations about the al-Dawaymah Massacre and Other Atrocities of the War

Al-Dawaymah, like Dayr Yasin, was an unarmed village. Yet unlike the nearby Jerusalem village, al-Dawaymah was situated in the western Hebron Hills, miles away from any Jewish settlement. More significant is that the massacre of some of the village inhabitants was carried out at the end of October 1948, not in the heat of battle but after the Israeli army had clearly emerged victorious in the war. Furthermore, the episode was largely covered up by the IDF and forgotten, and was only vaguely and inaccurately reported in 1948. It was only thirty-six years later that the magnitude of this tragedy began to unfold, in two articles published in the Hebrew newspaper *Hadashot*, (24,26 August, 1984), by an Israeli journalist, Yeolla Har-shefi.

The journalist's investigation was based in the first place on the testimony of the village mukhtar, Hasan Mahmud Hudayb, who was then seventy-five years old and lived in the Fawwar refugee camp, fifteen kilometers to the east of al-Dawaymah. A second source were the testimonies of Israeli soldiers who were at the scene of the atrocities on 28-29 October and took part in the overrunning of the village by Moshe Dayan's 89th Battalion. These testimonies variably show that the IDF troops entered the village and carried out indiscriminate liquidation of civilians, throwing their victims into pits.

Ben-Gurion in his vague recording of the war's expulsions and atrocities in his *War Diary* mentions the episode by quoting the head of the military government, General Elimelekh Avner, who had informed him that "rumours" had it that the Israeli troops had "slaughtered 70-80 persons."¹³ The most recently produced archival documents, published in the Morris book, shed new light on both savagery of the massacre and the extraordinary cover-up carried out by the prime minister and defence minister, Ben-Gurion, together with the rest of the cabinet and the army establishment, regarding reporting of the massacre. The latter had no difficulty in silencing certain circles in the Mapam party—who were represented in the government—who demanded a confidential ministerial investigation into the conduct of, and atrocities committed by, the IDF during October-November 1948, including the al-Dawaymah episode. In the end only a one-man confidential investigation was agreed to by Ben-Gurion, and this was conducted by the attorney general, Hayim Moshe Shapira. The findings of the Shapira report have remained one of Israel's many jealously guarded secrets. The report has been located in the Israel State Archives, Justice Ministry papers 21/1/0. However the present Israeli ministers still believe that there remains much to cover-up and the report remains classified by a Ministerial Committee decision taken by Yitzaq Rabin, Moshe Arens, Avraham Sharir, and the Israeli High Court.¹⁴

Like the Shapira report, many important files in the Israel State Archives have remained closed. The Shapira report may turn out to be embarrassing even to currently active Israeli politicians. A glance at the war record of the Ministerial Committee members and Defense Minister Rabin is very revealing. In 1947-48 Rabin was a deputy commander of the Palmach (*plugot mahatz*), the Haganah elite "crushing" forces; Commanding Officer Harel Brigade between April and June 1948; and OC operations during Operation Dani in July 1948. During the latter he was involved in the expulsion of the Arabs of Lydda and Ramlah,¹⁵ at which time the Palmach third battalion carried out a massacre in Lydda on 12 July 1948.

He was also OC Operations of the Southern Front, September 1948 March 1948, during which the al-Dawaymah atrocities were perpetrated.

One revealing element in the army's internal inquiry into the al-Dawaymah slaughter was that it was conducted by the former head of the Haganah intelligence section (Shai), Isar Be'eri. He himself had been found responsible for giving orders to murder an Arab called 'Ali Qasim in cold blood in the summer of 1948.¹⁶ 'Ali Qasim, who came from the evacuated coastal village of al-Haram, took refuge in Jaffa and remained there after its occupation by the Haganah in May. He was arrested a few weeks later and shot by the Shai. Nonetheless Be'eri was allowed to pursue a long-time career in the Israeli intelligence and rose to head Mossad in the 1960s.

The full truth about the al-Dawaymah massacre has not yet come out. The number of victims has never been established. Israeli sources put the estimate at 80-100 murders, while the village mukhtar testifies to a much greater number. Recent Israeli publications pin the blame for the killings on former elements of the Irgun and Lehi, integrated into Dayan's 89th Battalion.¹⁷ Yet very little information has been revealed on the role of the battalion and its companies' commanders as a whole in the episode. Moreover, there are conflicting reports and testimonies which need to be reconciled regarding the actual sites and details of the killing. Various evidence indicates that the atrocities were committed in and around the village, including at the mosque and in the cave nearby, that houses with old people locked inside were blown up, and that there were cases of the shooting and raping of women.¹⁸

A great deal of Israeli archival material has been declassified and opened for inspection. Morris's work—and to a lesser extent Palumbo's book—is based on this source. Without accepting Morris's specific interpretations or endorsing his general Zionist perspective, it appears that he did make a fair use of this unpublished material in terms of recording and documenting the numerous cases of direct and indirect expulsions. Also a series of atrocities committed by the IDF toward the end of the war have been given first-hand validation in his book. This new evidence, it seems, substantiates the theory that the more triumphant and confident the Israeli army became during the war the more determined became its chief, Ben-Gurion, to create Arab-free regions in the Jewish state.

Moreover, the recent research proves that the Palestinian Arabs were less prone to evacuate the towns and villages in the second half of the war. Hence the numerous atrocities committed from June 1948 onwards—such as those of Lydda, 'Ayn Zaytun, 'Aylabun, Sa'sa', Jish, al-Dawaymah,

al-Tirah (Haifa), Safsaf, Sha'ib, Salihah—were geared at forcing mass evacuation. The precise details of these episodes, exact figures of victims, the particular responsibility of the brigade, battalion, and company commanders, and the nature of the military orders to kill non-combatant civilians have still to be looked into carefully. The recent publications in English have not dealt comprehensively with these incidents. For instance, the role of Moshe Dayan and his 89th Battalion in many of these atrocities as well as early acts of brutality, such as the Khisas raid on 18 December 1947, is still in need of thorough investigation.¹⁹

The Role of the Haganah and Palmach

The most striking result of the recent Israeli publications is the shifting of the discourse away from the traditional arguments about the naked terrorism of the IZL and Lehi before and during the 1948 war, and towards scrutinizing the conduct of the Haganah-Palmach and IDF during the war. At issue is the role of the Haganah in the outbreak of the war. Recent revelations about the roots of the Palestinian exodus refer to the role and conduct of leading figures of mainstream labor Zionism such as Ben-Gurion, Yigal Allon, Moshe Sharett, Israel Galili, Yigael Yadin, Yitzhaq Rabin, Moshe Dayan, Moshe Carmel, and others throughout the war. Moreover, among these people, who dominated the Haganah and IDF, there seems to have been a consensus about the desirability of utilizing the war to create an overwhelmingly Arab-free Jewish state. Top Palmach commanders, such as Allon, Rabin, Carmel, and Dayan are exposed in a particularly revealing light. Throughout the last four decades the Palmach has been officially developed into almost mythological proportions. Haganah historians have propagated the myth of the “purity of arms,” (*tohar haneshik*), of the IDF, attributing this to the Palmach “ethos” and “conduct” before and during the war.

However, a more authentic record of Palmach conduct is now beginning to emerge. We may catch a glimpse of the top Palmach commander's conduct in the career of Yigal Allon; commander of the Palmach 1945-48; OC Operation Yiftah, April-May 1948 in the eastern Galilee when tens of Arab villages and the town of Safad were driven into flight; OC Operation Dani, July 1948 during which the amply documented expulsion of Lydda and Ramlah occurred; and OC Southern Front, September 1948-49. Allon is portrayed in the official histories of the Haganah as the best commander of 1948. This same commander pronounced unashamedly that his brilliant psychological warfare, including whispering campaigns and harassment

conducted in eastern Galilee in the spring (1948) offensives brought about panic-stricken evacuation of tens of thousands of Arab villagers from the area.²⁰

Further crucial evidence published recently from archival sources has established that Allon's spring operations in the Eastern Galilee, including Operation Yiftah and Operation Broom (*Mivtza' Matate*), were definitely intended to bring about the complete forced evacuation of the Arab inhabitants of the region and indeed succeeded in this.²¹ Moreover, a great deal of recent material has been produced about Allon's tactics in clearing entire Arab communities in the south during the IDF autumn offensives. The forced evacuation of the towns of Falujah and al-Majdal between 1949 and 1951 were the direct responsibility of Allon, Ben-Gurion, and the IDF chief of staff.²²

The new revelations about the top Haganah-Palmach commanders place them among the most ardent expellers of the war. A high proportion of these senior officers including Yigal Allon and Moseh Carmel, were members of the left-wing Zionist Party Ahdut Ha'avodah. Carmel, a member of Kibbutz Na'an, was OC Haganah, Haifa District, 1948; OC Carmeli Brigade, April-May 1948 during the battle for Haifa; and OC Northern Front during operations Dekel and Hiram in July and October respectively, during which significant parts of the western and northern Galilee were cleared of Arab inhabitants.

During the war the Ahdut Ha'avodah party joined Hashomer Hatzair, another left-wing Zionist movement, and formed the Mapam Party. Mapam forged an alliance with the Ben-Gurion-led Mapai Party and joined the first provisional (war) cabinet in 1948. Throughout the war, Mapam establishment circles were fully aware of the deliberate expulsionist policy of Ben-Gurion and the IDF high command. Some individuals, such as Aharon Cohen of the Mapam Arab department, expressed internal criticism. However, by and large, this criticism was made confidentially behind closed doors. This was because, ironically, Mapam was itself closely associated with the top Palmach commanders whose wishes and conduct were responsible for the great part of the Arab exodus. The minority dissident elements from Mapam, who were critical of the IDF conduct were easily stifled by the Ben-Gurion cabinet on the grounds that Mapam in general and the HaShomer HaTzair kibbutz movement in particular had joined the scramble for Arab lands, and had indeed benefited from the divisions of the spoils made in the immediate aftermath of the Arab expulsion. In fact the "socialist" Zionist kibbutz movements took the lion's share of Arab lands in

1948, leaving only a tiny portion to other right-wing Zionist settlement movements.

Indeed, by the second-half of 1948 the "socialist" kibbutz movements, which provided the leading figures of the new state and the ruling class, were in the forefront of the campaign, boosting the government official policy, to block any avenue of return for the Palestinian refugees. The conspiracy of silence over the insidious role played by the left-wing Palmach-Haganah commanders in the war atrocities and expulsion policy is, in part, explained by the enormous benefits the Zionist "socialist" colonizing movement obtained from creating Arab-free regions in the Jewish state.

Recent Israeli archival material provides cumulative evidence that a large number of Haganah-Palmach IDF commanders, at company, battalion, brigade, and high command level, took part in directly ordering numerous cases of expulsion from Arab rural areas. At the same time, and contrary to the official Israeli myth, the Israeli forces appeared on numerous occasions (examples include Tiberias, Beersheba, Jaffa, Beisan, Haifa, and al-Majdal) to be ill-disciplined and engaged in an orgy of looting, rape, and acts of brutality which did not have the sanction of the high command. The rape factor, for instance, both actual and rumoured, was no doubt among the primary causes of the panicked exodus from various parts of the country.

At issue, however, remains the argument surrounding the extent of direct and indirect expulsion as opposed to the spontaneous flight of panic-stricken civilians in the storm of the battle. Moreover, there is still need for work to be done on the indirect methods and tactics, such as the Davidka mortar-fire, used by the field commanders to force evacuation without resorting to direct expulsion. In such cases there was no need for direct orders from the high command or on-the-spot "mini massacres" to drive people into flight. More systematic research is also still awaited on the emergence and development of the multifarious motives behind the Israeli expulsion policy of 1948. The suggestion put forward by Israeli historians such as Benny Morris and Meir Pa'il that "military necessity" was the principal motive behind the 1948 expulsions appears to be somewhat apologetic and definitely questionable. This approach echoes the catch-all phrase of "security" reason given in the contemporary deportations of people from the West Bank and Gaza. Political, military, strategic, as well as economic, settlement, and demographic considerations were inherently intertwined in Zionist thinking and practice as far as the Jewish state objective was concerned and regarding the solution of the Arab "demographic question" in Palestine.

On the Transfer Schemes

At the center of the discussion of the Palestine refugee exodus is the transfer issue. Ever since the establishment of the political Zionist movement in the late nineteenth century the Jewish colonization of Palestine and the de-Arabization of the country were inseparably linked in the thinking and actions of the Zionist leadership. The transformation of Palestine and the transfer of its Arab inhabitants had graduated from a Zionist dream via proposals and schemes into practical policy in 1948. With historical hindsight, it may be asserted with certainty that the *Yishuv* was inherently bent on expansion and ultimately, innately and logically, threatened the displacement of Palestinian Arabs. The ultimate, self-proclaimed aim of mainstream Zionism was to establish a predominantly Jewish state in the whole of Palestine. In line with this objective, numerous quotations and explicit references regarding the Zionist dream of transferring the Palestinians to Iraq, Libya, and elsewhere may be found in the writings of, and archival records concerning, Theodor Herzl, David Ben-Gurion, Yosef Weitz, Menahem Ussishkin, Israel Zangwill, Arthur Rupin, Vladimir Jabotinsky, Werner David Senator, Eliezer Kaplan, Berl Katznelson, and many others.²³

The process of displacing Palestinian Arab peasant communities began as early as the 1920s, and culminated in 1948 when proposals and schemes of compulsory transfer were put into effect. Transfer committees were set up during the war with Ben-Gurion's blessing and the participation of his closest lieutenants.²⁴ These committees were chaired by Yosef Weitz, director of the Jewish National Fund's Land's Department, with the membership of 'Ezra Danin, a senior officer of the Shai and senior official of the Arab Division, Political Department, Jewish Agency, and Eliahu Sasson, of the same Arab Division.

Israeli authors, such as Morris, refer to these committees as dealing with retrospective transfer; i.e. the consolidation of the exodus as a *fait accompli* and the blocking of any future refugee return. In conjunction with the IDF strategy of destroying evacuated Arab villages, the transfer committees presided over the systematic demolishing, dynamiting, and bulldozing of tens of Arab villages. But, clearly the above suggestion of retrospective transfer cannot provide a proper framework for understanding the transfer issue in a wider historical context. The transfer committees of 1948 must be viewed within the framework of the expulsion policy of the war. Furthermore, transfer schemes had been put forward and discussed widely in Zionist congresses since the late 1930s. They were almost universally accepted by

mainstream Labor Zionism and a number of transfer committees were set up by the Jewish Agency between 1938 and 1942, with leading Zionists such as Moshe Sharett, Dov Yosef, and Eliezer Kaplan, looking into the possibilities of voluntary and compulsory transfer of the bulk of the Palestinian Arabs outside the Jewish state. Substantial Hebrew material regarding the transfer issue which has not yet been thoroughly researched, including Yosef Weitz's diaries and notebooks, provide a shocking glimpse into the evolution of transfer schemes and proposals from 1938 until the implementation of the policy in 1948.²⁵

Epilogue

The plethora of recent Israeli publications, both in Hebrew and English, on the 1948 War show a marked desire among the younger generation of Israeli authors and academics to unearth the truth concerning the events surrounding the Palestinian refugee exodus of 1948. This new tendency breaks the wall of silence, myth, secrecy, and censorship instituted by the older generation of Zionist leadership. Moreover, in spite of the questionable Zionist perspective of the recent writings, the younger generation of Israeli authors demonstrates a growing tendency toward academic integrity in dealing with what are very problematic issues for Zionist Israelis.²⁶

There is no single explanation for the revelations of recent Israeli scholarship. This openness must be seen in the wider context of the dissolution of the Zionist parties' consensus, which began with the 1967 occupations, increased by the 1973 War, and further developed in the late 1970s. In addition to the polarization of Israeli politics and the shift toward the right-wing Zionist parties, a great deal of confusion, contradictions, and frustrations has developed within "liberal/left-wing" Zionism and has resulted in the appearance of critical Zionist scholarship which questions the basic assumptions and conventions of the Israeli establishment. Further explanations for the new revelations may be found in the same context of the growing influence and domination of right-wing Zionist parties such as the Likud, Tehiyah, and others. The latter, parties which had incorporated the old IZL (Begin, Geula Cohen) and Lehi (Shamir), were blamed until 1977 by Labor Zionism for the brunt of the terrorist campaign of the late 1940s—the blowing up of the King David Hotel, the Dayr Yasin massacre, and so on. In their attempt to redress the balance, Likud-connected figures began revealing information about Palmach and Labor-dominated IDF expulsions during the war, such as those of Lydda and Ramlah.

Indeed, the present day tendency among the Likud politicians is to talk publicly and with brutal frankness about the mass expulsion of West Bankers and Gazans from the territories they are determined to annex. These same politicians, such as Knesset members Meir Cohen and Michael Dekel, deputy minister of defence, deplore the hypocrisy of the Labor Party and lament that "mistakes" were made in 1967 in not expelling the Arab population of the territories in the way Lydda and Ramlah were emptied in 1948.

Detailed and precise research on the history of the Palestinian exodus is too important a subject to be left to Israeli Zionist authors. At the same time, Israeli archival sources and Hebrew material are indispensable for any serious investigation into the subject. The Hebrew sources may contain a certain amount of the usual intelligence disinformation on the one hand, and unpalatable revelations about Palestinian public figures and their conduct throughout the exodus on the other. However, this must not form an obstacle to a critical approach to the mass of Israeli material on the exodus, wrapped though it is in a miasma of falsehood.



1. See article in the *Spectator*, 21 May 1961.
2. *Koteret Rashit*, 13 May 1986.
3. Meir Pa'il's testimony was recorded on 9 April 1948 and submitted to his military superior, Israel Galili. The testimony was published twenty-four years later in *Yedioot Aharonot*, 4 April 1972.
4. See article by Tom Segev in *Koteret Rashit*, 13 May 1986.
5. Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 53-54.
6. See Michael Palumbo, *The Palestinian Catastrophe* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), 39.
7. A graphic testimony of the massacre was provided by Dr. de Reynier in his book *A Jerusalem un drapeau flottait sur la ligne de feu* (Neuchâtel: la Baconnière), 68-74.
8. Palumbo, 48 and 218.
9. David Ben-Gurion, *Yoman HaMilhamah, 1948-49* [War Diary], vol. 1 (Tel Aviv, 1982), entry for 6 January 1948, 120.
10. Peel Commission Report, 391.
11. Ben-Gurion, *War Diary*, vol. 2 from statement at cabinet session, 16 June 1948, 525-26.
12. *Ibid.*, entry for 6 January 1948, 120.
13. *Ibid.*, vol. 3, entry for 10 November 1948, 807.
14. See Morris, 232-34 and 350-51.
15. See Morris, 207, 345, and 346; Rabin himself described his participation in the Lydda-Ramlah expulsion in a portion of his memoirs (*The Rabin Memoirs*, London, 1979), which was censored by the Israeli authorities. However, this information was released to the Western press by his translator, Peretz Kidron. See *New York Times*, 29 October 1979 and *Newsweek*, 9

- November 1979. See also Peretz Kidron, "Truth Whereby Nations Live." in *Blaming the Victims*, Edward Said and Christopher Hitchens (eds.) (New York: Verso, 1988).
16. Ben-Gurion, *War Diary*, vol. 3, entry for 6 December 1948, 866.
 17. See *Hadashot*, 24–26 August 1984; Morris, 221–23 and 348.
 18. See *Davar*, 6 September 1979.
 19. On Dayan's role in the Khisas raid see: Morris, 33 and 306; *Sefer Toldot HaHaganah* [The History of the Haganah], vol. 3, 2, 1415, and 1798; *Sefer HaPalmach* [The Book of the Palmach], vol. 2, 123–24. On the role that Dayan's 89th armored battallion played in the raid on Lydda on 11 July 1948 see: Morris, 205; Palumbo, 127.
 20. *Sefer HaPalmach*, vol. 2, 281–85.
 21. Morris, 102–105, 120–24.
 22. *Ibid.*, 219–224, 243–247.
 23. See Shahtai Teveth, *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs*, 189; Morris, 23–28; Uri Davis and Norton Mevinsky (eds.), *Documents from Israel, 1967-73*; Theodor Hertzl, *Complete Diaries* vol. 1, (ed.) Raphael Patai, 88; Simha Flapan, *Israel and the Palestinians*, 259–266; Yosef Heller, "Between Messianism and Realpolitik: The Stern Gang and the Arab Question," in Israel Gutman, (ed.) *Yahadut Zemanenu* (Contemporary Jewry), vol. I, 1983, 225; Y. Shavit, "The Attitude of Zionism Revisionism towards the Arabs," in S. Ettinger (ed.) *Zionism and the Arab Question*, 74.
 24. On the attitude of the Israeli government toward the Palestinian exodus, see the articles by Yoram Nimrod in 'Al *HaMishmar*, 5, 11, and 24 April 1985; 7 and 14 June 1985.
 25. Numerous references are made in Morris to Weitz' transfer schemes based on his notebooks and diaries. See also an article by Weitz on his proclaimed transfer solution in *Davar*, 29 September 1967.
 26. Among the various contributors to the recent scholarship are Uri Millstein, Benny Morris, Tom Segev, Yoram Nimrod, Avi Shlaim, Nativa Ben-Yehuda, and Meir Pa'il.

Bibliography

Throughout the last decade a large number of articles about events surrounding the 1948 war have been published in Israeli newspapers. These contain new revelations about the Palestinian exodus. These newspapers include *Ma'ariv*, *Ha'arets*, *Hadashot*, *Koteret Rashit*, 'Al *Hamishmar*, *Davar*, and *Jerusalem Post*.

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