

Critical Inquiry

Rethinking the Nakba

Elias Khoury

In his novel, “The Orchard” (1972) the Israeli writer Benjamin Tamouz, reformulated the image of the land as the arena of the struggle in Palestine. In this symbolic novella, the Israeli writer tried to go beyond the image of the Arab in the Israeli literature, as a dumb shadow. The dumb in this novella is Luna the woman who symbolizes the land. The struggle between the two brothers on her will end up with their consecutive deaths, and the son will appropriate the mother-land.

One can say that the very highly symbolic style in Tamouz’s work over shadowed the magic elements that a tale embodies. The memoirs of the narrator will show the limits of symbolism, and how the story of pain in the Palestinian Theater is erased by a poor mirroring of the old myth of Abraham and his two wives and sons.

Ishmael and Isaac will take the names of Obadiah (Abdullah) and Daniel, two brothers born to a Russian German father, the first from a Muslim Turkish mother, and the second from a Jewish Russian mother. Both will meet in the orchard of Mahomet Effendi, a Turkish land owner in Jaffa, who has an adopted girl, whose origins are vague, was she a Jewish or a Muslim Arab? No one knows.

The fight between the two brothers for the woman, who will take the shape of a mythical character, will end up with their death, and the mother will become pregnant from her Palmachi son.

One can read this novella as a new version of A.B. Yehushua’s story “Facing the forests”. The same dream of fire and the same ambiguities that veil the story of the indigenous Palestinians. In “Facing the Forests” not only the nameless Palestinian is called an Arab, but also the name of his original village disappeared along side the village itself under the forest. Whereas in the novella of Tammuz, the Palestinian is not even an Arab, he is the son of a Turkish mother, and the identity of his people is vague.

But the interesting development here is the woman who will resemble the orchard, or the Bayyara, as the Palestinians call their orchards. This woman is dumb, and she refused all through the novel to speak with her husband, the Russian immigrant, while there are signs that she spoke with her Muslim lover. What is sure is that she will speak

to her son, the new Jew, the Israeli Kibbutznik and soldier, who will inherit his two fathers by his sword?

The Arab or the Muslim is not dumb in “The Orchard”, and he is not the ghost of the two Arab twins Khalil and Aziz haunting the dreams of Hanna with rape, in “My Michael” of Amos Oz (1968), he is a partner and an enemy, and his death will declare the new Jew, as the legitimate heir of the mother and the land.

The twins in the novel of Amos Oz are two ghosts infiltrating from a vague childhood memory of a Gloom and dark Jerusalem, whereas the Arab in “Facing the Forest”, is represented as a man whose tongue was cut, and whose memories can only express themselves through the fire that will eat the trees, thus becoming only an agent for the Jewish young scholar to discover the land and appropriate it.

In the novella of Tammuz, the land is mute, Luna, the lover of the two brothers can not speak for herself, and her appropriation by the son, who will become her true lover, will be accomplished with the fire of 2 consecutive wars, the war of 1948, which the Israelis call the war of independence, and the Palestinians saw it as their Nakba or disaster, and the invasion of Egypt by the Israeli army in 1956, along side with the British and French troops in the Suez campaign.

The question of muteness is not only a literary problem; it is an integral part of a literary paradigm.

One must note that this way of seeing the struggle in Palestine was also loaded with direct symbolism in the Palestinian Literature. The first Palestinian novella narrating aspects of the Nakba written by Ghassan Kanafani and published in 1963, (the same year of the publication of Yehushua’s novella, was also loaded with a similar heavy allegorical aspect. “Men in the Sun” relates the story of three Palestinian generations in the search of individual salvation, and their tragic death in the desert without obtaining the chance to knock the walls of the water tank, where they were hiding in order to be smuggled to Kuwait.

How can one understand this similarity in both literatures?

One can argue that this was not the case in the Israeli literature, and will refer to the major novella of S. Yizhar “Khirbit Khiza” (1949), as a realistic testimony of the war of 1948.

I have argued that this novella is a very important and impressing work, and it is a rare demonstration of the ability of literature to cross the walls of dominant representations, but on the other hand “Khirbet Khiza” respected the lines that can’t be crossed. The Palestinian peasants who were driven out from their village are voiceless, they are a part of a landscape that was in violent transformation during the war, and their role in the story is limited to the biblical paradigm, where they remind the Jews of their need to redemption, and give them the possibility to have their own Jews.

This literary work was unique in the Israeli Literature of the generation of the war, and when the story will be related by the next generation of writers, they will keep the limits and lines drawn by Yizhar.

One can argue that relating the story of a human tragedy in such an indirect way was a demonstration of the muteness of language, facing the cruelty of history. But let us try to define this notion of muteness. Is Language mute? What is the meaning and the connotations of a literature written without a tongue?

I will try in this paper to read the Palestinian Nakba, through this situation of muteness that will give the Palestinians their status in the post 1948, as the Jews of the Jews.

Literature is not and can't be a historical reference, and all the novels and poems, both Israeli and Palestinian, that related fragments of the Nakba, can't be treated as documents, but they can be conceived as mirrors of the different trends in the ideological scene. Knowing that these mirrors are parts of the history of the genre, one must not neglect the literary tendencies, and schools. In this sense we can't study the early works of Oz and Yehushua and Kanafani without understanding the huge impact of French existentialism on the world literary scene. On the other hand the ideological approaches: The Canaanite movement in Israel, and the revival of the Marxist realism in the Arab World, will give us a better understanding of the works of Tammuz and Kanafani and Emile Habibi.

I suggest that the "Orchard" can play a major role in clarifying, the muteness of language.

First, we have the Binding of Isaac (the Akeda), as an approach and a theme of sacrifice and victimization.

Second the reference to Luna, the moon goddess, is essential. She is the ageless mother, who embodies the histories of the two brothers, playing the role of an archetype.

Third the feud between the two brothers, that will cover the real history with myths.

Questions like who is the real lover and father, who is right and who is wrong, will be rendered meaningless the moment the Palmachi son kills his uncle- father and make love to his mother.

The new Israeli is the issue and not the Jew. Daniels words in the end of the novella will be a hopeless scream. The Jew will die in the orchard hoping to meet the shadow of his dead Muslim brother, but his voice will be echoing emptiness.

"You see that the orchard serves as a cover and hiding place for all sorts of things that have no justice in them, Said Daniel.

... Yes, no justice in them, he repeated his words firmly. I came to the land of my fathers so that I can live a life of justice and honesty,

and look, what have I done? I have made a dark orchard, a sanctuary for wrongdoers. I murdered my brother in the orchard.

... Perhaps burn it, Daniel whispered. If we burn it, bare trunks will remain, and it will be possible to see from one end to the other, everything will be transparent and clear again”.

The orchard was not burned, as in the case of “Facing the Forests”, and the fire of Yehushua will purify no one, on the contrary, it will become part of the conquest of the land through appropriating it, and inheriting a map with the traces of fire.

The allegorical nature of this novella will give the narrator a kind of freedom that will permit him to erase the Palestinian from the map of the land. Obadiah is not a Palestinian; he is half Jewish half Turkish. And the dispute with his brother is demonstrated in the frame of the Canaanite approach about the Hebraic people. The non existing Palestinian is not a small detail here; it is the issue that dominates the whole approach.

The Palestinian writer Anton Shammas was obliged to redraw the two twins Khalil and Aziz in “My Michael” as two deaf mute sons of Surraya Said in his novel “Arabesque”. The struggle between the victor and the defeated, will take the form of a struggle about who of them will be the story teller.

The irony of deafness is a metaphor of the muteness of the Israeli story.

Amos Oz will frame the conflict as a struggle between two absolute justices: “As I see it the confrontation between the people that returns to Zion and the Arab inhabitants of the country is not like a western film or saga, but like a tragedy. Tragedy is not a conflict between “light” and “darkness”, between justice and crime; it is a clash between total justice and total justice”.

This definition of the struggle will erase the notion of crime, and instead of producing a human image of the enemy, it falls in stereotypes, and make from the other a window to the inner psychological worries on one hand, and a mere part of the landscape on the other.

Khalil and Aziz will become nightmares, and their inability to speak, will leave the story incomplete.

Hilmy in “The smile of the Lamb”, by David Grossman, is different, He is nature incarnated but his difference will not take him far from the paradigm of Israeli literature. He will play the role of the agent of the story of the lamb, Yuri will become his son, and Katzman will pay the price.

Although Grossmans novel is written in the frame of the occupation of the West Bank, after the six days war, and has very little to do with the deep questions of justice and justifying of the creation of the

Jewish State, but it couldn't escape the frame of the Akeda, and was unable to give the Palestinian his own and distinct voice.

The muteness of Literature is part of the muteness of history, or to put it in other words, part of the inability of the victim to write the story.

Anton Shammas formulated the struggle as a struggle related to the story teller. Who will own the story and the language, to use the words of the Palestinian great poet Mahmud Darwish, will own the land, because "land is inherited like language".

The Journey from the "Orchard" of Benjamin Tamouz to "The land of Sad Oranges", as Palestine is named after Ghassan Kanafani, was long. The Palestinian story will be under the trauma of the Nakba, and will try through symbols, metaphors, parody to find its own voice.

I want to sign out here, the major role of poetry in this process, and mainly the poems of Mahmud Darwish. Darwish did not only reproduce the invisible Palestinian name, buried under the rubbles of the Nakba, but he also told the story. In his autobiographical long poem "Why did you leave the Horse Alone", the poet will become a story teller and will participate in structuring the narrative of the Nakba, through creating the epic of the defeated.

But we can argue that also the Israeli is not represented in the Palestinian story.

Here we have to admit that in the majority of this literature this can be true, but there are three elements that will challenge this assumption profoundly.

- 1- The infiltration of Biblical myths in the Palestinian poetry.
- 2- The major novel of Ghassan Kanafani "Return to Haifa" (1969), where fragments of the Nakba are narrated, and where the Arab reader will meet Miriam, a holocaust survivor, who embodies in her story the Jewish tragedy.
- 3- The Emergence of Rita, as a stable figure of the lover in the poetry of Darwish. An Israeli girl will occupy the love myth in modern Arabic Poetry.

What I want to point out here is that literature is also an arena of misunderstanding. The absence of the Palestinian in modern Israeli literature, and his presence as a ghost embodies all the problems of this long conflict.

The Palestinians call this conflict the Nakba or Catastrophe. The term was coined by Constantine Zureik, a Syrian Historian, and one of the intellectual father figures of the Arab National movement. The

term was very problematic; its philological root has the connotation of a natural catastrophe.

Many intellectuals refused this term; arguing that it liberates the Palestinian leadership and the Arab governments from their direct responsibilities for the defeat.

The critics of Zureik had a major point, but words have their own histories, and when a word becomes an untranslatable proper name, we have to try to understand the wisdom of language.

In his small book, "The Meaning of the Nakba", published in 1948, before the end of the war in Palestine, Zureik's idea was that the creation of Israel was the major and most dangerous challenge facing the Arab World in the twentieth century. His modernist and rational approach was an early alert to the Arab elites, declaring that facing the Nakba can only be possible through radical changes in all the aspects of Arab life.

Zureik's approach was part of the discourse of "AL INKILAB" a term frequently used by Arab nationalists under Ottoman rule, and became popularized by Michel Aflaq in his book "Fi Sabil Al Baath". This ambiguous term that meant something between a coup and a revolution, will take the form of continuous military coups following the Egyptian model of 1952. The creation of military dictatorships will lead the Arab World to a situation of Political misery. The disastrous defeat of 1967, will lead Zureik to publish a new version of his book, entitled "The meaning of the Nakba once again" (1967), leaving the questions of the first book without answers.

The analyses of Zureik, with all its prophetic elements, neglected the nature of the Nakba. His hypothesis was built upon two elements:

1- The Nakba was an outcome of backwardness that must be replaced by modernism, and rationality.

2- The Nakba is a historical event that happened once in 1948. It is a national catastrophe, and the nation (the reference here is to the Arab nation) is responsible to find an adequate answer to it.

Although Zureik analyzed the Zionist movement as a colonial project, but his understanding of the Jewish problem and the impact of the holocaust, was schematic, and he did not understand that the new world order after the Second World War, and the interests of the two emerging super powers, will give the Zionist project many elements of superiority, and make it possible.

But the main point in Zureik's analysis was the hypothesis that the Nakba was a moment in history, and that the Palestinians and the Arabs, will begin after 1948 their new awakening in order to face this challenge.

Although the small book of Zureik was written during the Palestinian War of 1948, it did not take into consideration the fact that the Zionist victory in 1948 was the beginning of the process and not its end.

The Arab nationalist thought will stay under the influence of this small book, and the nationalist strategy led by Nasser of Egypt will concentrate upon accepting the borders of the cease fire, in the hope that one day, the Arab military force will solve this problem.

This day never came, and on the contrary, the spectacular defeat of Egypt and Syria and Jordan, and the occupation of all of Palestine in 1967, will demonstrate that 1948 was the date of the new beginning of the Israeli project, and that the national discourse, understood this major turning point in the history of the Arab World with the tools of the past.

Edward Said's book "The Question of Palestine" can be seen as part of this lineage of thought that began with the small book of Zureik. But what Said did must be conceived as a radically new approach to the question of Palestine, Zureik understood the Nakba as a historical event that must be the base for a new Arab awareness of history. The author of "Orientalism", will analyze it in a global perspective, and read it in the context of the colonial movement in the 19th and 20th centuries, and as a point of departure for what Said used to call the idea of Palestine.

The book of Said published in 1979, is a concrete political application of his book "Orientalism". Putting the idea of Palestine in the heart of world's history, will give this idea its universal dimension, and make it one of the references of justice and freedom. The Zionist conquest, according to Said is part of a global European colonial project, where the Zionist movement adopted the colonial discourses and practices.

Palestine is a field of struggle between presence and interpretation. The Palestinian presence will be the victim of the Israeli interpretation. The victory of interpretation through military force, will lead to the catastrophe.

The negation of the Palestinian presence in the land is a reincarnation of the Orientalist discourse, covered by a progressive and socialist terminology built around the myth of the kibbutzim.

It is one of the major ironies of history that the victims of European racism and anti-Semitism will adopt the racial discourse of their victimizers, to the extent that the Israeli new historian Benny Morris, who was a leading figure in the New historian movement in Israel will identify with the Roman Empire, making an analogy between the struggle of the Romans against the Barbarians, and the struggle of Israel in the so called war against terrorism.

In his novel, "Said the pessoptimist", Emile Habiby uses parody in order to forge a popular personality, with a combination of intelligence and stupidity, that can incarnate the experience of the Palestinian minority in Israel. The Palestinian individual has to defend his presence in his country against the Israeli assumption of his absence.

Most of the critical readings of this book gave the personality of Said the central role. He is The Palestinian Israeli par excellence. All his attempts to adjust and collaborate are in vain. He is a tragic hero, and his humor is black. A Palestinian Candide, who mixes optimism with pessimism in order to rationalize an irrational way of life.

In the mosque of AlJazzar in Aka, Said will meet the refugees from different demolished villages in upper Galilee. The women and their children who are waiting deportation in the mosque became the shadows of the atrocities of the Nakba that will frame the three women of the novel, Yaad the first, Yaad the second and Bakia.

These three women incarnate the process of the Nakba. The attempts of return by the two Yaad, and the relationship between Bakia and her secret, blur the frontiers between the Palestinian past and present, and put the story in the context of an opened tragedy.

How we can read the Nakba today and what is the place of memory in this reading?

The realities of the Nakba as an ethnic cleansing can no more be neglected or negated after the works of the Palestinian historian Walid Al Khalidy, and the works of the new Israeli historians.

The ethnic cleansing as incarnated by the plan Dalet is no more a matter of debate between historians, even when the new Zionist historians in Israel justify it, as indispensable.

On February 14, 1948, during the 1948 War the Palestinian village Sa'sa' was invaded by the Palmach, the elite unit of the Haganah, precursor to the Israel Defense Forces, whose commander was Yigal Alon. The villagers did not resist, but thirty-five houses were destroyed and 60-80 people were killed.

Israeli historian Ilan Pappé describes the incident in his book *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, drawing on a report by the commander of the battalion responsible for the attack, Moshe Kalman. "The order was very clear: you have to blow up twenty houses and kill as many warriors (read villagers) as possible. Sa'sa' was attacked at midnight. The New York Times (16 April 1948) reported that the large

unit of the Jewish troops encountered no resistance from the residents as they entered the village, and began attaching TNT to the houses. “We ran into an Arab Guard, Kalman recounted later, he was so surprised that he didn’t ask *Min hada*, who is it? But *Iesh hada*, what is it? One of our troops who knew Arabic responded humorously *Hada Iesh*, this is (in Arabic) fire in Hebrew, and shot a volley into him. Kalman’s troops took the main street of the village, and systematically blew one house after another while farmers were still sleeping inside”.

Are we speaking here about misunderstanding? Why *iesh* (what in Arabic and fire in Hebrew) became so essential in the events of the Nakba? Were the Palestinians unaware of the realities of the Zionist movement? Or they were weak and unable to understand the difference between fire and language?

Most probably it was both, a mixture of unawareness and weakness, and a feeling of betrayal and hopelessness.

The facts about 1948 are no more contested by any one, but the meaning of what happened is still a big question. Was it a struggle between two absolute rights, as Amos Oz formulated it?

Before tackling this issue, I want to point out, that I am questioning in this paper the whole approach of dealing with the Nakba as a historical event that happened in the past, and once for all. My hypothesis is totally different: what happened didn’t stop to take place since 62 years, and it is still happening now, the moment I am presenting this paper.

The Palestinians lost in 1948 the four main aspects of their lives:

1- They lost their land, which was confiscated by the new born Israeli state. 80 per cent of the Palestinian population was peasants, who became refugees, living in camps in the outskirts of different Arab cities, in the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Even in Israel, the peasants of the destroyed Arab Villages became refugees in other villages, and had no right to return to their original homes, although they became the citizens of the new state.

2- They also lost their cities, the major three coastal cities Jaffa, Haifa and Aka were occupied and their citizens evacuated. Jaffa The biggest Palestinian harbor on the Mediterranean and the cultural center

of Palestine will become a small poor suburb of Tel Aviv. Jerusalem will be divided along the new borders of 1948, and the Palestinian neighborhoods of west Jerusalem will be evacuated. Haifa will face the implementation of the first Palestinian ghetto in Israel. The Israeli historian Tom Segev will give a full description of this process in his book "The first Israelis". Aka will become totally marginalized, and the historical old city will become the refuge of many Palestinian refugees.

The destruction of the Palestinian cities will leave the Palestinians without any cultural reference, and will create a huge cultural vacuum. We have to wait till the sixties, to witness the emergence of a new Palestinian culture, that will take place in Haifa and Nazareth in the milieu of *Al Itihad* newspaper (the organ of the Israeli communist party, with Emile Habibi as its editor), and in Beirut with the emergence of a new Palestinian consciousness, with Ghassan Kanafani, as its leading figure.

3- They lost their Palestinian name. Suddenly a whole people became nameless, and have no right to use his name and refer to his national identity.

This was one of the most painful elements of the 1948 war. One can argue that Palestine never existed as an independent state. This is true not only for Palestine, but also for most of the countries of the region. But this land was known to every one as the land of Palestine. Even in the Zionist documents this name was used. The people who inhabited this land are known as Palestinians. Suddenly the name will vanish. The small Palestinian minority in Israel will be called by the new authorities The Arabs of Eretz Israel. The Palestinians of the West Bank that was annexed to Jordan after the war of 1948 will become Jordanians, and the others who were scattered in Lebanon and Syria will become refugees.

Appropriating the name will become a major issue with the emergence of a new Palestinian literature in the Sixties. Insisting upon the name in the poem of Mahmud Darwish "Lover from Palestine" (1966), where the woman who is also the incarnation of the land will be named Palestinian several times, as if the name incarnates the identity, and will become the precondition of a political revival. This insistence upon the name will become a major element in the Palestinian literature, and will take different forms: The voice of the peasants (Darwish), the refugee (Kanafani), the intellectual (Jabra Ibrahim Jabra), the story teller (Shammas), and the popular hero (Habibi).

The name will be totally regained after the Arab defeat of 1967, when the Pan Arab nationalist ideology will begin its agony, and when the Palestinian political movement will find its homeland in exile with the P.L.O.

4- They lost their story, or their ability to tell the story. I want here to suggest the replacement of muteness by deafness in “Facing the Forests” of Yehushua, and “Men In the sun” of Kanafani. The narrator of the Israeli story begins with the hypothesis that the Arab (this is how the Israeli Palestinian is named) is mute and his tongue was cut. On the other hand, the narrator of the Palestinian story ends his novel by the driver of the water tank Abul Khaizaran shouting, “Why they did not knock”.

We know that the narrator of the Israeli story doesn't know Arabic, what if his ignorance led him to suppose that the Arab is mute. The muteness of the other who does not speak our language was part of a long tradition in classical languages, The Arabs used to name someone who don't speak Arabic as “A ‘Jami”, or mute. May be the inability of the Israeli, to understand the Palestinian, led him to call him mute. While in the story of Kanafani there is no reason to believe the narrator, he is sure of something he can't prove, who told him that the three poor Palestinians didn't knock? Even if they have knocked, he was unable to hear them because he was inside a closed room, with the heavy sounds of air-conditioning, trapped with the silly investigation by the Kuwaiti policeman, about his sexual adventures in Basra. The impotence of Abu Al Khaizaran will take its full meaning with this last trap of deafness.

The Iraqi film maker Tawfic Saleh in his adaptation of “Men in the Sun” changed the end in his film “The Dupes” (1972). In the last part of this interesting film, we see the knocking. Saleh justified the small/huge change he had done, by the changing political reality, and the emergence of the Palestinian resistance movement.

The reading of the film director, was very faithful to the novel, and this film with its realistic structure, and the fluidity of the flash backs, was considered as the beginning of a new wave in modern Arabic movie production. What Saleh missed, is the possibilities of interpreting the symbol through the realities of the present, thus we can introduce the hypothesis that the Palestinian became mute in the story, because the Israeli narrator didn't want to hear him, and/or because the Kuwaiti policemen and the Palestinian driver developed deafness out from their impotence.

The two stories written by Kanafani and Yehushua echo each others. Symbolism that dominates the two works is a sign of the difficulties facing the unfolding of the story of Palestine, not because the story is not there but because there is nobody to hear it.

The misunderstanding in the village of Sa'sa', was based upon one word, *Iesh*, it was both the question and the answer, the astonished poor peasant didn't realize that answering him with his own question, is not a sign of misunderstanding, but a sign of death.

Death will cover the stories of the Nakba with silence. The symbolic representation of the Palestinian in the Israeli literature, and /or his status as a shadow or a young boy or a Bedouin, will make his story invisible, and will destroy his or her ability to find an audience.

This absent audience is due a major fact, the Palestinian is the victim of the victim. His tragedy is covered by another tragedy, and his victimizer is The Victim of European racism, who was taken to the gas chambers in a special historical moment of madness when the Nazis were trying to impose the final solution.

We can argue that the Zionist movement has nothing to do with the holocaust victims and survivors; it is a colonial movement, based upon combining modern nationalism with a mythical story. This is true, but not reasonable. Historians of Zionism will tell us that the movement dominated the Jewish consciousness only after the holocaust and because of it.

The Western world found that washing its hands from the Jewish blood with Palestinian blood, is the easiest way to cut with the atrocities of the Second World War. The Palestinians were alone; nobody was ready to hear the story of their pain, even the voices of Marten Buber and Hanna Arendt who defended the idea of a bi national state, refusing the transfer of the native Palestinians was neglected and not accepted.

Tom Segev relates the story of Deir Yassine, the Palestinian village that was massacred on April 9 1948 by the Ergun. Buber tried to convince the Israeli Prime Minister David Ben- Gurion to keep the village empty and as a memorial site, the demand of the Jewish philosopher was refused, and today one can go to the place to discover the Israeli mental hospital built on the site of the crime.

When Jean Paul Sartre visited the refugee camps in Gaza in 1965, he gave the Arab intellectuals a major lesson of the meaning of silence. In the fifties and sixties, the French existentialist philosopher was the model of the engaged intellectual. His popularity among the Arab intellectuals was huge, especially after his positions against the French war in Algeria, and his introduction to the book of Franz Fanon "The Wretched of the Earth".

Sartre refused to speak; no one can forget that his condition to visit Egypt was the release of all the leftist intellectuals who were imprisoned by the regime of Nasser. But when the issue missed Israel, he was unwilling or unable to speak.

No one was ready to hear, even in the Arab world, where the Palestinian refugees became a reminder of defeat, the Palestinians were silenced, and there Nakba will take new forms.

The Palestinians under their trauma rebuilt their lives through imagination; in the alleys of the miserable refugee camps they renamed the neighborhoods after their destroyed villages. Their silence was their secret way to make from their loss a way of life.

The occupation/unification of all of Palestine, i.e. The West Bank and Gaza in 1967, will witness the emergence of the Palestinian national movement, and the major role of the Palestinian literature, in creating the new image of the Palestinian identity, where fragments of the stories of 1948 began to be told and heard.

The specificity of the Palestinian Nakba, lies not only in the loss of the major four elements of the Palestinian life, that I tried to analyze briefly, but in the fact that it is a continuous tragedy, a catastrophe without borders in space or limits in time. The Nakba is taking place now in Palestine; it is not history to be remembered, but a present threatened by interpretation, to use the words of Edward Said.

We can suggest a typology of this continuous Nakba, and speak about its ways inside Palestine and in the neighboring countries, thus presenting a history of the region with its wars and civil wars, occupation and oppression.

I want to suggest an outline permitting us to read the different pages of the Nakba from the expulsion of 1948 to the Wall and settlements in the West Bank, and the expulsions that are taking place nowadays in Jerusalem.

In this outline we can notice five elements:

1- The confiscation of the Palestinian land that continued after the end of the war of 1948, two villages: akrot and bir'im give only an example of the destinies of those who stayed as strangers in their homeland, and lived under military rule till 1965, and their status as second class citizens in the democratic Jewish state of Israel.

2- The hunt of the infiltrators, where the Palestinian peasants tried to cross back the borders in order to join their homes or to collect their harvest. Emile Habibi in "Said the Pessoptimist" gave us examples of these cases, and Mahmud Darwish in his autobiographical poem: "In the Presence of Absence", relates his personal story as a boy of 8 when he crossed the Lebanese Borders with his parents and siblings, to discover that their village Al Birwa was demolished.

3- The refugee camps with their structure as a combination of slums and ghettos, and the oppression the Palestinians suffered in the different Arab countries. (Political oppression, work, education, travel...)

4- The occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, and the new structure of settlements, oppression, the wall, the continuous confiscation of land and property, the uprooting of trees, siege... which make the occupation a continuation of the war of 1948. Even the retreat from Gaza, became a way to create a ghetto under siege and fire.

5- The massacres of the Palestinian camps, Jordan 1970, Lebanon since 1975, and the major two massacres of Tal Al Zaatar camp (1976) and Shatila and Sabra (1982), are a continuation with new tools of the massacres of 1948.

This schematic outline is full of stories of pain and loss, thus the idea that when we speak about the Nakba, we are dealing with the events and atrocities that happened in 1948, is misleading. The Nakba is not only a memory, but it is a continuous reality that did not stop since 1948. Dealing with it as a history of the past, is a way to cover the struggle between presence and interpretation that never stopped since 1948.

Memory can be a trap and the Nakba as only a memory is the biggest trap that can mislead any rational analyses of the Palestinian Present.

We don't need to prove anymore what is now considered as a historical fact. What two generations of Palestinian historians and chronicles tried to prove, became an accepted reality after the emergence of the Israeli new historians. There is no more any point in negating the "nuanced" facts revealed by Benny Morris in his book: "The birth of the Palestinian refugee problem" (1988), these nuanced facts will become solid ones, through the works of other historians, mainly Ilan Pappé's master work: "The ethnic cleansing of Palestine" (2006), where he proved that there was a master plan of expulsion, and takes us to the "red house", and reveals the details of the plan Dalet.

No one will argue about names like "operation Dani", or "operations" Hiram" and "dekel". Many stories of massacres, rape, expulsion, are known, and many other stories still to be revealed. Tantoura, Safsaf, Ein Al Zaitun, Sa'sa', Sha'ab, Kabri, Abu Shousha, Ai'laloun, and so on...

The Palestinian historian Walid Al Khalidy, considered since 1961 that the plan Dalet was a "master plan of the conquest of Palestine", Ilan Pappé led us in his book to the red house in Tel Aviv, which became by the end of 1947 the headquarters of the Haganah. In a meeting held in this house, March 10 1947, the final touches of the plan Dalet for the ethnic cleansing of Palestine was put. And in 6 months the mission was completed.

The red house is not there anymore, but the traces of what happened in those six months are everywhere in the land of Palestine.

The memories of 1948, that were covered by the cynical negations of the official Israeli historiography is unveiled now, but there are signs that a new wave of Israeli historiography is trying to justify what happened, putting it in the frame of historical memories.

Justification is problematic on the ethical level; nothing can justify ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The only possible justification, which is also immoral, is to put these crimes in the realm of history. Who can judge history? One can argue, we can take lessons from history, but judging it morally has no political implications.

What we are witnessing now is the emergence of what one can call the new Israeli Zionist history. In an article published in the *Journal of Palestine studies* (autumn 2010) Ilan Pappé analyzed this major transition based upon a collective work entitled: "Israel War of Independence 1948-1949" (in Hebrew), edited by Alon Kadish, a former head of the history department at the Hebrew University. What is interesting in this book is its ethical approach. The atrocities of 1948 are read in a theological approach that justifies the ethnic cleansing as a necessity to avoid a new showa.

Benny Morris made a political revision to his revisionist history of Israel. In an interview with *Haaretz*, January 9 2004, he didn't only give a justification of the ethnic cleansing of 1948, but he also spoke about the possibilities of a new wave of transfer of the Palestinians, not only from the West Bank, but also from Israel.

His justification is simple: "I don't think that the expulsions of 1948 are war crimes. You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs; you have to dirty your hands... A society that aims to kill you forces you to destroy it. When the choice was between destroying and being destroyed, it is better to destroy".

This assumption contradicts another assumption, where Morris declares with clear words that expulsion was a pre condition for the declaration of a Jewish state. This has nothing to do with a threat, but is the outcome of an offensive act by the Israeli leadership. " ... Of course Ben-Gurion was a transferist... if he had not done what he did; a state would not have come into being. That has to be clear. Without the uprooting of the Palestinians, a Jewish state would not have arisen here".

Benny Morris goes a little further and criticized the first Israeli prime minister for not accomplishing the job: "I think he made a serious historical mistake in 1948... If Ben-Gurion had carried out a large expulsion and cleansed the whole country, the whole land of Israel as far as the Jordan River, this place would be quitter and knows less suffering".

The most important idea in this interview is that the Israeli historian understands that what he is dealing with is not the past but the present, this is why he suggests to put the Palestinians in cages, and make a prophecy of the coming transfer that will accomplish the work Ben-Gurion left behind in 1948.

What Benny Morris told us, while defending the ethnic cleansing, is that we are not only speaking about the past, but mainly about the present and the future.

The old Zionist discourse that interpreted the Palestinian presence by negation, is now taking a new phase, through admitting that this negation was a planned act with a structured rational, and that this rational clarifies why peace, or what was called the peace process was an illusion.

The justifications can vary between the fear from a new holocaust and the Islam phobia that considers the Arabs and Muslims as the new barbarians threatening Rome. But they arrive to the same conclusion: The Nakba is an Arab memory and an Israeli continuous action in the same time. Although, with the Israeli new law, the native Palestinians are forbidden from commemorating their Nakba, but the world must admit that what has happened, and what is happening now, is a memory of the past that must be forgotten.

The major Palestinian error in the Oslo agreement was that the Palestinian surrender presupposed that the Nakba is the past, and didn't understand that the Nakba is still in the making. This is why the surrender of the Palestinian leadership was without any horizon, and took the shape of a trap.

The Nakba is a continuous process, 1948 was its major event, but it never stopped. It went through different phases, and took different shapes. The Palestinians are absent, and/ or absents presents, and/ or the barbarians dreaming of bloodshed and rape.

The image of Khalil and Aziz in "My Michael" is not the product of the hallucinations of Hanna, but rather an archetype of the absent mute Palestinian. One can ask, what is the meaning of two absolute justices if one of the two has no tongue? What is the meaning of the words when the voices of the two brothers in the "Orchard" will be melting inside a symbol that transcends reality and push it towards myths and allegory?

My personal relationship with the Nakba began through the long process of work on my novel "The Gate of the Sun". I discovered that the love story I wanted to write need the background of the events that took place in northern Palestine in 1948. I felt that my job was to collect memories, and write stories never written before. In this huge

personal journey, I discovered Palestine, a land I never visited. But the secret that was revealed to me, as it is the case with literature, where the writer and the readers will discover the generosity of life, my secret in *Gate of the Sun*, was that 1948 is not a year. 1948 is a long period of time that began in that year and was disguised in the names of the years that followed.

My novel was published in 1998, to narrate 50 years of the Nakba, and twelve years after the publication of my book, I see the Nakba as a process without an end.

I tried to create mirrors instead of allegories and metaphors; the allegory pretends reflecting reality, while mirrors reflect other mirrors. My stories were mirrors of stories and pain was mirroring pain.

My hypotheses were that once we write the pain we push it to the realm of memory, and make from it a past that we can transcend in order to build a future.

But the story betrayed my presuppositions, the protagonists were not revealing their memories, on the contrary, they were living their present, their stories were not the past but the present, and their pain was not the memories of pain, but the experience of their daily lives.

This is why my feeling is that “*Gate of the Sun*” is an unfinished novel, and it will stay opened till the moment when this wound will be healed.

I am neither a nihilist nor a pessimist; I think that the moment will come, when the peoples of the Mashreq will wake from this nightmare, to discover that life is possible without wars and massacres and madness, and that Man is not the slave of myths and ideologies, and the rights of minorities will only be guaranteed in the region and by its peoples through democracy and the respect of human rights.