60 years after the Nakba
by Dr Nur Masalha

1948 was the year of the Nakba, or the 'catastrophe'. The 'catastrophe', the 60th anniversary of which the Palestinians are commemorating this year, was their expulsion from their homeland. Dr Nur Masalha analyses and traces the background to this traumatic event which set into motion a process which eventually resulted in some 70% of the Palestinian people being turned into refugees.

1948 saw the establishment of a settler-colonial Zionist state on 78% of Mandatory Palestine was carried out as an integral part of the infamous Plan Dalet and through the systematic use of terror and a series of massacres, of which the massacre of Deir Yasin in April 1948 was the most notorious.

The Nakba resulted in the destruction of much of Palestinian society, and much of the Arab landscape was obliterated by the Zionist state - a state created by the Ashkenazi Jewish yishuv, a predominantly European settler-colonial community that immigrated into Palestine in the period between 1882 and 1948. From the territory occupied by the Israeli state in 1948, about 90% of the Palestinians were driven out - many by psychological warfare and /or military pressure and a very large number at gunpoint. The 1948 war simply provided the opportunity and the necessary background for the creation of a Jewish state largely free of Palestinians. It concentrated Jewish-Zionist minds, and provided the security, military and strategic explanations and justifications for 'purging' the Jewish state and dispossessing the Palestinian people.2

The Nakba has become in Palestinian history and collective memory the demarcation line between two contrasting periods; it changed the lives of the Palestinians at the individual and national levels drastically and irreversibly; it also continues to inform and structure Palestinians' lives. Denied the right to independence and statehood, the Palestinians were treated after 1948 as 'refugees'-either as a 'humanitarian problem', deserving the support of international aid agencies and, more specifically, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), or as an 'economic problem' requiring 'dissolution' through resettlement and employment schemes (Masalha 2003).

But the 'ethnic cleansing' of the Nakba and the displacement of Palestinians did not end with the 1948 war, and the Israeli authorities continued to 'transfer' and dispossess Palestinians during the 1950s (Masalha 1997). Israel instituted a military government and declared Palestinian villages 'closed military zones' to prevent displaced Palestinians from returning. The Israeli army and the Jewish National Fund (JNF) became the two Zionist institutions key to ensuring that the Palestinian refugees were unable to return to their lands, through complicity in the destruction of Palestinian villages and homes and their transformation into Jewish settlements, national parks, forests and even car parks. The JNF also planted forests in the depopulated villages to 'conceal' Palestinian existence. In the post-1948 period the minority of Palestinians (160,000) who remained behind, many of them internally displaced, became second-class citizens, subject to a system of military administration by a government that confiscated the bulk of their lands. Today almost a quarter of the 1.3 million Palestinian citizens of Israel are 'internal refugees'.3

Although the ocean of refugee suffering is bound to be perceived as unique by the Palestinian people, it is, however, resonant with all extreme human suffering, including historical Jewish persecution and suffering in Europe. Surely the Nakba and ongoing Palestinian suffering are a reminder of the reality of the suffering of Jews in Europe. It is precisely because of the Jewish holocaust that the truth about the Palestinian Nakba and the continuing horrific suffering of the Palestinian people have remained invisible to enlightened public opinion in the West. Of course acknowledging the truth of what took

place in Europe can never morally justify the uprooting of another people outside of Europe and the destruction of historical Palestine.

The foundational myths of Zionism

It is frequently argued that Zionism is in essence an unchanging idea that expresses 2,000 years of yearning for Jewish political and religious self-determination to be exercised over the 'promised land'. Because political Zionism has culminated in the creation of the state of Israel, it is also often argued that its historical realisation has confirmed its unchanging essence, and no less important, the brutal means used for its realisation. Very little is said about the actual genealogy and provenance of Zionism, especially the European settler-colonial context of the late 19th century from which Zionism drew its force; and almost nothing is said about what the creation of the state of Israel entailed for the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine. Despite its distinct features and its nationalist ideology, political Zionism followed the general trajectory of colonialist projects in Africa, Asia and Latin America: European colonising of another people's land while seeking to remove or subjugate the indigenous inhabitants of the land.

'Land redemption' (geolat adama), 'land conquest' (kibbush adama), emigration, settler colonisation and demographic transformation of the land, the Judaisation of Palestine and the Hebraicisation of its landscape and geographical sites have all been permanent themes of modern Zionism. The analogies between Eastern and Central European populist nationalisms and Labour Zionism: Zionist nationalist socialists repudiated liberal individualism and were suspicious of bourgeois liberal democracy. In this illiberal legacy of Labour Zionism, Israeli historian Zeev Sternhell finds the seeds of current Israeli problems - the lack of a constitution, an inadequate concept of universal human rights, the failure to separate religion and state, etc. Deflating the socialist pretensions of Labour Zionism, Sternhell explains that socialist Zionists and the right-wing Revisionist movement of Betar, founded by a Russian Jew, Vladimir (Zeev) Jabotinsky (1880-1940), through Menahem Begin (1913-1992) and Yitzhak Shamir to Binyamin Netanyahu, were all integral nationalists. The settler-colonial legacy of Labour Zionism, with its obsession with land settlement, ethnic and demographic separation (hafrada), continued after the founding of the Israeli state in 1948. With no social perspectives or ideological directions beyond a racialist volkisch nationalism and mystical attitudes towards the land, based on abstract 'historical rights to the whole land of Israel', the mould set in the pre-state period did not change. After 1967, unable to come to terms with Palestinian nationalism, Labour Zionism had inevitably pursued its settler colonialism in the occupied territories and tried to test the Zionist method of 'creating facts on the ground' (Sternhell 1998).

From the beginning of the modern Zionist settlement in Palestine, European Jewish settlers had to confront the reality that their project immediately clashed with the ethnic, religious and demographic realities of Palestine and precipitated conflict with the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine. In particular, Palestinian demography and the land issue were at the heart of the struggle between the Zionist settlers and indigenous Palestinians. Even in 1947, the indigenous Palestinians were the overwhelming majority in the country and owned much of the land. The Jewish community or Yishuv (mainly East European settlers) was about a third of the total population and owned, after 50 years of land purchases, only 6% of the land.

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

The myth of an empty and deserted land

The state of Israel was built on old biblical symbols and legends and modern Zionist myths. Central to Zionist foundational myths is the theme that the land, until the arrival of European Jewish settlers, was virtually barren, desolate and empty, waiting to be made fertile and populated by Israel; it was the rightful property of 'returning Jews' (Whitelam 1996: 40-45). The mega-narrative of Zionism contains several intertwined foundational myths which underlie contemporary Israeli culture. These include the 'negation of exile' (shlilat ha-galut), the 'return to history' (ha-shiva la-historia), the 'return to the land of Israel' (ha-shiva le-Eretz Yisrael) and the myth of 'empty territory' (Piterberg 2001: 31-46). The 'negation of exile' allows Zionism to establish a line of unbroken continuity between ancient Palestine and a present that renews it in the resettlement of Palestine (Piterberg 2001: 31). These slogans run through state education in Israel and find strong expression in children's literature. One such work for children

contains the following excerpt:

'Joseph and some of his men thus crossed the land [Palestine] on foot, until they reached Galilee. They climbed mountains, beautiful but empty mountains, where nobody lived ... Joseph said, "We want to establish this Kibbutz and conquer this emptiness. We shall call this place Tel Hai [Living Hill] ... The land is empty; its children have deserted it [reference is, of course, to Jews]. They are dispersed and no longer tend it. No one protects or tends the land now"' (Gurvitz and Navon 1953: 128, 132, 134, in El-Asmar 1986: 83).

In a similar vein, Israel's leading satirist, Dan Ben-Amotz, observed in 1982 that 'the Arabs do not exist in our textbooks [for children]. This is apparently in accordance with the Jewish-Zionist-socialist principles we have received. "A-people-without-a-land-returns-to-a-land-without-people"' (Ben-Amotz 1982: 155).

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

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

land without a people for a people without a land'. Another use of the same myth of an empty country was made in 1914 by Chaim Weizmann, later president of the World Zionist Congress and the first president of the state of Israel:

'In its initial stage, Zionism was conceived by its pioneers as a movement wholly depending on mechanical factors: there is a country which happens to be called Palestine, a country without a people, and, on the other hand, there exists the Jewish people, and it has no country. What else is necessary, then, than to fit the gem into the ring, to unite this people with this country? The owners of the country [the Ottoman Turks] must, therefore, be persuaded and convinced that this marriage is advantageous, not only for the [Jewish] people and for the country, but also for themselves' (Weizmann, 28 March 1914, in Litvinoff 1983: 115-16).

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

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

Disposable natives

Neither Zangwill nor Weizmann intended these demographic assessments in a literal fashion. They did not mean that there were no people in Palestine, but that there were no people worth considering within the framework of the notions of European white supremacy that then held sway. In this connection, a comment by Weizmann to Arthur Ruppin, head of the colonisation department of the Jewish Agency, is particularly revealing. When asked by Ruppin about the Palestinian Arabs and how he (Weizmann) obtained the Balfour Declaration in 1917, Weizmann replied: 'The British told us that there are some hundred thousand negroes [kushim in Hebrew] and for those there is no value' (Heller 1984: 140).

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

In my works (Masalha 1992; 1997; 2003) which are largely based on Hebrew and Israeli archival sources, I have dealt with the evolution of the theme of 'population transfer'- a euphemism denoting the organised removal of the Arab population of Palestine to neighbouring or distant countries. I have shown that this concept - delicately described by its proponents as 'population exchange', 'Arab return to Arabia', 'emigration', 'resettlement' and 'rehabilitation' of the Palestinians in Arab countries, etc. - was deeply rooted in mainstream Zionist thinking and in the Yishuv as a solution to Zionist land and political problems. Although the desire among Zionist leaders to 'solve' the 'Arab question' through transfer remained constant until 1948, the envisaged modalities of transfer changed over the years according to circumstances. From the mid-1930s onwards a series of specific plans, generally involving Transjordan, Syria and Iraq, were produced by the Yishuv's transfer committees and senior officials.

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

Closely linked to this idea of the non-existence of the Palestinians as a nation and their non-attachment to the particular soil of Palestine was the idea of their belonging to an Arab nation with vast territories and many countries. As Ben-Gurion put it in 1929, 'Jerusalem is not the same thing to the Arabs as it is to the Jews. The Arab people inhabit many great lands' (Teveth 1985: 39). And if the Palestinians did not constitute a distinct, separate nation, had little attachment to Jerusalem, were not an integral part of the country and were without historical ties to it, then they could be transferred to other Arab countries without undue prejudice. Similarly, if the Palestinians were merely a marginal, local segment of a larger population of Arabs, then they were not a major party to the conflicts with

Israel; therefore, Israeli efforts to deal over their heads were justified.

Despite their propaganda slogans of an underpopulated land, of Palestine's 'civilisational barrenness' and of their making 'the desert bloom', all of which were issued partly for external consumption, the Zionists from the outset were well aware that not only were there people on the land, but they were there in large numbers. Zangwill, who had visited Palestine in 1897 and come face-to-face with the demographic reality of the country, himself acknowledged in a 1905 speech to a Zionist group in Manchester that 'Palestine proper had already its inhabitants. The pashalik [province] of Jerusalem is already twice as thickly populated as the United States, having fifty-two souls to the square mile, and not 25% of them Jews' (Zangwill 1937: 210).

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

The concept of 'transfer' in mainstream Zionism

The concept of 'transfer'/ethnic cleansing is as old as modern political Zionism and has accompanied its evolution and praxis during the past century (Masalha 1992; 1997).4 Ben-Gurion, in particular, was an enthusiastic and committed advocate of the transfer 'solution'. The importance he attached not merely to transfer but forced transfer is seen in his diary entry for 12 July 1937:

'The compulsory transfer of Arabs from the valleys of the proposed Jewish state could give us something which we never had [an Arab-free Galilee], even when we stood on our own feet during the days of the First and Second Temple' (Ben-Gurion 1974: 297-99).

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

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

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

'We must prepare ourselves to carry out the transfer' [emphasis in the original] (Ben-Gurion 1974, vol.4: 297-99).

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

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

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

'Was the transfer of the Arabs ethical, necessary and practicable? ... Transfer of Arabs had repeatedly taken place before in consequence of Jews settling in different districts.'5

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

'The Hebrew State will discuss with the neighbouring Arab states the matter

of voluntarily transferring Arab tenant farmers, workers and fellahin [peasants] from the Jewish state to neighbouring states. For that purpose the Jewish state, or a special company ... will purchase lands in neighbouring states for the resettlement of all those workers and fellahin.'6

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

'We have to examine, first, if this transfer is practical, and secondly, if it is necessary. It is impossible to imagine general evacuation without compulsion, and brutal compulsion ... The possibility of a large-scale transfer of a population by force was demonstrated, when the Greeks and the Turks were transferred [after the First World War]. In the present war [the Second World War] the idea of transferring a population is gaining more sympathy as a practical and the most secure means of solving the dangerous and painful problem of national minorities.'7

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

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

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

'The matter of population transfer has provoked a debate among us: Is it

permitted or forbidden? My conscience is absolutely clear in this respect. A remote neighbour is better than a close enemy. They [the Palestinians] will not lose from it. In the final analysis, this is a political and settlement reform for the benefit of both parties. I have long been of the opinion that this is the best of all solutions ... I have always believed and still believe that they were destined to be transferred to Syria or Iraq.'8

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

'What is a compulsory transfer? Compulsory transfer does not mean individual transfer. It means that once we resolved to transfer there should be a political body able to force this or that Arab who would not want to move out. Regarding the transfer of Arab individuals we are always doing this. But the question will be the transfer of much greater quantity of Arabs through an agreement with the Arab states: this is called a compulsory transfer ... We have here a war about principles, and in the same way that we must wage a war for maximum territory, there must also be here a war [for the transfer "principle"] ... We must insist on the principle that it must be a large agreed transfer.'9

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

'Has [kibbutz] Merhavya not been built on transfer? Were it not for many of these transfers neither Merhavya or [kibbutz] Mishmar Ha'emek or other socialist Kibbutzim would have been set up' (Gorny 1987: 304. Also Katznelson 1949: 241, 244; Shapira 1984: 335).

Supporters of 'voluntary' transfer included Ruppin, a co-founder of Brit Shalom, a movement advocating bi-nationalism and equal rights for Arabs and Jews; moderate leaders of Mapai such as Moshe Shertok and Eli'ezer Kaplan, Israel's first finance minister; and leaders of the Histadrut (Jewish Labour Federation) such as Golda Meyerson (later Meir) and David Remez (Masalha 1992).

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

'Amongst ourselves it must be clear that there is no room for both peoples in this country . After the Arabs are transferred, the country will be wide open for us; with the Arabs staying the country will remain narrow and restricted ... There is no room for compromise on this point ... land purchasing ... will not bring about the state ... The only way is to transfer the Arabs from here to neighbouring countries, all of them, except perhaps Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Old Jerusalem. Not a single village or a single tribe must be left. And the transfer must be done through their absorption in Iraq and Syria and even in Transjordan. For that goal, money will be found - even a lot of money. And only then will the country be able to absorb millions of Jews ... there is no other solution' (Weitz 1940: 1090-91).

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

'large [Arab] villages crowded in population and surrounded by cultivated land growing olives, grapes, figs, sesame, and maize fields ... Would we be able to maintain scattered [Jewish] settlements among these existing [Arab] villages that will always be larger than ours? And is there any possibility of buying their [land]? ... and once again I hear that voice inside me call: evacuate this country' [emphasis in the original] (Weitz 1941: 1204).

Earlier in March 1941 Weitz wrote in his diary after touring Jewish settlements in the Esdraelon Valley (Marj Ibn 'Amer): 'The complete evacuation of the country from its [Arab] inhabitants and handing it to the Jewish people is the answer' (Weitz 1941: 1127).

In April 1948 Weitz recorded in his diary:

'I made a summary of a list of the Arab villages which in my opinion must be cleared out in order to complete Jewish regions. I also made a summary of the places that have land disputes and must be settled by military means' (Weitz 1948: 2358).

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

The 'Transfer Committees' (1937-1948)

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

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

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

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

The Nakba as a form of politicide

The ethnic cleansing of the Nakba led to the creation of the state of Israel on 78% of historical Palestine (and not 55% according to the UN partition resolution), and resulted in the destruction of much of Palestinian society and much of the Arab landscape by a predominantly European settler community immigrated into Palestine in the period between 1882 and 1948. The 1948 war was presented by the Zionist leadership in messianic terms as a 'miraculous clearing of the land' and as another 'War of Liberation' modelled on the Book of Joshua. The question is: from whom was the land 'liberated'? From

the British, whose colonial administration in Palestine after 1918 had alone made it possible for the growth of the European Jewish settlement against the will of the overwhelming majority of Palestinians? Or from its indigenous inhabitants, who had tilled the land and owned the soil for many centuries10 and for whom the Bible had become an instrument mandating expulsion (Prior 2002: 44-45)?

The myth of 'no expulsion' was echoed by the first United States ambassador to Israel, James McDonald, who told of a conversation he had with the president of Israel, Weizmann, during which Weizmann spoke in 'messianic' terms about the 1948 Palestinian exodus as a 'miraculous simplification of Israel's tasks'. McDonald said that not one of Israel's 'big three' - Weizmann, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion and Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett - and no responsible Zionist leader had anticipated such a 'miraculous clearing of the land' (McDonald 1951: 160-61). The available evidence (based on mountains of Israeli archival documents), however, shows that the 'big three' had all enthusiastically endorsed the concept of 'transferring' the Palestinians in the 1937-48 period and had anticipated the Palestinian refugee exodus in 1948.

In the official Zionist rendition of the 1948 war the events are presented as a battle between a Jewish David and an Arab Goliath. Central to key narratives in Israeli culture is the myth which depicts the Israel-Palestine conflict as a 'war of the few against the many'. Since the early 20th century Zionist historiography has based this narrative of 'the few against the many' on the biblical account of Joshua's conquest of ancient Palestine, while mainstream Israeli historians continue to portray the 1948 war as an unequal struggle between a Jewish David and an Arab Goliath, and as a desperate, heroic, and ultimately successful Jewish struggle against overwhelming odds.11 It was the European Zionist settlers who brought with them to Palestine the 'few against the many' narrative - a widespread European cultural myth which appeared in many variations, including the American western cowboy variation of the early 20th century (Gertz 2000: 5). Turning the Jewish faith into secular ideology, Israeli historians and authors have adopted and reinterpreted biblical sources and myths and have mobilised them in support of post-1948 Israeli objectives (Gertz 2000: 5). The few, who overcame the many by virtue of their courage and absolute conviction, were those European Zionist settlers who emulated the fighters of ancient Israel, while the many were those Palestinians and Arabs who were the embodiment of various ancient oppressors. The Zionist struggle against the indigenous Palestinians was thus portrayed as a modern re-enactment of ancient biblical battles and wars, including David's slaying of Goliath (Gertz 2000: 5).

While the 'David and Goliath' version of the Israel-Palestine conflict continues to gain hegemony in the Western media, since the late 1980s, however, many of the myths that have come to surround the birth of Israel have been challenged by revisionist Israeli historians including Flapan (1987), Morris (1987), Papp, (1992) and Shlaim (1996, 2000; Rogan and Shlaim 2001). Furthermore the new and recent historiography of Israel-Palestine has shown that the 1948 Palestinian catastrophe was the culmination of over half a century of often secret Zionist plans and, ultimately, brute force. The extensive evidence shows a strong correlation between transfer discussions, their practical application in 1948 and the Palestinian Nakba. The primary responsibility for the displacement and dispossession of three-quarters of a million Palestinian refugees in 1948 lies with the Zionist-Jewish leadership, not least David Ben-Gurion. The work of revisionist Israeli historians contributed to demolishing some of the long-held Israeli and Western misconceptions surrounding Israel's birth. Containing remarkable revelations based on Hebrew archival material, their studies throw new light on the conduct of the Labour Zionist founding fathers of the Israeli state.

The new historiography of Israel-Palestine shows that in reality, throughout the 1948 war, the Israeli army outnumbered all the Arab forces, regular and irregular, operating in the Palestine theatre. Estimates vary, but the best estimates suggest that on 15 May 1948 Israel fielded 35,000 troops whereas the Arabs fielded 20-25,000.12 Moreover, during the war imported arms from the Eastern bloc - artillery, tanks, aircraft - decisively tipped the military balance in favour of Israel. During the second half of 1948 the Israelis not only outnumbered but also outgunned their opponents. As 'the Arab coalition facing Israel in 1948 was one of the most deeply divided, disorganised, and ramshackle coalitions in the history of warfare, the final outcome of the war was not a miracle but a reflection of the underlying Arab-Israeli military balance'.13 Furthermore, since 1948 the Arab-Israeli military imbalance has been illustrated by the fact that Israel (with US backing) has developed the fourth most powerful army in the world and has become the only nuclear power in the region.

Ben-Gurion's 1948 war against the Palestinians was a form of politicide.14 Ben-Gurion entered the 1948 war with a mindset and premeditation to expel Palestinians. On 19 December 1947, he advised that the Haganah, the Jewish pre-state army, 'adopt the method of aggressive defence; with every [Arab] attack we must be prepared to respond with a decisive blow: the destruction of the [Arab] place or the expulsion of the residents along with the seizure of the place' (Ben-Gurion 1982: 58). There is also plenty of evidence to suggest that as early as the beginning of 1948 his advisers counselled him to wage a total war against the Palestinians, and that he entered the 1948 war with the intention of expelling Palestinians:

a) Plan Dalet: A straightforward document, this Haganah plan of early March 1948 was in many ways a blueprint for the expulsion of as many Palestinians as possible. It constituted an ideological-strategic anchor and basis for the destruction of Arab localities and expulsion of their inhabitants by Jewish commanders. In conformity with Plan Dalet, the Haganah cleared various areas completely of Arab villages.

b) The general endorsement of transfer schemes and the attempt to promote them secretly by mainstream Labour leaders, some of whom played a decisive role in the 1948 war, highlight the ideological intent that made the 1948 refugee exodus possible. Ben-Gurion in particular emerges as both an obsessive advocate of compulsory transfer in the late 1930s and the great expeller of the Palestinians in 1948 (Masalha 1992; Morris 1987; Flapan 1987; Segev 1986; Papp, 1992; Shlaim 1996; Rogan and Shlaim 2001).

In 1948 there was no need for any cabinet decision to drive the Palestinians out. Ben-Gurion and senior Zionist military commanders, such as Yigal Allon, Moshe Carmel, Yigael Yadin, Moshe Dayan, Moshe Kalman and Yitzhak Rabin, played a key role in the expulsions. Everyone, at every level of military and political decision-making, understood that the objective was a Jewish state without a large Arab minority.

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

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

Yosef Sprintzak, who in 1948 was Secretary General of the Histadrut, stated at a debate at the Mapai Centre on 24 July 1948, which was held against the

background of the Ramle-Lydda expulsions of 12-13 July (see below):

'There is a feeling that faits accomplis are being created ... The question is not whether the Arabs will return or not return. The question is whether the Arabs are [being or have been] expelled or not ... I want to know, who is creating the facts [of expulsion]? And the facts are being created on orders' (Morris 1990: 42-43).

Sprintzak added that there appeared to be 'a line of action ... of expropriation and of emptying the land of Arabs by force' (Morris 1990: 42-43).

With the 1948 war, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion and the Zionist leadership succeeded in many of their objectives. Above all, they created a vastly enlarged Jewish state (on 78% of historical Palestine) in which the Palestinians were forcibly reduced to a small minority. The available evidence shows that the evacuation of some three-quarters of a million Palestinians in 1948 can only be ascribed to the culmination of Zionist expulsion policies and not to mythical orders issued by the Arab armies. Benny Morris's Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem explodes many Israeli myths surrounding the 1948 exodus. Morris assesses that of 330 villages whose experience he studied, a total of 282 (85%) were depopulated as a result of direct Jewish attack.

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

'The Arabs' exit from Palestine ... began immediately after the UN resolution, from the areas earmarked for the Jewish state. And we have explicit documents testifying that they left Palestine following instructions by the Arab leaders, with the Mufti at their head, under the assumption that the invasion of the Arab armies at the expiration of the Mandate will destroy the Jewish state and push all the Jews into the sea, dead or alive.'15

Ben-Gurion was propagating two myths: (a) that there were orders from the

neighbouring Arab states and the Hajj Amin Al-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem, for the Palestinians to evacuate their homes and lands on the promise that the Arab armies would destroy the nascent Jewish state; and (b) that those armies intended to 'push all the Jews into the sea, dead or alive'. Ben-Gurion gave no attribution for this phrase, nor did he claim that it was a quote from an Arab source. Since the Second World War the Holocaust had been used as a legitimiser of Zionism. However, the phrase 'push all the Jews into the sea' - a highly emotive phrase invoking images of the Holocaust, though adapted to a Mediterranean setting - has since acquired extraordinary mythical dimensions as it is constantly invoked by Israelis and Zionists in order to justify the policies of Israel towards the Palestinians as well as the continuing occupation of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem.16

Although Ben-Gurion and his commanders did not drive the Palestinians into the sea, they did drive them from their homes and villages and ancestral lands and from Palestine and into squalid refugee camps. The irony of Ben-Gurion's 'chilling phrase' should not escape us. He demanded deference for a fictitious intention on the part of the Palestinians and Arabs17 while denying his own direct and personal involvement in the 'ethnic cleansing' of the Palestinians.

Lydda and Ramle

From the territory occupied by the Israelis in 1948-49 about 90% of the Palestinians were driven out, many by psychological warfare and/or military pressure. A very large number of Palestinians were expelled at gunpoint. A major instance of 'outright expulsion' is the widely documented case of the twin towns of Lydda and Ramle in July 1948. More than 60,000 Palestinians were expelled, accounting for nearly 10% of the total exodus. Ben-Gurion and three senior army officers were directly involved: Yigal Allon, Yitzhak Rabin and Moshe Dayan. Shortly before the capture of the towns, Ben-Gurion met with his army chiefs. Allon, commander of the Palmah, the Haganah's elite military force, asked Ben-Gurion, 'What shall we do with the Arabs?' Ben-Gurion answered (or, according to one version, gestured with his hand), 'Expel them.' This was immediately communicated to the army headquarters and the expulsion implemented (Morris 1986b: 91). Morris (1990: 2)writes:

'At 13.30 hours on 12 July ... Lieutenant-Colonel Yitzhak Rabin… issued the following order: "1. The inhabitants of Lydda must be expelled quickly without attention to age. They should be directed to Beit Nabala ...

Implement immediately." A similar order was issued at the same time to the Kiryati Brigade concerning the inhabitants of the neighbouring town of Ramle, occupied by Kiryati troops that morning ... On 12 and 13 July, Yiftah and Kiryati brigades carried out their orders, expelling the 50-60,000 remaining inhabitants of and refugees camped in and around the two towns.'

In the case of Nazareth, Ben-Gurion arrived only after its capture. On seeing so many Palestinians remaining in situ, he angrily asked the local commander, 'Why are there so many Arabs? Why didn't you expel them?' (Bar-Zohar 1977: 776).

The massacres factor

The view that the Bible provides Jews with a title-deed to the 'Land of Israel', combined with European Zionism's self-perception as morally superior to the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine, was echoed in the myth of 'purity of arms' - a slogan initially coined by the Haganah/Palmah in early 1948. In the period between the mid-1930s and 1948, the Yishuv Labour leadership had embraced the concept of 'transfer' while quietly pondering the question of whether there was a 'more humane way' of expelling the indigenous Palestinians. In Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force, Anita Shapira shows that already during the Great Palestinian Rebellion of 1936-39 the Zionist leadership abandoned the slogan of havlaga - a restrained and proportionate response - and legitimised the use of terror against Palestinian civilians - the Zionist nationalist end justified the means (Shapira 1992: 247-49, 350).

More crucially, however, the 1948 war proved that engineering mass evacuation was not possible without perpetrating a large number of atrocities. According to Israeli military historian Arieh Yitzhaki, about 10 major massacres (of more than 50 victims each) and about 100 smaller massacres were committed by Jewish forces in 1948-49. Yitzhaki argues that these massacres, large and small, had a devastating impact on the Palestinian population by inducing and precipitating the Palestinian exodus. Yitzhaki suggests that almost in every village there were murders. Another Israeli historian, Uri Milstein, corroborates Yitzhaki's assessment and goes even further to suggest that each battle in 1948 ended with a massacre:

'In all Israel's wars, massacres were committed but I have no doubt that the

War of Independence was the dirtiest of them all.'18

Both Israeli 'new historiography' and Palestinian oral history confirm that in almost every Palestinian village occupied by the Haganah and other Jewish militias during the 1948-49 war, atrocities - such as murders, execution of prisoners and rape - were committed (Finkelstein 1995: 110-12; Prior 1999: 208-09).

Moreover, the most striking result of the new historiography of Israel-Palestine is that the discourse has shifted away from the orthodox Zionist interpretation of the Deir Yasin massacre as 'exceptional'. The focus of study is no longer so much on the terrorism carried out by the Irgun Tzvai Leumi (National Military Organisation), the military arm of Betar Zionism, and Lehi irregular forces before and during the 1948 war, but on the conduct of the mainstream Haganah/Palmah and Israeli Defence Force (IDF). At issue are the roles and involvement of the Haganah and the Israeli army in the numerous atrocities carried out in 1948. Sharif Kanaana of Birzeit University places the massacre of Deir Yasin and the evacuation of Arab West Jerusalem in 1948 within the framework of what he terms the Zionists' 'maxi-massacre pattern' in their conquest of large Palestinian cities: Jewish attacks produced demoralisation and exodus; a nearby massacre would result in panic and further flight, greatly facilitating the occupation of the Arab city and its surrounding towns and villages (Kanaana 1992: 108).

Deir Yasin

Deir Yasin was the site of the most notorious massacre of Palestinian civilians in 1948 - a massacre which became the single most important contributory factor to the 1948 exodus and a powerful marker of the violence at the foundation of the state of Israel. On 9 April, between 120 and 254 unarmed villagers were murdered, including women, the elderly and children. (The number of those massacred at Deir Yasin is subject to dispute. The widely accepted death toll has been that reported in the New York Times of 13 April 1948: 254 persons.) There were also cases of rape and mutilation.

Most Israeli writers today have no difficulty in acknowledging the occurrence of the Deir Yasin massacre and its effect, if not its intention, of precipitating the exodus. However, most of these writers take refuge in

the fact that the massacre was committed by 'dissidents' of the Irgun, then commanded by Menahem Begin19 (who would later become Prime Minister of Israel), and Lehi, then co-commanded by Yitzhak Shamir (who would also later become Prime Minister of Israel), thus exonerating Ben-Gurion's Haganah, the mainstream Zionist military force.

Recently published Hebrew material, however, shows that: a) in January 1948, the mukhtar (headman) of Deir Yasin and other village notables had reached a non-aggression agreement with the Haganah and the neighbouring Jewish settlements of Giva't Shaul and Montefiori; b) the Irgun's assault on the village on 9 April had the full backing of the Haganah commander of Jerusalem, David Shaltiel. The latter not only chose to break his agreement with the villagers, but also provided rifles and ammunition for the Irgunists; c) the Haganah contributed to the assault on the village by providing artillery cover; d) a Haganah intelligence officer in Jerusalem, Meir Pa'il, was dispatched to Deir Yasin to assess the effectiveness and performance of the Irgun forces (Masalha 1988: 122-23).

Although the actual murders of the non-combatant villagers were carried out by Lehi and the Irgun, the Haganah must share responsibility for the slaughter. The atrocity was fiercely condemned by liberal Jewish intellectuals, most prominent of whom was Martin Buber, who wrote repeatedly to Prime Minister Ben-Gurion about the massacre. But apparently Ben-Gurion did not reply.ÿAccording to Israeli historian Morris, Ben-Gurion was at that very time explicitly sanctioning the expulsions of the Palestinians (Morris 1987: 113-15).ÿMore significantly, recently published Israeli material shows that Deir Yasin was only one of many massacres carried out by Jewish forces (mainly the Haganah and the IDF) in 1948. Recent research proves that the Palestinians were less prone to evacuate their towns and villages in the second half of the war. Hence the numerous massacres committed from June 1948 onwards, all of which were geared at forcing mass evacuation.

In 1948, al-Dawayma, situated in the western Hebron hills, was a very large village, with a population of some 3,500 people. Like Deir Yasin, al-Dawayma was unarmed. It was captured on 29 October 1948 without a fight. The massacre of between 80 and 100 villagers was carried out at the end of October 1948, not in the heat of the battle but after the Israeli army had clearly emerged victorious in the war. The testimony of Israeli soldiers present during the atrocities establishes that IDF troops under Moshe Dayan entered the village and liquidated civilians, throwing their victims into pits. 'The children they killed by breaking their heads with sticks. There was not a house without dead.' The remaining Arabs were then shut up in houses 'without food and water' as the village was systematically razed.

'One commander ordered a sapper to put two old women in a certain house ... and blow up the house ... One soldier boasted that he had raped a woman and then shot her. One woman, with a newborn baby in her arms, was employed to clear the courtyard where the soldiers ate. She worked a day or two. In the end they shot her and her baby'. A variety of evidence indicates that the atrocities were committed in and around the village, including at the mosque and in a nearby cave, that houses with old people locked inside were blown up, and that there were several cases of the rape and shooting of women (Masalha 1988: 127-30; Morris 1987: 222-23; Khalidi 1999).

The evidence surrounding the Galilee expulsions shows clearly the existence of a pattern of actions characterised by a series of massacres designed to intimidate the population into flight. On 29-31 October 1948, the Israeli army, in a large military campaign named Operation Hiram, conquered the last significant Arab-held pocket of the Galilee. According to new Israeli archival material, commanding officers issued expulsion directives: 'There was a central directive by Northern Command to clear the conquered pocket of its Arab inhabitants' (Morris 1999: 70). Moreover the operation was 'characterised by a series of atrocities against the Arab civilian population' (Morris 1995: 55). On 6 November 1948, Yosef Nahmani, director of the Jewish National Fund office in the eastern Galilee between 1935 and 1965, toured the newly conquered areas. He was accompanied by Immanuel Fried of Israel's minority affairs ministry, who briefed him on 'the cruel acts of our soldiers', which Nahmani recorded in his diary:

'In Safsaf, after ... the inhabitants had raised a white flag, the [soldiers] collected and separated the men and women, tied the hands of 50-60 fellahin and shot and killed them and buried them in a pit. Also, they raped several women ... At Eilabun and Farradiya the soldiers had been greeted with white flags and rich food, and afterwards had ordered the villagers to leave, with their women and children. When the [villagers] had begun to argue ... [the soldiers] had opened fire and after some 30 people were killed, had begun to lead the rest [towards Lebanon]. Where did they come by such a measure of cruelty, like Nazis? ... Is there no more humane way of expelling the inhabitants than such methods?' (Morris 1999: 73). (Also see box.)

Erasing villages and deleting the reality of historical Palestine

In 1948 more than half of the Palestinians were driven from their towns and villages, mainly by a deliberate Israeli policy of 'transfer' and ethnic

cleansing. The name of Palestine disappeared from the map. To complete this transformation of the country, in August 1948, a de facto 'Transfer Committee' was officially (though secretly) appointed by the Israeli cabinet to plan the Palestinian refugees' organised resettlement in the Arab states. The three-member committee was composed of 'Ezra Danin, a former senior Haganah intelligence officer and a senior foreign ministry adviser on Arab affairs since July 1948; Zalman Lifschitz, the prime minister's adviser on land matters; and Weitz as head of the committee. The main Israeli propaganda lines regarding the Palestinian refugees and some of the myths of 1948 were cooked up by members of this official Transfer Committee. Besides doing everything possible to reduce the Palestinian population in Israel, Weitz and his colleagues sought in October 1948 to amplify and consolidate the demographic transformation of Palestine by:

preventing Palestinian refugees from returning to their homes and villages;

destroying Arab villages;

settling Jews in Arab villages and towns and distributing Arab lands among Jewish settlements;

extricating Jews from Iraq and Syria;

seeking ways to ensure the absorption of Palestinian refugees in Arab countries and launching a propaganda campaign to discourage Arab return.

Apparently, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion approved of these proposals, although he recommended that all the Palestinian refugees be resettled in one Arab country, preferably Iraq, rather than be dispersed among the neighbouring states. Ben-Gurion was also set against refugee resettlement in neighbouring Transjordan (Morris 1986a: 549-50).

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

circumstances of each village's occupation and depopulation, and a description of what remains. Khalidi's team visited all except 14 sites, made comprehensive reports and took photographs. The result is both a monumental study and a kind of memoriam. It is an acknowledgement of the enormous suffering of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees (Khalidi 1992).

Of the 418 depopulated villages, 293 (70%) were totally destroyed, and 90 (22%) were largely destroyed. Seven survived, including 'Ayn Karim (west of Jerusalem), but were taken over by Israeli settlers. A few of the quaint Arab villages and neighbourhoods have been actually meticulously preserved. But they are empty of Palestinians (some of the former residents are internal refugees in Israel) and are designated as Jewish 'artistic colonies' (Benvenisti 1986: 25; Masalha 2005). While an observant traveller can still see some evidence of the destroyed Palestinian villages, in the main all that is left is a scattering of stones and rubble.

The destruction of Palestinian villages and the conceptual deletion of Palestinians from history and cartography meant that the names of depopulated Palestinian villages and towns were deleted from the map. The historical Arabic names of geographical sites were replaced by newly coined Hebrew names, some of which resembled biblical names. In his 2004 book, A History of Modern Palestine, Israeli historian Ilan Papp, remarks:

'[W]hen winter was over and the spring of 1949 warmed a particularly frozen Palestine, the land as we have described .- reconstructing a period stretching over 250 years - had changed beyond recognition. The countryside, the rural heart of Palestine, with its colourful and picturesque villages, was ruined. Half the villages had been destroyed, flattened by Israeli bulldozers which had been at work since August 1948 when the government had decided to either turn them into cultivated land or to build new Jewish settlements on their remains. A naming committee granted the new settlements Hebraized [sic] versions of the original Arab names: Lubya became Lavi, and Safuria Zipori . David Ben-Gurion explained that this was done as part of an attempt to prevent future claim to the villages. It was also supported by the Israeli archaeologists, who had authorized the names as returning the map to something resembling "ancient Israel"' (Papp, 2004: 138-39).

The disappearance of Palestine in 1948, the deletion of the demographic and political realities of historical Palestine and the erasure of Palestinians from history centred on key issues, the most important of which is the

contest between a 'denial' and an 'affirmation' (Said 1980; Abu-Lughod, Heacock and Nashef 1991). The deletion of historical Palestine from cartography was designed not only to strengthen the newly created state but also to consolidate the myth of the 'unbroken link' between the days of the ancient Israelites and the modern state of Israel. Zionist post-1948 projects concentrated on the Hebraicisation and Judaisation of Palestinian geography and toponymy through the practice of naming sites, places and events. The Hebraicisation project deployed renaming to construct new places and new geographic identities related to supposed biblical places (Abu El-Haj 2001; Benvenisti 2002; Masalha 2007). The new Hebrew names embodied an ideological drive and political attributes that could be consciously mobilised by the Zionist hegemonic project.

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Endnotes

1   One of the first authors to label 1948 the Nakba was Dr Constantine Zurayk, a distinguished philosopher of Arab history and liberal intellectual, in his book The Meaning of the Disaster (Ma'na al-Nakba), a self-critical analysis of the socio-economic causes of the Arab defeat in 1948, written almost immediately after the 1948 war. The term also became the title of the monumental six-volume work of Palestinian historian 'Arif Al-'Arif entitled The Disaster: The Disaster of Jerusalem and the Lost Paradise 1947-52 (Al-Nakba: Nakbat Bayt al-Maqdis Wal-Firdaws al-Mafqud, 1947-1952) (Beirut and Sidon, Lebanon: Al-Maktaba al-'Asriyya, 1958-1960 [Arabic]).

2   For an extensive discussion of Zionist ethnic cleansing policies in 1948, see Masalha (1992; 1997; 2003).

3   For an historical overview of 'Palestinian Internally Displaced Persons inside Israel', see release by BADIL Resource Center, 6 November 2002 at:

        http://www.badil.org/Publications/Press/2002/press277-02.htm

(accessed on 25 March 2008).

4   See also Benny Morris in The Guardian, G2, 3 October 2002.

5   As reported in the New Judea (London), XIII, nos.111-12 (August-September 1937): 220.

6   Protocol of the Jewish Agency Executive meeting of 7 June 1938, in Jerusalem, confidential, vol.28, no.51, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

7   David Ben-Gurion, 15 October 1941. 'Lines for Zionist Policy', in Masalha (1992: 128-29).

8   'Al Darchei Mediniyutenu: Mo'atzah 'Olamit Shel Ihud Po'alei Tzion (1938).

9   Protocol of the Jewish Agency Executive meeting of 12 June 1938. Vol.28, no.53, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

10   Kohn (1958), in Khalidi (2005: 836).

11   Avi Shlaim, 'The New History of 1948 and the Palestinian Nakba', first published by www.miftah.org on 18 March 2004, at http://www.miftah.org/PrinterF.cfm?DocId=3336.

12   Shlaim, 'The New History of 1948 and the Palestinian Nakba'.

13   Ibid.

14   The term 'politicide' was used by Kimmerling (2003) in connection with Ariel Sharon's war against the Palestinians.

15   Quoted in William Martin, 'Who is Pushing Whom into the Sea?', 11 March 2005, at: http://www.counterpunch.org/martin03112005.html (accessed on 14 March 2005).

16   Martin, 'Who is Pushing Whom into the Sea?'

17   Martin, 'Who is Pushing Whom into the Sea?'

18   Guy Erlich in Ha'ir, 6 May 1992.

19   Begin sent a congratulatory note to the Irgun fighters who had carried out the Deir Yasin massacre: 'Accept congratulations on this splendid act of conquest.ÿTell the soldiers you have made history in Israel.' Quoted in Ellis (1991: 31).

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