

Introduction

A Story of Catastrophe and Survival

NEW APPROACHES IN THIS BOOK

This book introduces a number of new elements related to theory, methodology, sources, and references for examining the 1948 war and its aftermath for the defeated, whose voice has not been heard before in the recounting of the events of the Nakba—the Palestinians inside Israel. These Palestinians, who became “citizens” in Israel, have long suffered from double marginalization by the two sides to the conflict. Hearing their voice allows us to construct a more complex picture of the consequences of the Nakba from the inside, through their testimonies as Palestinians inside the occupied homeland where the Jewish state was established. The experiences of those who remained during the war and its aftermath are different and distinct from those of other groups of fragmented Palestinians; their particular experiences led them to develop a critical awareness of, and evolving positions toward, nationalist points of view and narratives which excluded them and marginalized their history, at least for a while.

This research proposes critical reading and complex analysis rather than generalized and polarized narratives. Instead of dismissing the previous stereotypical positions about past events, this book will gradually weave a history from the base to the top. This history is not restricted to the viewpoints of the elites; it also takes into account the testimonies and even the sayings of popular groups. As is well known, peasants formed the vast majority of those who remained in northern and central Palestine. Their reasons for and their opinions on remaining in Palestine after the 1948 occupation have been absent or clouded over by a fog and rarely illuminated by historians. Adding these voices to the narratives of the struggle brings color and shading to the stark black and white image that characterizes accounts by the elite, giving the picture new and complex dimensions.

This book also renews the investigation of issues which are disputed by researchers, and not confined solely to the history of Palestinians in Israel. One such issue is the dispute about whether indeed there was a plan to expel the Palestinians during the 1948 war or if they were forced out by the events and conditions of war. Even if we were to accept the assumption that there was no comprehensive and all-embracing plan to drive the Palestinians out, their dispersal and the refusal to allow them to return became an official objective and actual policy after the establishment of the Jewish state. This study focuses on the issue of “non-expulsion”—the other side of this controversial issue—and adds a new angle to the analysis and discussion by posing questions and breaking down prevailing narratives into two fledgling fields of research connected to the Nakba and its consequences.

Firstly, instead of undertaking research once again into the question of the expulsion of the Palestinians who became refugees, this book focuses on those who were not expelled or who returned to their homes and towns. These “remain-ers” are those whose valuable stories this research will try to uncover, stories that are absent in most studies relating to the Nakba. The reasons and circumstances which led Palestinians to remain in Haifa and the Galilee were numerous and diverse. Their unexamined history in 1948 is the other face of the refugee problem which has occupied the prime focus of researchers.

Secondly, instead of forging anew into the question of the existence or non-existence of a general Israeli plan and policy to expel Palestinians in the year of the Nakba, the focus will be on cases of “non-expulsion.” This research will try to answer questions concerning the circumstances and reasons for remaining and the extent to which there was a pattern indicating high-level policy and direction on this point. The two fields of research are interconnected, and related to the question of ethnic cleansing. The novelty in the angles of research concerning the circumstances for remaining could enrich our knowledge about the policy of expulsion through close examination of cases of “non-expulsion.” It is clear that “non-expulsion” in northern Palestine was not arbitrary, but was the result of high-level orders and policy on the part of the Israeli leadership. Saying this does not contradict the principal objective of the Zionist leadership to keep as few Arabs as possible in the Jewish state, since the exception due to special reasons and circumstances proves the rule.

Thirdly, this study documents the role of those who remained in their towns. In addition to cases of being allowed to remain due to orders from above, many Palestinians successfully resisted the policy of expulsion despite orders and plans to disperse them. Did they succeed because of geography and the topography of their mountainous region? Did their sectarian makeup (as Druze, Christians, or Muslims) play an important role? Did the timing of the occupation have an influence on some remaining in the Galilee? What about local leadership and the decisions taken at critical moments in the war? Are accounts of resisting the policy of expulsion—particularly on the part of communist activists—true, or did surrender

and readiness to collaborate with the Israeli side play the more significant role? The answers to these questions could uncover remarkable aspects of the history of this Palestinian minority during the year of the Nakba and its aftermath.

Events show that there were several cases of “non-expulsion” in the Galilee that came to light in the “Battles of the Ten Days” (the so-called Operation Palm Tree, between the first and second truce, 8 July–18 July 1948), first in the Druze villages, then in the city of Nazareth and the villages in its district. On 15 July 1948, the villages of Abu Snan, Kufr Yasif, and Yarka surrendered without a battle.¹ This was followed by the surrender and occupation of many villages in lower Galilee between Shafa ‘Amr and Nazareth, without the army expelling the majority of the population. It became quite clear from these examples that there was a policy and orders from the top echelon which we will discuss later. Furthermore, the policy of “non-expulsion” continued in the Galilee until its occupation was completed through Operation Hiram. The Druze in upper Galilee also were not targeted by the policy of expulsion which uprooted the inhabitants of dozens of neighboring villages.

Even the agreement by David Ben-Gurion and his advisors on the return of thousands of Palestinian refugees after the war was an attempt to serve regional and international political interests. One example of this was the permission granted to dozens of communists and their families to return to Haifa and the Galilee in the summer of 1948. After the parliamentary elections in early 1949, a number of communist rivals were also allowed to return, most prominently Melkite (Catholic) Bishop George Hakim and hundreds of his community, and the attorney Muhammad Nimr al-Hawwari and his extended family. The ruling Mapai (Workers Party) turned family reunification into an instrument that served its interests, particularly during electoral battles. At the same time that some Palestinians were being permitted to return to the occupied homeland, the policy to expel thousands of others continued to be implemented.

The sword of expulsion was a constant threat over the heads of Palestinians in the Galilee and in other areas even after the end of the war when Israeli security forces conducted a fierce campaign against attempts by refugees to return to their own villages. Israel criminalized those returnees by labeling them as “infiltrators” in order to justify its iron fist policy, which included firing indiscriminately on any refugee seen trying to return to their home or village.² This Israeli war on attempts to return has been examined previously as an aspect of the struggle with neighboring Arab countries. But little has been written concerning the actions of Israeli authorities in the early 1950s against many of the Palestinians who remained and whom it tried to expel as infiltrators. Like most published studies on the 1948 war that ignored the fate of the “remainers,” studies on the “border wars” also ignored the consequences for the Arabs in Israel from 1949 to 1956.

The policy of ethnic cleansing during the 1948 war was more complex and expansive than a specific plan such as Plan Dalet. The leaders of the Zionist

project to establish a Jewish state in Palestine imagined it as empty of its Arab population, which is the cornerstone of the subsequent ethnic cleansing policy. Using the same model as all European settlers, the Zionists had convinced themselves from the end of the Ottoman era that the indigenous population would benefit from their project, and would not oppose it. But the Palestinian Arabs declared that they would resist, and then resorted to arms in the 1936–39 revolt against that settlement project and its cradle in British Mandate policy. It was then, following the Peel Commission plan of 1937, that the expulsion of the Arabs from the Jewish state—or “transporting” them to neighboring Arab countries—became a declared policy.

The leaders of the Zionist movement formed the habit of posing practical questions, such as “What can be done?,” at each stage of their settlement plan, rather than talking about the final objectives. That is what also happened in the 1948 war, when it became clear that the objective that enjoyed the unanimous support of Zionists of all inclinations was to establish a Jewish state with the smallest possible number of Palestinians. The important question at that stage, from their perspective, was what could be done through means that would not hurt their own interests. Plan Dalet was important during a certain phase in the war; however, the Zionists employed the same policies and instruments both before that plan and after it as well. The prohibition of return, the expulsion of thousands of those who had remained in the Galilee and elsewhere, and the destruction of villages and eviction of their population under military rule, particularly from 1948 to 1956, represented other links in the chain of the ethnic cleansing policy.

As we shall see later, the history of the Palestinians who remained in the Galilee both attests to the existence of a high-level policy of ethnic cleansing at times and refutes that policy at other times. Those cases which are not consistent with the general policy are due to causes connected to geography and the differential treatment of non-Muslims. The Druze were treated in a different way from the general Arab population. Christians were generally treated more leniently and with some sensitivity, out of fear of the reaction of Western states and churches. This unequal treatment of Palestinians in Haifa and the Galilee emerged during the months of war and several years after. These and other examples demonstrate that cases of “non-expulsion” were not spontaneous but rather the result of a high-level policy of Israeli leaders based on their political interests and also connected to the positions adopted by the leaders of those religious and political sects.

This study offers a new and different reading of the history of Arabs in Israel from their own perspective, based on Arabic sources to which researchers have rarely paid attention. This reading allows us to be acquainted with personal and human stories that may be at odds with the narratives of the national elite which largely ignored local history. The emerging panorama studded with local events is similar to a mosaic in which the interconnected stones demonstrate a new

multifaceted form of the historic tale. The interlacing of the local and the personal alongside the general narrative of events which this historical study offers allows us to examine the abstract mega or meta-narratives and to deconstruct them. Those who stayed in Haifa and the Galilee were not merely the victims of acts of murder and expulsion but also people who initiated actions and adopted positions which often saved them from the tragedies that befell other Palestinians.

Historiographies are the counterpart of theories in the social sciences, which always require events and facts encountered in the field to support the general theoretical-analytic framework. It goes without saying that facts alone are not enough to construct a general framework for events. In turn, the historiography or the theory are in dire need of facts to validate them and affirm their veracity. This study is based on local historical events (microhistory) without attempting to impose a historiography or comprehensive theory. It is not content, however, with simply chronicling detailed facts; rather it places them within a general context (macrohistory). In this way the reader is able to see the “forest” and also closely examine the various “trees.” These trees are the stories of the people and towns, which form the basic raw materials for the historical narrative.

This work tells the story of the Palestinians who remained in Galilee and other areas in several contexts. The first context is their adaptation to their new reality as an undesired minority. Family reunification and the building of their lives under military rule are two basic aspects of the struggle for survival. Just as the issue of Palestinian refugees arose during the war, then crystalized into the policy of forcibly preventing their return during the 1950s, so too arose the story of those who remained. Those who were not expelled, and those who managed to return, carried on the struggle to remain in the face of policies to isolate them and expel them until 1956, at least. At the beginning they had to foil the attempts to expel as many as possible of those who remained. Subsequently, the struggle to remain evolved into devising modes of conduct and tools that would enable their adaptation to the policies of eviction, repression, and permanent surveillance.

The second context for the history of Palestinians in Israel is the Arab world. Until 1948, the Palestinians who remained in Israel were considered an organic part of the Palestinian people and the Arab world in general, but the Nakba isolated them from their people and the neighboring Arab states. The new borders between Israel and its neighbors turned into enclosures that prohibited communication and contact, and this added a new element to the painful reality of those who remained in northern Palestine. During the first years after the Nakba, a not insignificant number of Palestinians continued to cross the border despite the considerable danger involved; the gradual sealing of the gaps in the enclosure had an enormous effect on the lives of those who remained in what became the “Israeli prison.” The isolation of those who remained—from the Jews in Israel and from the Arabs in neighboring countries—was one of the main givens of their existence, particularly in the first decade after the Nakba.

The particular context for this study is the international arena. It is true that the world has not heard of and knows little about the Arabs who remained in Haifa and the Galilee. The enclosures which locked them in after the Nakba also closed what small windows there had been to the larger outside world. A number of Western churches retained some interest in the Christians in Nazareth and its environs and their conditions. The communist bloc was concerned about the comrades in Maki (Israeli Communist Party) who resisted the policies of discrimination and repression. This connection with the communist countries strengthened the political opposition to military rule and contributed to the development of cultural institutions in Haifa and Galilee. The policies of Maki were devised in Moscow to a large extent, which made it necessary to take into account the Cold War links between the capitalist and socialist camps for understanding the local policies of communist parties.

The Arabs who remained sometimes found themselves facing two bitter choices: either to become refugees and go into exile, or to stay and cooperate in some way with the victors. In order to remain in the Jewish state, some of them were forced to pay a price which would have been unacceptable in a normal crisis: they were obliged to bow to and cooperate with the occupation and its policies so that it would consent to their remaining in their homeland. The Palestinian communists who joined Maki appeared ideologically convinced that their choice to cooperate with Zionism formed part of the international proletarian struggle; their class analysis of the struggle was dominant over the national dimension, so most accepted Moscow's positions. However, the majority of the Arabs who remained in Haifa and the Galilee were neither collaborators nor communists, but steadfast people who preferred living under occupation in their homeland to exile in refugee camps. Not long after the Nakba it became apparent that whatever the ideological choices of those who remained, they were all subject to the same military government and to the repression of the colonialist emergency regulations.

This research study is based on the argument that the war period was the real beginning of the history of the Palestinian minority in the Jewish state, the details of which are absent from most of the historical literature about the circumstances of Palestinians in Israel. The root of the problem is the existence of a division or total breach between those specializing in the study of the 1948 war and those specializing in the study of the circumstances of the Palestinian minority in the Jewish state after the Nakba. The first group pays no attention to the question of those who remained and then centers on relations with the Arab countries after the war.³ The second group begins with the history of the Palestinian minority, usually following the end of the war, without devoting much attention to the Nakba and its consequences for that minority. This study will bridge that methodological and epistemological division which imposes an imagined split on history and reality that obscures knowledge and clouds vision.

Although the Arabs who remained experienced the full trauma of the Nakba, they rose from the ashes and tried to rebuild their lives anew despite their subjugation under the occupation. They did this under unusual circumstances that isolated them from the Arab world and even from the rest of their people from whom they had been inseparable until 1948. So, we pose the following question once again: why and how did a relatively large number of residents of the Galilee manage to remain, compared to other regions which were totally emptied of their Palestinian population? What does the Nakba mean to this Palestinian minority which lived under the dominance of a Jewish majority? What are the consequences and repercussions of forced demographic change and of living as a marginalized minority whose presence in Israel was undesirable? How did those who remained adjust to the new reality and how did they live with the social and cultural outcomes and consequences of the Nakba? However, before we begin to answer these questions, let us draw in broad strokes some preliminary characteristics of the subject of our study: those who remained.

WHO ARE THE PALESTINIANS WHO REMAINED?

During the 1948 war Israel was born and the Palestinian refugee issue was created. A minority of the stricken population stayed in their country, particularly in Haifa and the Galilee. The Nakba was like an earthquake that severed connections among the Palestinian people and caused the loss of a homeland where Palestinians had lived for centuries. The refugees lost their homes and lands, and lived as strangers far from their destroyed cities and villages. Those who remained stayed in their towns and communities, subject to the rule of their enemy who was responsible for the catastrophe, the Nakba. The consensus among studies that trace the history of this Arab minority in the Jewish state is that those who remained totaled 156,000. This estimate, made in the summer of 1949, relied on Israeli statistics following the conclusion of the armistice agreements and the drawing of borders. However, these numbers of the new demographic reality minimize the details of the tragic events that continued for nearly one and a half years.

The Arabs who remained suffered from the trauma of the Nakba and its consequences for a long time. They were overcome by a sense of loss, confusion, and incapacitating anger, as well as a sense of betrayal and humiliation in the wake of the defeat. The vast majority were peasants (*fellahin*) who lost the Palestinian city and so, like flocks without shepherds, had to adapt on their own to the new tragic reality and to the language and laws of their new rulers. These laws and policies aimed to further restrict them and to grab their remaining lands and property. However, the leaders of Israel were still unsatisfied, and continued to look for the means and the appropriate time to rid themselves of the remaining minority. Thus, the remaining Palestinians spent their first years in their estranged homeland tormented by the fear of being uprooted and displaced.

The initial nucleus of the society of “remainders” in Haifa and the Galilee consisted of 69,000 people who were registered in the first census in November 1948. The residents of Nazareth and twenty villages in its district were the largest and strongest demographic bloc after their occupation in July 1948. Also, a not insignificant number of residents of ‘Akka and western Galilee remained in their homes and villages. Those who remained in Haifa and the Galilee represented the largest segment of Palestinians whom the census proved had not been expelled. Most of these Palestinians took part in the first parliamentary elections at the beginning of 1949, which consolidated their status as citizens and the fact that they remained under Israeli rule but, at the same time, lent legitimacy to the “democratic” nature of the Jewish state. Those elections constituted an important turning point in the struggle to remain, based on a complex mechanism of give-and-take between the vanquished and the victors who had established their state on the ruins of the Palestinian home.⁴

Israel had completed the occupation of the Galilee through Operation Hiram when the census took place. However, the Palestinians who had remained in the recently occupied territory were not included in the census although they were included in subsequent months. The continuation of the movement of people between the Galilee and Lebanon made it a possibility to also live under the occupation without being registered. In the last month of 1948 and the beginning of the following year, Israel expelled thousands of those who had remained in the Galilee to neighboring Arab countries. This act of uprooting, especially those cases that occurred after the census, was illegal even by the Israeli understanding of the matter. Some of those expelled returned on their own, and then resorted to the courts, which ordered that they be given identity cards and citizenship. However, the legal process was limited and came late in most cases. Prior to that, most returnees managed to stay due to mechanisms and loopholes they found and exploited to defeat the policy of ethnic cleansing.

The interim government that oversaw the war effort after May 1948 under the leadership of Ben-Gurion included twelve members, among them Bechor Shitrit, the minister of police and minority affairs. The Palestinians, who had been the vast majority of the population of the country, were classified as a minority in the Jewish state at its creation. As for the claims Israel has made about equal treatment of its Arab citizens, events and policies in practice were the exact opposite. Since the beginning of the implementation of Plan Dalet up to May 1948, a very small number of Palestinians managed to stay in their homes in the cities or villages which had been occupied. In that month, the new state of Israel expanded its borders beyond that demarcated as the Jewish zone in the partition plan, and Shitrit was put in charge of minorities in a letter of appointment which was clear regarding the desired demographic objective for the expanded borders.

July 1948 represented a turning point in the history of the war and the Palestinian Nakba. After the ten-day battles ended and a cease-fire was declared for the

second time without a time limit, the defeat of the Arab armies and the events of the Nakba were obvious for everyone to see. From a practical standpoint, the war between Israel and its neighbors—Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan individually—had ended. The Egyptian front, where fighting continued, was very far from the Galilee, and the Egyptian army there changed its position from offense to defense. Clearly, the defeat of the Arab armies opened the door for Israel to expand its territory without regard for the partition plan borders. It was then that many Palestinians began to absorb the lesson of the catastrophe that had befallen them and saw with their own eyes how Israel acted to prevent the return of the refugees through all means available. The historian Constantine Zurayk monitored these events and the results of the war, and then wrote and published his well-known book *Ma'na al-Nakba* [Meaning of the Catastrophe].⁵

The Nakba was an earthquake that shook Palestinians everywhere, but its particulars and consequences differed from place to place. Even within the Galilee, some villages were subjected to acts of terrorism (massacres and mass expulsion), while other villages in their locale escaped. All of the residents of some villages were expelled and became refugees either outside their homeland or within it. In some cases, such as 'Ilabun and 'Illut, internal migrants were allowed to live in the Galilee, or even to return to their villages and homes. However, in eastern Galilee (in the vicinity of Safad, Tiberias, and Bisan) only a few villages escaped the uprooting and dispersal of their residents. The fact that those few towns or villages, despite being isolated from their Arab milieu, had survived had a huge psychological, social, and cultural impact on the lives of their inhabitants. But in areas where there were adjacent population clusters, as in the area of Nazareth, al-Battuf, and al-Shaghur valley, the inhabitants were less vulnerable to feelings of isolation and estrangement.

In general, the Nakba had diverse consequences in the Galilee as compared to the Triangle (around Kufr Qari', 'Ar'ara, Baqa al-Gharbiyya and Umm al-Fahm) and the Naqab (Negev). The history of Arabs who remained in the Naqab remained unknown for several decades after the 1948 war; even today our knowledge of this subject continues to be meager. This study does not attempt to cover the history of this region in southern Palestine, which requires a special study. But some important events in the villages of the Triangle in the central area will be referred to and will be compared to events in the Galilee region. While villages in the central area did not suffer massacres and mass expulsion, they did experience the same policy of repression and discrimination following their annexation after being transferred from Jordanian to Israeli control at Rhodes in the spring of 1949.

Aside from the geographic factor, Israel's separate policies towards the adherents of the three faiths—Muslim, Christian, and Jew—should be noted. At the end of the war, it became apparent that the Druze had not suffered from killings, uprooting, and evictions. All of the villages they inhabited remained intact and their inhabitants were not subjected to collective punishment. Even the village

of Yanuh, where there was a heated battle in which a large number of Israeli soldiers were killed (most of them Druze), suffered no serious punishment. This was largely due to the decision by Israeli leaders to conclude a cooperation agreement with some leaders of this sect on the eve of the creation of the state. Thus, in addition to the case of Nazareth, the treatment that the Druze received is another paradigm of the policy of “non-expulsion” due to orders from above: to guarantee the survival of all Druze villages and their inhabitants due to their cooperation with the victors at an early point in 1948.

It was well known that dozens of Druze youth fought for Israel in 1948. Their Christian and Muslim neighbors saw how Israel and its army gave differential treatment to the Druze. At the other end of the spectrum were Muslims who suffered from the iron-fist implementation of the policy of ethnic cleansing that included massacres, demolition of houses, and expulsion of the population of the Galilee and other areas. The treatment meted out to Christians fell somewhere in-between: in some places (such as Nazareth) strict orders were given to the soldiers not to attack the Christian holy places and residents of the city, while residents of some Christian villages were killed and expelled, as happened in ‘Ilabun. In addition, a number of Christian border villages were destroyed and their residents evicted, as happened in the case of Kafr Bir‘im, Iqrit and others.

Despite the fact that Christian villages were subjected to collective punishment, Israel’s treatment of the adherents of the Christian faith was in general lenient compared to its treatment of Muslims. In the case of ‘Ilabun, the residents had been subjected to killings and forced expulsion, yet those expelled were allowed to return to their homes and village shortly after their expulsion—a permitted return that has become well known as a unique case in the history of the Nakba. As for the inhabitants of Kafr Bir‘im and Iqrit Israel allowed the inhabitants of the two villages to live elsewhere in the country instead of expelling them to Lebanon, contrary to what happened to the inhabitants of Muslim villages along the border strip with Lebanon. The villages that remained and were not uprooted under the military plan were inhabited by either Christian or Druze (Fassuta, Mi’lya, Tarshiha, Hurfaysh, and Jish). This discriminatory policy was the result of the international and regional calculations of the leaders of the Jewish state.

During the 1950s Israel consented to the return of thousands of refugees under the family reunification program. We do not know the exact number of those who benefited from this mechanism, but the official figures put the number at twenty thousand. Permission continued to be granted in a limited number of cases for the purpose of family reunification until the mid-1950s; still, the policy of expelling Arabs from Israel continued at least until 1956. The expulsion of several thousand residents of the city of al-Majdal-Asqalan at the end of 1950 is well known. However, any mention of the expulsion of thousands of residents after that time is largely missing from the historical literature, including the expulsion of several thousand

residents who had remained in villages of the al-Hula plain. Some residents of Krad al-Baqqara and Krad al-Ghannama had been expelled across the border to Syria, while others were sent to the village of Sha'b in 1953. In 1956, Yitzhak Rabin, commander of the northern region at the time, took advantage of the outbreak of the Sinai war and ordered the soldiers under his command to expel about two thousand residents who had remained in their villages to Jordan and Syria.⁶ In the Naqab, the expulsion of thousands of Arab residents continued until 1959.

Rabin and other army officers who led the 1948 war considered the presence of Arab residents near Israel's borders with its neighbors a problem in need of a solution.⁷ On the Jordanian front, which remained quiet during the Sinai War, Border Guard troops carried out a massacre in Kafr Qasim on the evening of 29 October 1956. The killing by Israeli troops of forty-nine Arab citizens in cold blood, eight years after the Nakba, signals clearly how they were viewed by the ruling majority and its representatives in the security agencies. There was some speculation that keeping the eastern front open and unguarded on the day of the massacre hints that there was a plot to terrorize the inhabitants and force them to leave. This massacre in the Triangle on the first day of the 1956 war reminded Palestinians of the trauma of killing and expulsion in 1948.⁸ The massacre and the expulsion of the remnants of al-Hula's Arab population were clear indicators of the still-present danger faced by those who remained in their homeland.

The objective of remaining in one's homeland after the Nakba continued to guide Palestinians not just through the months of war but also for many years after. When it became apparent after the guns had fallen silent that a large number of Palestinians remained in the Galilee, the leaders of Israel were relentless in attempting to remove a large number through a policy of repression and direct expulsion. Even after the decline of expulsion operations after 1952, plans were drawn up and action taken to encourage Palestinians to leave the country and to immigrate to Arab and foreign countries far from Palestine, such as Libya and Argentina.⁹

The Suez war of 1956 was tantamount to the "second round" in the Arab-Israeli conflict, but it did not constitute for Israel the wished-for opportunity to rid the country of those who remained. In the early 1950s, many statements by the leaders of the Jewish state were published to the effect that the fate of Arabs in Israel was not yet decided. Although it is difficult to remove tens of thousands of people under normal circumstances, war had its own rules. However, the residents of the Triangle villages all stuck resolutely to their homes and lands, and refrained from any actions that could have justified their expulsion by the army despite the horrific massacre. Since the 1956 war was far from the Jordanian and northern (Lebanese and Syrian) fronts, it became difficult to justify collective expulsion. The remaining residents of two villages in the Hula region were exceptions to this rule. In general, the 1956 events showed that Palestinians in Israel had learned the lesson of the Nakba, and became a resilient and permanent part of the population.

Still the fear among those who remained of being expelled was ever-present for at least another decade.

WEAK INTEREST IN THE CONDITIONS
OF PALESTINIANS IN ISRAEL

Most of what has been written since the Nakba has revolved around the “Palestine Question,” and little of it has dealt with the fate of the Palestinians. Arabs openly told themselves and the world at large that what had happened was a grave injustice, and that establishing the state of Israel on the ruins of Palestine was morally illegitimate, unfair, and unjust. This legalistic defensive discourse contributed to the neglect of the fate of the disaster’s victims. Generally speaking, the Arab elite adopted the “Palestinian cause” but paid much less attention to the Palestinians themselves. As for the Palestinians in Israel, the Arab boycott of the Zionist entity was a barrier that disrupted the possibility of attending to what had befallen them. The Arab world went through a somewhat protracted phase of instability after the defeat in 1948, punctuated by military coups, revolts, and assassinations of the leaders who had been accused of betraying the cause. For these and other reasons the Arabs who had remained in the “lost Paradise” were forgotten.

It may be surprising that Arab academics who were themselves among the Palestinians who remained paid scarce attention to the history of the Nakba and its consequences for them. However, that surprise dissipates once we realize that this remnant of the Palestinian people produced only a few historians, most of whom stayed far away from chronicling the Nakba and its results. Furthermore, the Arabs in Israel are without a university or research institution with a strong interest in history. Consequently, this double marginalization and fear of unearthing sensitive and complicated matters relating to the 1948 war led them to distance themselves from the subject. The communities in which a few historians resided who did poke into the events of the Nakba and its consequences considered this to be a form of indulgence that was harmful to present-day struggles, which led researchers to avoid these painful subjects.¹⁰ Gradually, however, the sense of fear and embarrassment waned and led to important studies, some of which have been published.

In the last year of military rule (1966), two pioneering studies were written by sons of “remainders.” Subhi Abu-Ghosh wrote a doctoral dissertation at Princeton University, and Sabri Jiryis, a lawyer and political activist at the time, authored the first book on *The Arabs in Israel* in Hebrew. Abu-Ghosh based his dissertation on field research in an Arab village, and its conclusions are similar to those by Israeli Orientalists about the same village. For instance, he claimed that modernization and development of Arab villages was thwarted by the traditional social structure governed by the heads of families and clans. He argued that state institutions and other external parties were the agents of progress and change, and that the

obstacles were internal and Arab, that is, unconnected to the military government and the policies of repression and expulsion. This dissertation, which earned Abu-Ghosh a PhD, has not been translated from English and has not been published in Israel.¹¹

Even Sabri Jiryis's book, although originally published in Hebrew, did not attract much attention initially.¹² The author, a courageous radical and daring critic of the military and its policies, was a graduate of Hebrew University law school (1963) and a nationalist activist. His book avoided generalities, and provided ample details about Israel's methods of repression and their instruments: military rule, the defense (emergency) regulations of 1945, the intelligence services and the police, and others. Jiryis argued that these institutions were responsible for repressing the Arab population and preventing the development of their independent economy. He also claimed that they obstructed every attempt at independent political organization, and attempted to strangle any initiative for infrastructural development and education. Jiryis's book and its conclusions are the antithesis of Abu-Ghosh's, and constituted a model for a new generation of youth who broke the fear barrier and issued a challenge to repression.

Following the establishment of a number of Palestinian institutions for study and research in Beirut, some researchers began to devote attention to the Palestinians in Israel, drawn first to the poetry of resistance and the maintaining of the Arab identity of the population of the Galilee. In the mid-1960s, resistance poets such as Mahmoud Darwish, Samih al-Qasim, and others became popularized and expressions of admiration came from Beirut and Cairo and other Arab capitals; some raised their voices in praise of the steadfastness of the Arabs in Israel and their adherence to their Arab identity. Darwish's uncomfortable reply to this sudden embrace after long years of neglect came in his famous article "Save Us from This Cruel Love."¹³ The encounter with resistance poetry resulted in an increase in interest in this remaining minority and in the publication of studies exploring it. Jiryis's book was translated into Arabic and published in Cairo and Beirut, and an updated edition was later issued in English.

Some leaders of the generation of those who remained in Haifa and the Galilee chose literature as the mechanism to express their position. The most prominent among them was Emile Habibi (1921–1996), who in 1974 published his enduring masterpiece *Al-Mutasha'il* [The Pessoptimist].¹⁴ This satiric novel exposes some of what had been concealed about the story of Palestinians remaining in Haifa and the Galilee under Israeli military rule. Dalia Karpel's documentary film *Emile Habibi: A Remainer in Haifa* was a response to Ghassan Kanafani's (1936–1972) famous novel *Returning to Haifa*.¹⁵ Habibi and Kanafani represented two distinct generations of fathers and sons who gave expression to the Nakba of the Palestinians through the form of the novel. As is well known, writers and poets do not need archives and documents to record the experiences of the defeated and to tell their stories. Consequently, they were the first to tell the

story of the fate-stricken Palestinians on both sides of the border which emerged in 1948–49.

The author of *The Pessoptimist* used to say that he carried two watermelons (politics and literature) in his arms for most of his life. Since 1974 he had been denying that his novel contained any autobiographical elements, but two decades later, on the eve of his passing away, he admitted that parts were in fact autobiographical. In the film, he reads aloud one section after another of *The Pessoptimist*, particularly concerning the road of his return from Lebanon to Haifa. This admission in Karpel's documentary film was reaffirmed by Habibi in a final interview published in *Masharif* magazine.¹⁶ In reality the novel is not just the story of one person divorced from his political and social milieu; it also gives voice to the Palestinian generation who lived through the Nakba. He chose a way to remain in Haifa with the leaders of the National Liberation League, which united in October 1948 with the Israeli Communist Party (Maki).

The *Pessoptimist* demonstrates total loyalty (to Israel), and full readiness to carry out all the tasks assigned to him, as part of his adjustment and submission to the rules of "Israeli democracy." The fate of Sa'ïd Abi al-Nahs (Happy, the Ill-Fated—the name of the *Pessoptimist*) is not as bad, relatively speaking, as that of others among his fate-stricken people, as he receives several payments and rewards for his cooperation. In spite of that, he does not rise to the same level as the average Israeli citizen, but suffers as a result of the iron grip of military rule and the actions of its representatives in Arab towns. The author of *The Pessoptimist* allows himself, behind his satiric mask, to acknowledge his weaknesses in the year of the Nakba and beyond. In contrast to Habibi the politician, the novelist admits that he and many of those who remained in Israel were searching for a way to stay at any price. We shall return to this treatise, which guided Habibi and many of his comrades, in a later chapter concerning the role of the communists in 1948 and afterwards in Israel.

In contrast to such Palestinian writing, the Israeli side did not produce anything new in the 1970s on Palestine and the Palestinians in the Nakba or its aftermath. The treatment of the history of the country by Israeli academia is relegated to sections and departments with little to connect them. The departments dealing with the history of "the land of Israel" and the history of the people of Israel do not deal with the history of the Palestinians. Usually the professors and students in those departments do not have a command of Arabic, so they do not attempt to make use of Arabic-language sources and references in their studies and research. Most studies on the Palestinians are conducted by Orientalists and security experts who serve in the Israeli occupation agencies. On the other side, we find many Palestinian researchers who wrote on the Nakba and its consequences and on many aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict, but who do not have familiarity with Hebrew. In their writings, most researchers into these topics on both sides of the conflict take their point of departure from the maxim "know thine enemy," and this

approach has produced many studies with biased views and propaganda for the sake of mobilization, instead of searching for the truth, which often contradicts what is known and familiar.

Interest in the conditions of Arabs in Israel increased considerably in the 1980s. For example, Ian Lustick's *Arabs in the Jewish State* focuses on describing and analyzing the mechanisms which enabled the continuation of Israeli control and its suppression of Arab opposition even after the end of military rule.¹⁷ His book contributed a great deal to the understanding of the regime of Jewish control and its mechanisms in dealing with the Arab minority. In *1949: The First Israelis* Tom Segev, contrary to the practice in much of this literature, allocates an appropriate place to the Arabs who remained in Israel,¹⁸ not just in terms of the number of pages dedicated to the conditions of Arabs in Israel during 1948–49, but in exposing the policy of systematic repression and harassment of this minority. The journalists Uzi Benziman and 'Atallah Mansour followed in his footsteps in their book, *Agents of a Third Party*, which expands its account of policy towards the Arabs in Israel in several areas, from the creation of the state to the 1980s.¹⁹

Research by Benny Morris, Ilan Pappé, Avi Shlaim, and others who were classified as revisionist historians offered new information and a new perspective on the Palestinian disaster. Following these, Arab and Jewish researchers published studies on the Arabs in Israel and the treatment doled out to them since 1948. These research works caused some to believe that there was not much to add or to update on these topics. This incorrect impression was due in the first place to the divorce, even in the most critical studies, between the Nakba and the origins of the history of the Palestinian minority in Israel. Unless this gap is addressed, the mistaken impression will prevail that there is no connection between them, and that the 1948 war and its outcome are not a founding event in the history of that minority. But the young generation of Arabs and Jews who were the students of the critical non-Zionist school began to participate in critiquing the Israeli narrative, even as the older generation of researchers continued to make their own contribution.

Pappé is considered one of the most daring and productive researchers to challenge the historical Zionist narrative. In the last decade, he became famous for his book *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, which describes a policy that Israel carried out systematically in the 1948 war.²⁰ The book created a sharp controversy which demonstrates that the Nakba is still a burning issue in need of further research and investigation. There is now a general consensus among the parties to the historical discussion that there were dozens of massacres and acts of expulsion of Palestinians from their country prior to and after May 1948. The debate revolves essentially around the extent to which the top Israeli leadership was responsible for these acts and gave the orders to carry them out. Pappé, Walid Khalidi, and others believe that Plan Dalet was a methodical blueprint for ethnic cleansing—the expulsion of the Palestinians from their homeland—in the year of the Nakba. However, Zionist historians, including Morris, still insist that the massacres and the acts of

expulsion carried out by the Israeli army were not the result of deliberate top-level planning or policy.²¹

The era of the revisionist historians in Israel ended during the first decade of the twenty-first century. While Pappé adopted the Palestinian historical narrative, Morris returned to the Zionist narrative in which Israel wraps itself in the robes of the victim, claiming it was acting in self-defense. He allowed himself free rein in a 2004 interview with Ari Shavit of *Haaretz*, declaring his support for the expulsion policy which Ben-Gurion led, and now blaming him for not having expelled all Palestinians from Israel.²² Morris retracted the claim that there was no planning or execution of a plan by the top leadership, and added that the field commanders had absorbed what the top leader wanted them to in terms of expelling the Palestinians after occupying their towns and villages. Even more provoking is that he justified the policy of murder and expulsion, adding that he did not think it far-fetched that Israel might expel the Palestinians in the future, including those who had remained in 1948, which he said he did not oppose.²³

In addition to Jewish researchers, in the last decade of the twentieth century there emerged a new generation of researchers from among the Arab “remainers.” Two of these, Ahmad Sa’di and Nur Masalha, specialize in the Palestinian Nakba and its effects on the lives of Arabs in Israel during the 1950s and have contributed, separately, a number of important studies on this subject.²⁴ Mustafa Abbasi authored a number of important articles and books on the cities of the Galilee pre- and post-Nakba.²⁵ Mustafa Kabha also published studies, some of which concern the fate of the Triangle area while others deal with general Palestinian problems. He is also supervising an oral history project at the Umm al-Fahm museum. Both Abbasi and Kabha succeeded in combining documents and other written sources with the use of oral history as an important resource for their research. Their studies are excellent models for documenting and chronicling forgotten aspects of the history of Palestinians in Israel.

Hillel Cohen is a prolific Israeli researcher who has published a significant number of books and articles on the Arabs in Israel. He devoted his master’s thesis to the study of “The Present Absentees.”²⁶ This study, subsequently published in Hebrew and Arabic, deals with Palestinian refugees since 1948 who were expelled and then prevented from returning to their homes and lands and became internal refugees in the Galilee. Later, Cohen published a book on Arab agents who collaborated with the institutions of the Jewish state during the period of military rule (1948–67).²⁷ This book also covers the activities of the communists and other Arab opponents of the policy of military rule, based largely on police, intelligence, and military government records.

Another recent study based on diverse sources attempted to highlight the role of Arabs in shaping their own history. Shira Robinson’s dissertation, later published, is based on Israeli archives and various Arab sources.²⁸ The author does not restrict herself to published documents and sources, but augments these with

interviews with dozens of eyewitnesses in the Galilee and the Triangle. This combination of a range of sources from both sides of the conflict is very important, as is the author's selection of theories of Zionist settlement and colonialism which makes it possible to see the larger picture of the circumstances of the Palestinian minority remaining in Israel after 1948. The studies by Cohen and Robinson are perhaps closer to the topic of my own study on the Palestinians who remained, particularly in Haifa and Galilee in the 1948–56 period.

THE STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE BOOK

The occupation of Nazareth, and the subsequent declaration of the second cease-fire in mid-July 1948, constitute the real beginning of the story of the Arabs who remained. By that time, it was clear to Israel's leaders that it had scored a victory in its military war. The Arabs and most of their leaders also became aware of this fact. The ten-day battles ended with a relatively large Arab minority remaining in lower Galilee, and it became necessary for Israel to formulate a policy regarding those who remained. A military governor of Nazareth was appointed immediately after it was occupied to run the affairs of the city and offer services to its residents in cooperation with the city's institutions and leaders. Business and education were at the top of the list of priorities. During this period Radio Israel launched a broadcast in Arabic, and a daily Arabic-language newspaper began to publish in order to transmit the government's views and policies to the Arab citizens in their own language.²⁹

The first chapter of this book sheds light on the various meanings of the Nakba in northern Palestine until the months of the second cease-fire in the summer of 1948. In that period the term "*al-Nakba*" was coined to describe the Arab defeat in the Palestine war, as it had become known that the Arab armies had not halted the expansion of the borders of the Jewish state and the expulsion of the Palestinians from the territories it occupied. The chapter reviews those events and focuses on those who remained under occupation until September 1948. The Palestinian cities of Haifa, Jaffa, Safad, and Tiberias were depopulated, but the fate of the hundreds of thousands of refugees from those cities and villages of the area is mentioned only as background, in order to focus attention on the fate of the tens of thousands who remained and to expose the circumstances and reasons which contributed to their staying and not being expelled.

The second chapter relates what occurred in the Galilee on the eve of the renewal of the fighting, and then reviews the events of the occupation of northern Palestine in what was called Operation Hiram. In mid-October 1948, war broke out again on the Egyptian front and the likelihood of battles erupting in the Galilee increased. The residents were aware of the limited capabilities of the Jaysh al-Inqadh, the Arab Rescue Army,³⁰ in any confrontation with the Israeli army. Consequently, most of the residents of the area chose to support their local leaders who tried to ensure that the inhabitants would remain in the event of a renewed outbreak of

the war. The Arab communists in Haifa and the Galilee were some of those local leaders who played an important role in the struggle to stay and to rebuild the lives of the Arab minority in Israel. This chapter, which monitors the events of the war during the Israeli effort to complete the occupation of the Galilee, closely follows the role played by the residents and the conditions which allowed them to foil the Israeli army's policies of uprooting the population in the region.

The third chapter sheds light on two groups among those who remained in northern Palestine: the Druze and the communists. Both groups, acting separately, altered their positions toward the Jewish state for different reasons during the months of war, and their leaders' actions contributed to thousands of residents remaining in the Galilee. In Haifa and Galilee, the majority of the leaders of the National Liberation League chose to cooperate with Israel and opposed the entry of Arab armies into the Palestine war. This position became particularly apparent in July 1948 when League leaders chose to cooperate with the Israeli occupation in their regions and completed a 180-degree turn when they joined Maki before the war had ended. These important aspects of the history of Maki and the role played by its leaders is still unknown to many readers who embraced the party's narrative about its struggle against military rule with no awareness of its activities during the war.

The fourth chapter completes the task of monitoring of the circumstances of the Palestinians remaining in northern Palestine after the end of the war in early 1949. Israel had formulated criteria for classifying the status of those who remained in the territories it had occupied, noting that some had become citizens while others (suspected of leaving their homes and then returning) were considered temporary residents of the Jewish state. The thousands who had been evicted from the area along the Lebanese border were considered "the present absentees." The first plebiscite did not include all the villages of upper and central Galilee, where some of the residents were considered "infiltrators" and were under relentless threat of expulsion for a long time. There was a persistent internal migration of the population of upper Galilee and border crossings in both directions for several years. While several thousand managed to return and secure a place in their homeland, thousands of other Palestinians were expelled from their homes and lands and became refugees.

Chapter 5 deals with new areas that were not explored in the earlier chapters. Residents of the Triangle, which was annexed to Israel in the spring of 1949, began to adapt to Israeli rule in that later period, as those villages on the border with Jordan, from Kafr Qasim in the south to Umm al-Fahm and its villages in the north, were arbitrarily and suddenly separated from the towns and villages of the West Bank; their population, numbering over thirty thousand, became citizens of Israel even though Israel had not stopped trying to rid itself of, or at least reduce, the Arab minority. This chapter also presents the stories of individuals, families,

and villages whose experiences in the struggle to remain have not yet been told. Despite the general policy of expulsion and preventing return, Israel allowed the residents of three villages (‘Ilabun, ‘Illut, and Kufr Qari’) to return.³¹ Shedding light on the stories of the inhabitants of these villages and the fate of members of certain families gives a vital human dimension and overturns the black and white stereotypes drawn by a number of studies.

Chapter 6 follows the progression of the struggle to remain by identifying the tools and adaptation behaviors employed for adjustment to Israeli military rule. Those who remained in Palestine realized that receiving citizenship and blue identity cards had removed the sword of expulsion hanging over their heads, and they quickly began to learn new ways to thwart the continued attempts to uproot them. One way, for example, was to resort to the Israeli Supreme Court. In Jaffa, the first such case was filed towards the end of 1948, and involved Hajj Ahmad Abu-Laban, followed by many other cases in the following years. These cases and their judgments constitute important topics for research. Most petitions were against the appropriation of land and the expulsion of residents and their arrest, as well as appeals to prevent the authorities from expelling some of those who had succeeded in returning to their homes for a second time.

The seventh and last chapter deals with the political mobilization of Arabs in Israel and their voting patterns in the Israeli Knesset elections. Like citizenship and the blue identity card, voting became a mechanism and avenue for Arabs to arrange to stay and avoid expulsion from the country. This helps explain why the communists on the one hand, and the collaborators on the other, hurried to urge their supporters to vote in the first general elections in January 1949. When the security forces resorted to the pretext of proximity to the country’s borders to uproot Arab villages, some expressed readiness to defend those borders themselves. The leaders of Maki and others demanded that Arabs be recruited in the Israel army as a demonstration of their loyalty and an attempt to ensure they could remain and enjoy equal rights. In its analysis of political conduct, this chapter will reveal many daring and unusual positions adopted in those crucial years.

The conclusion to the book completes the cycle of events from the Nakba to the war that Israel started against Egypt in 1956. This war and its aftermath served as a reminder of the 1948 war in the Galilee. The villages of the Triangle escaped the massacres and the expulsion of residents which befell Palestinians in the Galilee and other locations, but the 1956 war reopened that danger when the army declared a curfew on the villages of the Triangle hours before the war began on 29 October 1956—and announced it only after villagers had left to tend their fields. This sudden movement restriction resulted in the killing of forty-nine people from the village of Kafr Qasim by Border Guards as they returned from their fields that evening, unaware of the curfew. Yet the aftermath of that massacre was contrary to

the expectations of those who planned and executed it, as it reinforced the solidarity of those who had remained and added determination to their struggle.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

Gaps offer an inviting opportunity for researchers in general, including historians. This thought kept returning to me at the beginning of my study of the history of Arabs in Israel after the Nakba. However, as the research progressed, it was apparent that the situation was complex and required explanation and clarification. Despite the obvious gap, few had approached the topic to try to study it seriously and deeply. When I entered the stage of conducting interviews and collecting oral testimonies from those who experienced the period under study, I found some of them reluctant to discuss it. I became preoccupied with trying to explain why researchers had kept their distance from the subject, as did some storytellers. The reason why many refrained from entering into the details and depths of the subject provides an important basis for understanding the history of the Palestinian minority in Israel. Why did those who lived through this period not write memoirs concerning their roles and activities during and after the 1948 war?

Most Palestinians, particularly the peasants, could not read or write at the time, and therefore did not keep diaries or write memoirs. The oral testimonies of Palestinians who were contemporaries of the events of the Nakba became the primary source for presenting the point of view of the defeated in that war. Memory is a problematic source for writing history if we rely on it without close examination. However, the categorical rejection of oral documentation due to the problematic nature of memory is an obstacle that has been surmounted by historical research. Some Arab literary figures and researchers have collected the testimonies of the “Nakba generation” in order to tell certain aspects of the disaster that transformed Palestinians from home owners and people with a homeland into destitute refugees.

The reactions of most Israelis to the stories told by Palestinians range from total rejection to casting doubt on the testimonies and those who rely on them. An example can be found in some of the Israeli reactions to the novel by Elias Khoury titled *Gate of the Sun*, which was translated and published in Hebrew.³² The historian and journalist Tom Segev issued a strongly worded indictment of the book after it was published in Israel. In his review, titled “An Arab Story,” he writes: “A Lebanese author accuses the Israeli army of committing war crimes. Where is the proof? A literary fact opposed to an historical fact.”³³ Segev recoils from the tales of killing and repression and the eviction of the population of Sha’b in the Galilee, the main theater of the protagonist’s memories. He notes that “what Benny Morris wrote about the rise of the ‘Palestinian problem’ does not even approach those atrocities.” From his point of view, Morris and his archival documents

constitute the proof that the discussion revolves around made-up stories to which the author gave literary form. Then Segev pronounces categorically that “the burden of proof rests with the teller of the story,” even in a literary work and not just in researched studies. He concludes: “Khoury does not provide any kind of proof of what he alleges. He is not a well-known author in Israel, and there is no reason for us to believe him.”³⁴

Segev’s last sentence is of the essence: what if he had he been “a well-known author in Israel”! Segev assumes, if that had been the case, that people would have believed him. In this way many believed the tales of *Khirbet Khiz’eh* (Ruins of Khiz’ah) by S. Yizhar,³⁵ without asking him for proof or documentation. Similarly, they believe the statements of victims of the Holocaust, Europeans and other Jews, when they tell their stories to the world. Elias Khoury is a prolific writer and is quite famous in the Arab world, but not in Israel. Why should Jewish readers of Hebrew believe him? But the more important question that arises from Segev’s assertions is: What constitutes proof from the perspective of the historian? Endowing archival documents with sanctity, as is apparent from Segev’s absolute reliance on Benny Morris, is a problematic issue which requires ample discussion, for which we do not have space here.

Many Jews and Arabs have only heard the narrative of the winners in the events of 1948. Few of them, particularly in Israel, have heard the human story of the losers. The year 1948 witnessed the creation of the state of Israel and the Nakba, with the tragic consequences that Palestinians are living to this day. The world that they knew and inhabited has been demolished since that tragedy, which was man-made and not the work of fate or nature. Despite the writings of the revisionist historians, there are many documents still shrouded in secrecy in Israeli archives. Tom Segev alluded to the fact that most of these secret documents concern massacres and the expulsion and repression of the population at the hands of Israeli soldiers. Segev adds: “A state that conceals printed war crimes concerning its history is retroactively complicit in those crimes.”³⁶

As is well-known, the output of historians is not absolute; their research findings are time bound and not comprehensively precise, as they do not constitute the whole truth about the period under study. At the time that Tom Segev permitted himself to fiercely attack Elias Khoury, relying on Morris’s *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, Morris had published a new book, *Correcting a Mistake*, in which he cast doubt on some of his previous findings.³⁷ In an article on Operation Hiram in the Galilee, Morris affirmed the large number of massacres, expulsions, and acts of terrorizing the population carried out by the Israeli army to expel Palestinians from the Galilee outside Israel’s borders. He went on: “Our information about these massacres is very limited because of the secrecy imposed by Israeli army archives on the relevant documents.”³⁸ We will just have to wait to see—if these secret documents are declassified—what they will add to our knowledge. Until that happens, are the victims supposed to go to their graves without being

given a chance to tell their stories because they do not possess written documents to support what they have to say?

In the absence of Palestinian archives, this study will depend on the testimony of eyewitnesses, some of whom have kept diaries while others have given testimonies before the author and other researchers. Only a limited number of Palestinians had written autobiographies until the 1970s, but in the last two decades there has been an increase in the use of this literary form, which also constitutes a historical document. Because of the limited abilities of some authors some memoirs had to be published locally at the expense of the authors and distribution was limited. These locally published memoirs and autobiographies constitute an important source for hearing the voices of the defeated and the forgotten in national historiographies. A strong point of these memoirs is that they retrace lives of Palestinians before the Nakba, and then show how those lives were shattered during the war and in the postwar years.

Since there are few memoirs of those who remained in Israel from the Nakba generation, most of whom could not read or write, listening to oral testimonies has become an urgent necessity in the last few years. Those among this generation who are still alive and in good health do not number more than a few hundred. Therefore, listening to the testimonies of 120 people who lived through the Nakba and the subsequent years in Haifa and the Galilee is a way of rescuing the personal and human experiences which would otherwise be lost with the passing of their owners. I am saddened that a fair number of those whom I met once or more than once are no longer alive. However, their testimonies remain as important building blocks of a personal and human dimension to be added to published documents and sources. These testimonies which I have collected in the field are a treasure and a precious addition, the importance of which cannot be overestimated, to the other available sources.

Historians and other researchers have concluded that oral testimonies are important as living documents to which attention must be paid; they should not be neglected because they present some problems. As in the case of any source on which historians rely in their research, one should be cautious and compare them with other written and published sources to create a fuller picture. Military documents which some Israeli researchers treat as sacred are not free of the intrusion of self-interest, politics, and the self-image of those who wrote and classified them. The author of this book, who has read a not inconsiderable number of Israeli archival documents, has discovered on more than one occasion that some were fake, and that attempts to hide things and mislead were made to conceal some war crimes, whereas eyewitnesses have offered detailed descriptions of those events, albeit decades later. That is why oral testimonies constitute an essential and indispensable addition here, in order to give voice to the victims and the defeated in the war of 1948.

The perpetrators of war crimes have always tried to silence the voice of their victims, to erase them from the historical record, and to transfer responsibility for crimes to the victims. Usurpers fear memories, as our poet Mahmoud Darwish has said. The Palestinian-Israeli case is no exception, particularly when talking about the events of the Nakba and the years following. Most of the Zionist accounts of those events vary between denying they ever happened to placing the blame on the Palestinians and their leaders for what happened, rather than being open and frank with themselves and with others. Escaping historical accountability and its political liabilities is today's version of burying one's head in the sand.

The Palestinians, who cannot forget the Nakba and its consequences for their present and future, transmit the memories of events from one generation to the other so that they will not be forgotten and will not be extinguished by the logic of power. Research on memory has demonstrated that the victims of acts of extreme violence store details of what they witnessed and what made their bodies tremble for decades. The significance given to those painful events that imprinted their lives may differ, but the essence of the story and its details remain constant even as time passes. The testimonies by those who survived concerning the events of the Nakba and its direct consequences are distinctive documents to be added to other available sources. They should be relied on using caution and in a professional manner in order to contribute to making the voices heard, especially since many sides have tried to silence them in order to conceal war crimes and their consequences for the Palestinians who remained in Haifa and the Galilee after 1948.

The oral testimonies which have been collected for this study, and on which it relies, are personal memories, distinct from the public or collective memory that states and their institutions promote. The eyewitnesses whom I interviewed were mostly victims of acts of ethnic cleansing carried out by the Israeli army in the Galilee during the war. The memories and identities of those witnesses were forged by the extreme violence they experienced that had been intended to terrorize the population. Contrary to those responsible for those acts, who did all they could to forget them and keep them concealed, the victims stored the details in their memories where they remained resistant to forgetfulness. A number of other researchers and activists have preceded me in conducting similar interviews. In this respect, noteworthy is important work that is being carried out by Zochrot, an Israeli nonprofit organization.³⁹ Oral testimonies have also been published in local history books about dozens of villages in the Galilee and other regions over the last two decades, thus rescuing them from loss since many of the contributors have since passed away.

This study relies on oral narratives and local written history, supported by a large number of primary and secondary sources and references, to try to present a macro-picture of events that is interspersed with the stories of local individuals and groups. The aim is to offer a comprehensive and integrated interpretation

of its scope, by uncovering the events of what happened to those who remained, particularly in northern Palestine. The oral narratives have been subjected to the methodology of critical reading and comparison, the same tools on which the historian relies when dealing with written texts and documents.

The study relies first and foremost on primary and secondary written sources from both sides of the conflict. Communists, their documents and press (both in Arabic and Hebrew), and the memoirs of some of their activists make up the major share of the list of sources and references for this study. Dozens of members of the party and others whom I met have added important testimonies about the events of their time, which provide vital documentation of the local history, and are not represented either in archives or in the contemporary press. *Al-Ittihad* weekly newspaper provided the other side of the coin to *al-Yawm*, the organ that presented governmental policy and propaganda to Arab readers. Furthermore, the Mapam party and other Arab and Jewish groups have left us their documents and newspapers, which monitored the events after the Nakba with a critical and penetrating eye.⁴⁰

Finally, we should remember court rulings, particularly those of the Supreme Court, from which many victims of military rule sought help and protection. In many cases, the plaintiffs and their witnesses came to the court and gave testimony concerning events in their villages in 1948 and after. Those testimonies, on which the court relied in passing judgment, were made by witnesses who swore to tell the truth, and at a time when the events they related were still fresh in their minds, having occurred only a short time earlier. In this way, some plaintiffs from Galilee villages succeeded in obtaining judgments that forced the interior ministry to give them identity cards and prevented the military authorities from expelling them again. A quick comparison of those testimonies with later ones confirms that oral histories are an important and vital source for relating the stories of the victims and their points of view regarding the events they lived through and which were imprinted on their identities and their memories.