

ESHET 5.30 - DANI OPERATION + 12.38
BOSS 4.00 BISAN

TOWARDS A COMMON ARCHIVE

THE NAKBA IN THE WORDS OF ITS PERPETRATORS

60 years passed since the 1948 Nakba, It is only in the last two decades, after more than 40 years of denial, that Palestinian refugees-victims' testimonies started to be taken in consideration, both as historical documents (that we got the habit to call oral history) and memory.

Due to the time factor i.e. the age of the survivals, recollection of Palestinians testimonies is based on the urgent need of collecting the Palestinians' memory.

Despite the numerous Web sites, documentary films, books, oral testimonies, stories, lectures, publications and research projects which are produced in the aim to tell the story of the expulsion and destruction of the Palestinian society on the eve and during the 1948 war, "*indigenous Palestinian history and anthropology remain an enterprise largely to be realised.*" notes Lena Jayyusi director of Oral History Program in Shaml.

Collecting and archiving the victim/survival' narrative raises the question of the status of the victim as a witness. And sometimes even their legitimacy to take part in the establishing of an authentic non-ideological narrative of the events and suffering he endorsed becomes crucial.

Auschwitz survivor, the writer Primo Levi, already insisted on the distinction between the witness and survival. Following Levi, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (in its' reminisces of Auschwitz') reminds us that "*it is difficult for the survival to be at once, victim and witness.*"

Hannah Arendt considers that *“the history of Holocaust was not written by the victims themselves but was written after the trial of Eichmann in Jerusalem after he spoke about it.”*

And as history is told and written by the victorious, (the winners), concerning Palestine official history as well public memory and conciseness were imposed by the Zionist movement and the Israeli governments.

“Palestinian oral history (Lena Jarryusi) is a fundamental tool for challenging the official Israeli narrative and discourse”.

But in fact what challenges most the Israeli narrative is the corroboration of Palestinian ‘memory’ or ‘oral history’ with Israeli documents or testimonies.

The public and scientific impact created by the revelation, interpretation and publication of documents done by what become to be known as the *Israeli new history school or the new historians*, illustrated the importance and efficiency (politically speaking) of the perpetrators or the executors ‘testimony’.

Quite a lot was written about the research of historians as Benny Morris, Tom Segev, Ilan Papé, Avi Shlaim and others.

From all the arguments about their importance and tribute to establish a non-ideological narrative of the 1948 events, two points are to be retained.

First, that it is not so much their analyses that are the fundamental contribution, but the fact that they collected, reviled and published documents, facts and testimonies generated by the crimes perpetrators themselves.

The second point is their belonging to the victorious society which is the key to understand the international impact of their work.

These two facts - the access to the material and the belonging to the Israeli Jewish society - are much more important than their analytical work. Since the revelation of the Zionist armed forces documents, the study and impact of the victims' oral history is at a turning-point.

The victims' i.e. the Palestinians are less in the need to fight at the same time: denial and to struggle for the acceptance of their narrative.

Thank to the new Israeli history, it is now largely acknowledge that the Palestinian narrative corroborates with the perpetrators' history and there is no more question of truth, facts or chronology. Only intentions goals ideologies and aims persists in the debate

The *so-called* new Israeli historians gave, through their work - and from the reasons exposed above – what the French philosopher Michel Foucault entitled a “Status de vérité” (status of truth) to the victims/survivals testimonies.

The interest of such a perspective (i.e. perpetrators testimonies) is explained clearly by Raoul Hilberg, the great American historian and author of the magisterial “*Destruction of the European Jews*”, wich resums in his politiques of memory, more than 50 years of research, “*It was impossible to catch the full dimension of this historical fact if we don't understand the mechanism of the executors' acts. It is the executors who had the global view. He himself formed the fundamental element. It is through his eyes that I had to look at the event, from its genesis till its climax. The insurance that the perspective of the executors offers the first track to follow became for me a doctrine that I never changed.*”

Paradoxically, the notion '*duty of memory*' is only concerns the victims. Executors, perpetrators, the criminals themselves were never obliged either felt the need to testify about their actions or did. Of course, when they did so, it was under the double figure of hero or/and victim.

There are not many public stages or spaces where criminals are band to testify.

The justice courtroom or the truth committees are two spaces where criminals are obliged or willing to witness.

In these cases, the simple filed soldiers and officers who implemented the criminal policy are invited to describe what exactly they remember they did.

The existence of such '*spaces of voice*' depends on one obligatory condition: the victims of the crime must become in certain moment, on their turn (and not too late after the event) victorious.

Under this condition, the justice court or the Truth and reconciliation committee becomes a way to collect or even redeem the perpetrators' and executors' testimonies.

It is a wishful thinking to consider that in the case of the 1947-1948 Nakba, a trial or even a truth committee will take place before the main Israeli actors will disappear from this world.

Experiences of French torturers in Algeria, Second World War criminals or Argentinean ones show that the age has a major influence on the perpetrators deep need to speak about their crimes and to testify in a confession like act.

Time is running out. The 17 years old soldiers of the Zionist militias who fought the 1948 war in Palestine are already over 70 years old and their commanders around 80. No serious work was done in collecting the testimonies of these actors of the Palestinian Nakba. Of course, they told either the “heroic” or the “victim” stories of that time. But they were never obliged to witness. They were bound to keep silence about what ever was in contradiction or could harm Israel official history. They actively participated in the construction of the Israeli – and the world’s – memory/deny of the 1948 crimes.

For many years, the expulsion and the destruction of Palestinian society were absent from the Israeli official discourse. The soldiers who took part in those actions could not tell the real story of the Nakba in heroic terms. Their testimony was resumed to “heroic” actions and battles against the so-called *Arab armed gangs*.

The banalisation of the Israeli public discourse on *Transfer* as the fact that some officials and ministers in Israeli government talk freely about transfer make us to believe that the approach to some of 1948 Nakba actors can be facilitated.

Some of them believe – among many other Israelis – that, in view of the actual situation, the 1948 ethnic cleansing is *not yet finished*.

Others believe now that the expulsion and the destruction should be considered as heroic acts that nothing should ashamed about and it’s time to assume and to be proud of.

Others kept silence for too long.

Due to the fact that the witnesses (perpetrators) are getting old and might soon disappear, we launched a project of collecting testimonies from Israeli soldiers and commanders who took part actively in the expulsion of the Palestinian people and the destruction of their villages.

The objectives of this project are to document, to archive, to legitimate the Palestinian testimony, to serve as a document in the struggle for restitution, research, documentary film productions, etc.

Collecting the perpetrator's oral memory, - which corroborate both with the historical documents and with the oral memory of those who became Palestinian refugees - joins a largely developed debate about the importance of perpetrators' testimony.

The risk of physical disappearance of the participants' generation urges us to collect their testimonies.

Such a recollection might help to avoid a mythical or/and ideological image of the perpetrators, an image generated by the victims and that risks to dominate their future representation

Israeli testimonies are crucial in the construction of a new conscience and a legitimacy concerning the victim testimonies. And as such, these testimonies are part of the Palestinian oral history.

If you wish Palestine's new history, or, the future Palestine's history.

Summery of the main points raised in the interviews:

Having completed a 30 hour of pilot research we can conclude that most interviewees do not deny the Nakba but repress the knowledge, and in most cases they justify it by the notion that they had no choice, they had to establish a Jewish state. The "events" of 1929 and 1936 are used to justify the preparation for war; it gives the historical explanation for the "either them or us" concept.

The common argument concerning the question about expulsion is that the Arab leadership called the Palestinian population to leave the cities and villages for a few weeks with the intension of coming back. However, the question about fleeing or expulsion seems irrelevant if we take into consideration that the main fact is, that there was an explicit action again the return of the refugees. A great deal of ITW give the example of Abou Gosh and Faradis as an argument against the idea of an organized expulsion.

In nearly all cases where the refugees experienced expulsion, the Jews describe a very different experience: we arrived at night and the villages were empty, but when asked what they had done the night before, how many bombs were shelled they could not make any connection between what the Palestinians had to go through at night with the outcome of the empty villages in the morning.

It seems that when they say that they didn't see the refugees fleeing, they are not lying, they couldn't see the inhabitants of the land, they were ideologically blinded. Most of interviewees talk openly about the massacre in Lydd and Dir Yassin, but regard it as an exception. It appears as if there was a general consent that only these two massacres will be acknowledged.

The Arab resistance is described as carried out by gangs.

There is no distinction between the gangs and the Arab Liberation Army?????

Usually there is no distinction between the months that preceded the Arab invasion and the war itself.

The Jews were obliged to fight for the roads, because of Arab hostility]

A common sentence which is constantly repeated as an explanation for the fleeing is: "They were afraid that we will do to them what they wanted to do to us."

Another common sentence is the biblical saying "He who rises to kill you, should be killed first"

All interviewees say that most of the villages they entered were empty. they do not make any link between their night attacks and bombardment and the fact that people left.

Many interviews go beyond the discourse on the expulsion and 1948, deal with the destruction of villages by the military government and suggest analogies with the current situation

All interviewees have a very vivid memory of the geography of Palestine, they know all the names of the Palestinian villages and towns. Yet there seems to be a discrepancy between the geography they carry in their memories which is Palestine and the narrative which is Zionist.

The body language of the interviewees, are also of great significance. So are the questions that they do not answer, their silences, their contradictions , the language they use to cover facts and truths (e.g the Palestinians had gangs and lived in shacks)