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The Palestinian Perspective: Understanding the Legacy of al-Nakba Through the Palestinian Narrative

By Muhammad Jamal Saadah

The memories carried by the Palestinian people can be understood in two forms. First, there are the memories as a result of direct trauma received through displacement and death throughout the history of the Zionist colonial project. The Palestinian Nakba, as but one example, highlights the extent of such memories through the traumatizing military massacres and forced expulsion of over 750,000 Palestinians at the hands of Zionist militant groups. These direct memories are carried from generation to generation and transform into a looming sense of collective melancholy experienced by the later generations both in historical Palestine as well as those living in diaspora. There is a clear disconnect in historical academia as people try to understand the suffering of the Palestinians through questionable historical frameworks rather than a lens that accurately represents the memories and trauma of the Palestinians as they had and continue to experience. As a result, Palestinians today find their memories of trauma challenged and in some cases outright denied via these historical frameworks and atmospheres produced by the Israeli government. The question is then how could we be able to understand trauma and memory as it relates to the Palestinians? Throughout this thesis we will explore several different forms of translating and transmitting Palestinian memory.

Introduction

Palestinians acknowledge May 15th as the commemoration of the Palestinian Nakba, which refers to a series of genocidal massacres across the land of historical Palestine in 1948. 'Nakba' in the Arabic language literally translates to 'catastrophe', and this word was attributed to the series of events in 1948 that resulted in the deaths of thousands and the expulsion of over 750,000 Palestinians, leading to over 6 million Palestinians currently living in diaspora. The Nakba was categorized by the violent demolition and seizure of hundreds of Palestinian villages via mass killing and forced displacement at the hands of Zionists militant groups, which later became the backbones of the Israeli state. Samera Esmeir opens her essay in *Nakba, Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*: "The year of the Nakba, 1948, was a year of conquest. It was a year in which death and destruction were imposed, though not to a perfection, on what had previously existed."¹ The Palestinian communities, especially those living in diaspora, carry their collective memories of the Nakba from generation to generation; strengthening their overall memory of Palestine in the process. Despite this effort, there are several challenges historians face when addressing the Palestinian Catastrophe, which are centered around the ideas of witnessing and memories.

¹ Esmeir, Samera, and Lila Abu-Lughod. "Memories of Conquest: Witnessing Death in Tantura." Essay. In *Nakba, Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*, edited by Ahmad H. Sa'adi, 247–69. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007, 247.

Palestinians today find their memories of trauma, as well as their general culture and history, challenged by the historical frameworks and atmospheres produced and used by the Israel state.

The Palestinian story poses several interesting anthropological questions, regarding the idea of a stolen and hidden narrative in relation to trauma: How are the memories of al-Nakba preserved and passed down? What does it mean to have an apparatus working against you? We soon learn that the identity and existence of the Palestinians has been under attack by the crimes against fact as memories of al-Nakba are being denied. Similar to Saidiya Hartman's realization in *Lose Your Mother*, there is the case of the fragmented archive where the record of al-Nakba and the events are incomplete and memories become ultimately lost.² Author Gayl Jones also explores these questions around generational trauma and memory through her novel *Corregidora*, which explores the life of Ursa and her task to carry the memories of her enslaved women ancestors; preserving them and passing them on.³ As we expand upon these themes shared within the black American narrative and history of trauma and apply it within the context of the Palestinian Nakba and diaspora, we are able to explore the act of remembrance when one's memory is held by the enemy, as well as how the colonized can break free from the colonial narrative where their minds above all else has been a target of colonization and oppression by the colonial regime.

The Zionist colonial narrative operates in opposition to the truths and memories of al-Nakba, and therefore acts against the lives of Palestinians. Nevertheless, it is regarded as a 'truth' which creates a framework of 'history' that is based on myth and is used as a weapon against the indigenous Palestinian people. In order to understand the power of 'history' and explore the means to change it, we must look at the origins of the traditional historical account of Israel. This account was pushed by the Zionist communities and government since the day of al-Nakba, and lacked real archival record. This was due to the fact that the documents relating to military operations in 1948, evidence that the events of al-Nakba were calculated and pre-determined, were actually classified by the government following the British model of the "thirty-year rule", and were not released until 1988. For three decades after al-Nakba, official accounts were meant to utilize a romantic and mythical account regarding the founding of Israel. With regards to al-Nakba, there was an historical grey area with no clear story. That is not to say that the Palestinians have not carried their own stories in the form of oral histories/testimonies, however, those stories were not treated as legitimate evidence and were considered romanticizations of their own.

After the archives were eventually released in the 80s, a minority group of historians — called "New Historians" — emerged and challenged the traditional Israeli perspective; making several contradictions to the 'official' account of al-Nakba and the foundations upon which the Israeli state was built. They used the released documents to show that the Palestinians did not leave by their own free will, but were instead ethnically cleansed and expelled from their homes as their villages were burnt to the ground.⁴ This is not to say that 'history' has become a friend to the Palestinian voice; far from it, as a matter of fact. The story of the New Historians does show how the apparatus of history could be changed to work for the Palestinian memory and narrative rather than against it. Despite the efforts of the New Historians and the declassification of the archives, the traditional account remains official in most case studies and continues to foster an environment of debasement, denial, and the suppression of Palestinian memories and identity.

Esmeir expands on this idea of denial with the case of Theodore Katz, a graduate student from the University of Haifa who wrote an MA thesis in 1998, utilizing various Israeli archives while also taking into consideration a Palestinian narrative. Katz's thesis was concerned with the 'Arab exodus' — as al-Nakba has been referred to by Zionist historians — and the displacement of several Palestinian villages. Initially, Katz's thesis was praised by some academics as a well-balanced account of the history of the 'Arab exodus'. Unfortunately, Katz was faced with a libel lawsuit from the Alexandroni Brigade Veterans' Association⁵ due to his labling of the events as 'massacres', or rather, "exceptional acts of killing", having taken place in the village of Tantura. These labels were mainly drawn from Palestinian survivors' testimonies. Since this ran against the traditional Israeli account, and the veterans deny any massacre having taken place, Katz's thesis was under public debate and Katz himself faced a major legal challenge. In the end, although Katz settled the libel case, his degree was revoked

2 Hartman, Saidiya. *Lose Your Mother*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006.

3 Jones, Gayl. *Corregidora*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1975.

4 Pappé, Ilan. *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. Oxford, UK: Oneworld, 2006.

5 The Alexandroni Brigade was an IDF military brigade which was involved in the 1948 war and was also responsible for the massacre of Tantura village.

and his thesis was taken off the university's library shelves. This legal battle was essentially a means of legally challenging the Palestinian narrative of the massacre of Tantura. Rather than a case against libel, this was a court case about the historical validity of the events of al-Nakba and the memories of trauma carried by the Palestinian survivors. Esmeir notes that the key strategy for the plaintiffs was disqualifying the testimonies of Tantura's survivors, making the world forget about the atrocities that took place.⁶

The testimonies by Katz's interviewees were debunked by the 'official' accounts. These official accounts are not only drawn from the testimonies of the veterans, but also from the fact that there is a lack of primary sources describing that a massacre actually took place in Tantura. Esmeir explains that this is due to the fact that the Tantura massacre was denied and covered-up almost immediately via the literal destruction and censorship of those very primary sources.⁷ Considering both the memories of the traumatized slaves which Hartman and Jones explore as well as the memories of the expelled Palestinians, we can see a theme where the memories of the oppressed are, quite literally, stolen, denied, and subsequently erased by the oppressors.

As we see with the case of Katz' thesis, the court recognizes the Zionist narrative as the default, unless there is established an entirely accurate and detailed picture of the contrary Palestinian narrative that is also accounted for by the Israeli archives. Since there is a lack of written primary sources from the Israeli archives, this picture had to be drawn from spoken testimonies of Tantura's survivors. Essentially, oral history is the only real way that the memories of Tantura can be preserved. We see similar instances, as we later explore, in Gayl Jones' *Corregidora* as Ursa's family pass down and preserve their memories through oral histories, albeit having a somewhat different effect on the mind and bodies of those remembering. Jones expresses an importance of preserving personal histories through telling stories across generations: "My great-grandmama told my grandmama the part she lived through that my grandmama didn't live through and my grandmama told my mama what they both lived through and my mama told me what they all lived through and we were suppose to pass it down like that from generation to generation so we'd never forget".⁸ Likewise, Palestinian memories are also passed down, in a generationally, within this context of retold stories and oral histories.

This posed a very troublesome legal problem, as oral history could easily be labeled as hearsay and therefore become inadmissible as evidence. Katz's interviews and the court testimonies by his interviewees revealed some contradictions and lack of order in the accounts of Tantura's survivors. On the surface, this Palestinian narrative could be compared to the issues Hartman faces while attempting to narrate the Middle Passage, in the sense that both the Palestinian narrative and African slave narrative appear incomplete via fragmented archives. In the case of Katz's thesis, we see a direct legal challenge against the memories of trauma for Tantura's survivors. Yet, it is important to note that the survivors have not lost their own personal memories.

The 'Tantura Case', is a perfect example of the inability of an Israeli courtroom to listen to and understand the memories of Palestinian survivors: "To understand survivors' memories of the massacre, of this very specific incident of death, one has to understand the partial death of human relationships that Palestinian society was subjected to following the 1948 war and the establishment of the State of Israel".⁹ Esmeir explains that the memories of the Palestinian survivors of Tantura village must be understood as ongoing memories. That is, these memories exist between the past and the future rather than on a linear temporal scale: "The past is relived in the present and does not come to an end in the present". Although 1948 is the year of the Nakba, the trauma is ongoing as the survivors continue to survive.¹⁰

Esmeir's understanding of the Palestinian memory falls in line with some of the ideas which author Gayl

6 Esmeir, Samera, and Lila Abu-Lughod. "Memories of Conquest: Witnessing Death in Tantura." Essay. In *Nakba, Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*, edited by Ahmad H. Sa'adi, 247-69. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007, 249-253.

7 Esmeir, Samera, and Lila Abu-Lughod. "Memories of Conquest: Witnessing Death in Tantura." Essay. In *Nakba, Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*, edited by Ahmad H. Sa'adi, 247-69. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007, 262.

8 Jones, Gayl. *Corregidora*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1975, 9.

9 Esmeir, Samera, and Lila Abu-Lughod. "Memories of Conquest: Witnessing Death in Tantura." Essay. In *Nakba, Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*, edited by Ahmad H. Sa'adi, 247-69. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007; 256 - 369.

10 Esmeir, Samera, and Lila Abu-Lughod. "Memories of Conquest: Witnessing Death in Tantura." Essay. In *Nakba, Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*, edited by Ahmad H. Sa'adi, 247-69. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007; 256 - 369.

Jones discusses in her novel *Corregidora*. The book takes a painfully honest account of the generational trauma suffered by the black community as a result of the atrocities of slavery, intertwining Ursa's - the novel's protagonist, a black American blues singer - own narrative with her family's traumatic history.¹¹ Ursa carries the memories of her ancestors, yet these memories aren't necessarily restricted by any real temporal constraints. Instead, we see Ursa actively preserving her family's memories through embodying their trauma. For Ursa, memories and trauma aren't locked into the past, but are experienced in both the past and present; following a similar line to the memories of the Tantara massacre. In fact, the entire act of remembering, as Ursa experiences it, actually reproduces the same violence and suffering on their own mind and body; creating a neverending account and experience of violence.

As we consider the problems of the archives, we understand that Palestinians share a similar task. Palestinians must preserve their own memories and narrative, through the context of history, to make their voices heard and debunk the troublesome traditional Zionist account. Oral history is passed down from generation to generation, creating a continuous sense of trauma and remembrance that isn't bound by a temporal scale. With this in mind, we can understand there to be no real factual fault within the Palestinian memories. The fault lies in the system of a 'history' that is incapable of properly understanding them and describing their suffering.

The memories carried by the Palestinian people can be understood in two forms. First, there are the memories as a result of direct trauma received through displacement and death throughout the history of the Israeli colonial project. The Palestinian Nakba, as but one example, highlights the extent of such memories through the traumatizing military massacres and forced expulsion of over 750,000 Palestinians at the hands of Zionist militant groups. The second form arises when the direct trauma transforms into a looming sense of a collective common experience, as memories are carried from generation to generation. There is a clear disconnect in historical academia as people try to understand the suffering of the Palestinians through questionable historical frameworks rather than a lens that accurately represents the memories and trauma of the Palestinians as they had experienced and continue to experience them. As a result, Palestinians today find their memories of trauma challenged and in some cases outright denied via these historical frameworks and atmospheres produced by the Israeli government. The question is then how could we be able to understand trauma and memory as it relates to the Palestinians? Throughout this thesis we will explore several different forms of translating and transmitting Palestinian memory.

This thesis will explore these questions. Chapter 1 serves as a starting ground to set the stage of understanding the Palestinian identity as well as the Palestine-Israel conflict through the lens of settler-colonialism. Chapter 2 focuses on the legal and social challenges that Palestinian memories face in regard to al-Nakba as it relates to the idea of a hidden and ignored narrative. Chapter 3 is an analysis of the film *Route 181 Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel* in terms of its effect and legacy in exploring Palestinian narrative and providing an instrument to study that very narrative under. Chapter 4 examines the collective trauma that the Palestinian people suffer as a consequence of settler-colonialism and the generational transmission of trauma. Chapter 4 will also involve a heavy personal interview between myself and Lara Sheehi, a professional psychoanalyst and clinician who has worked firsthand with and within the Palestinian community.

11 Jones, Gayl. *Corregidora*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1975.

Chapter 1: Who are the Palestinians?

The irony—indeed the mother of ironies—is that Ben-Gurion spent 1916 researching the history of Palestine in—of all places—the New York Public Library. One of the conclusions of his research was that the Palestinian peasantry were the real descendants of the ancient Hebrews.

- Walid Khalidi¹²

The Palestinians live in a state of stasis and antistasis, where their identity is not merely connected to an abstract sense of ethnohistory but rather a continuous lived experience that connects them as a culture and a people. It is true, that the efforts towards an independent Palestinian state are relatively recent, and in turn a sense of Palestinian nationalism, yet that is only a small piece of what we can understand about the Palestinians. The ‘Palestinian identity’ is deeply rooted in history as well as their present experiences of living under the burden of settler colonialism in both Israel and the Palestinian Territories. This paper will ultimately make some presumptions. First, the Palestinians are in fact the indigenous inhabitants of historical Palestine. Second, the state of Israel is one that operates on the basis of settler-colonialism and works against the human rights of the Palestinians where their wellbeing, livelihood, psyche and right to self-determination is concerned. Third, the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians is not one rooted in ethnic or religious differences, but is instead characterized by the notion of it being a continuous struggle between the oppressors and the oppressed.

The Palestinian identity

Although it may seem as an unorthodox detour, the issues around the cultural phenomenon of ‘race’ is paramount in our understanding of the Palestinians as a people with distinct cultural and ethnic backgrounds. After Charles Darwin’s publication of *On the Origin of Species*, where he introduced his evolutionary theory of natural selection, we see the rise of ‘social evolutionaries’ in the 19th Century. As an ‘evolutionary’ and scientifically-labeled mode of perceiving differences between the so-called ‘races’, social evolutionary theory can be explained as a progressivist and determinist method of classifying different peoples.¹³ This notion of social Darwinism described different races as having different uses of the human brain and are therefore in different stages of human development, which ultimately fostered into the cultural understanding of non-white ‘savages’ and the ‘civilized’ white.

It wasn’t until Franz Boas, father of American Anthropology, wrote his critiques on racial formalism and established a field of study that rejected this form of scientific racism. ‘Race’, as Boas describes it, is nothing short of a social construct of unstable types, lacking any real biological or scientific backbone. Although Boas strongly influenced how ‘race’ should be understood in the anthropological and overall academic context, the legacy of social Darwinism championed by individuals such as Herbert Spencer and E.B Taylor lasts to this very day. In particular, Taylor and Spencer’s idea that certain races lacked the intellectual capacity for higher reasoning was used as justification for Western globalization and the European colonial projects we see throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. This is significant when discussing Palestine through the lens of settler-colonialism, as we see the same logic and narrative being used in Palestine to describe the indigenous population — the Palestinians.

When trying to understand the origins of Palestinians, in the attempt to classify them, we must acknowledge the fact that historical Palestine was not originally Arab. A common misconception regarding the background of the Palestinian people is that they are a part of some ‘Arab’ race. The term ‘Arab’ refers to the nomadic bedouins and city dwellers residing in the Arabian Peninsula. The first conquests led by the first Islamic Caliphate in the 7th and 8th centuries incorporated much of the Levant into their empire, including historical Palestine. Many people use this fact to claim that the Palestinians we see today are somehow directly related to the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula, yet we must understand that the Arab ‘race’ doesn’t refer to a specific biological and ethnic grouping as we apply Boas’ anthropological lens. Regions such as Palestine were not necessarily re-inhabited by an Arab population, but were instead ‘arabized’ in terms of religion, culture, and most importantly — language. In other

12 Khalidi, Walid. “The Hebrew Reconquista of Palestine: From the 1947 United Nations Partition Resolution to the First Zionist Congress of 1897” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 39, no. 1 (2009): 36.

13 Allen, John S. “Franz Boas’s Physical Anthropology: The Critique of Racial Formalism Revisited” *Current Anthropology* 30, no. 1 (1989): 79-84.

words, we could understand the term ‘Arab’ to have the same cultural significance to Arabic speakers and Arabic speaking nations as the term ‘hispanic’ does towards Spanish speakers and Spanish speaking nations. Therefore, it isn’t entirely accurate to regard the Palestinians as simply ‘Arabs’, as it discredits their identity as an ethnic group that is indigenous to the land that they live on.

The Palestinian identity has been subject to change in major ways over the course of history. Palestine has been home to a wide array of ethnic groups while also being recognized as distinct geo-political entities since the Late Bronze Age (500 BC) until the fall of the Ottoman Empire (1922).¹⁴ Within the context of these early civilizations come unique forms of cultural and ethnic heritage that continues to thrive within the contemporary ‘Palestinian identity’. It is the opinion of several anthropologists and scholars, such as Walid Khalidi from the Institute of Palestine Studies, that the modern-day Palestinian identity is actually a total accumulation of previous indigenous cultural and ethnic backgrounds while also identifying with the broader ‘Arab’ population¹⁵. As Walid Khalidi also points out, evidence points towards the Palestinian peasantry as the closest descendants of the Ancient Hebrews who once inhabited the land¹⁶. That is to say, the identity of the late-Ottoman Palestinians was culturally unique and distinct from that of other Arab/Islamic regions. The distinction between ‘Arab’ and ‘Palestinian’ is key, as the former refers to a broad group of Arabic speakers while the latter refers to a more concrete ethnic and cultural background.

Those pesky ‘Arabs’

The etymological discrepancy we see when ethnically characterizing the Palestinians, in regards to their inaccurate labeling as ‘Arab’, was not an accident or result of forgetfulness by any means whatsoever. In fact, this use of language is a key instrument used by the colonial power of Israel in regards to the relationship between the Palestinians and Palestine. Essentially, calling the Palestinians ‘Arab’ manages to sever the connection between the indigenous Palestinians and their homeland. Once we apply everything through the frameworks of settler-colonialism, the term ‘Arab’ is a weapon used to disenfranchise the worth and significance of the Palestinian identity. Furthermore, as we will explore later on, it has become a racialized term which harms the individual and collective psyche of the Palestinians. In the historical record, whenever the Palestinians were mentioned directly, it was under the vague term of ‘Arab’ rather than ‘Palestinian’; creating the discourse where there is no such thing as a Palestinian nor a Palestinian identity. In other words, the Zionist narrative becomes: there are no Palestinians living in Palestine, only Arabs.

This narrative factors into the justification of the brutal colonial onslaught against the Palestinian people through similar means like that of pre-Boas racial formalism. As a film, *The Battle of Algiers* briefly explores this phenomenon through showcasing the struggle towards liberation of the Algerians from brutal French colonialism¹⁷. Throughout the film, the French officers would always refer to the ‘Arab problem’ of Algeria which disrupts the European colonial project. Regardless of the ethnic makeup of present day Algerians (i.e. berber, arab, etc.) the red flag is the classification of the colonized as ‘Arab’ rather than ‘Algerian’. Not once in the film is the term ‘Algerian’ used to describe the Algerians. On top of that, the word ‘Arab’ becomes unjustly associated with stereotypes and branding as ‘unlawful’, ‘uncivilized’, or simply ‘dirty’. Throughout the history of the Israel-Palestine ‘conflict’ — or so it’s called — we see the same tactics being used against the Palestinians by European Zionists to justify the colonial project of Israel.

With this came efforts to dehumanize and barbarize the Palestinian people through depictions of uncivilization as well as the erasure of history. As a settler-colonial project, there have been several myths surrounding the land of historical Palestine in order to justify mass Zionist immigration and settling in the early 20th century. The most prominent and effective Zionist myth was that historical Palestine was a “land without a people for a people without a land”.¹⁸ There are several implications with this statement. It perpetuates a false narrative regarding who inhabited the land of Palestine, ignoring its rich history as a space of several civilizations. It describes Palestine as an empty and ignored land which the Jewish population of Europe had a moral obligation

14 Masalha, Nur. *Palestine: A Four Thousand Year History*. London, U.K: Zed Books Ltd, 2018; 55.

15 Khalidi, Walid. *Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of The Palestinians 1876-1948*. Institute for Palestine Studies: 1984; 32.

16 Khalidi, Walid. “The Hebrew Reconquista of Palestine: From the 1947 United Nations Partition Resolution to the First Zionist Congress of 1897” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 39, no. 1 (2009): 36.

17 Pontecorvo, Gillo. *Battle of Algiers*. 1967.

18 Pappé, Ilan. *Ten Myths About Israel*. Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2017; 5

and religious right to settle on. This, of course, is easily disrupted when you consider the fact that Palestine has been inhabited by numerous unique groups and civilizations. With that fact in mind, it is not that the Zionist Congress mistakenly thought that Palestine was ‘empty’, but rather that they didn’t consider the indigenous population as ‘people’.

Israel as a settler-colonial project

Palestine is perhaps one of the most prevalent contemporary examples of settler-colonialism, and is defined as such based on the intent of Zionists to destroy and replace the Palestinians.¹⁹ This terminology is quite literal: destroying the Palestinian civilization by military means and replacing the expelled indigenous population with Zionist settlers. Specific examples of such military actions will be explored in further chapters as we cover the impact of al-Nakba.

There are three key ‘-isms’ that we must consider when describing Israel as a settler-colonial project: Zionism, Anti-Semitism, and Colonialism²⁰. Today, Zionism does indeed hold several varying definitions and is relatively open to interpretations, changing a good deal over time. As new historian Ilan Pappé states, the most important thing to keep in mind when discussing Zionism is “how people in power interpret this ideology.”²¹ In the context of Palestine, Zionism refers to a power-ideology that is directly focused against the native Palestinians. More specifically, Zionism can be understood as the 19th century political movement that sought the establishment of a Jewish state through the settlement of European Jews, eventually within historic Palestine. Zionism essentially incorporates the effects of European anti-semitism, as dictated through Europe’s “Jewish Question/Problem”, as well as the means of colonialism to establish this said Jewish state in the land of Palestine. What makes the State of Israel a settler-colonialism project, was the intent to replace the native population of Palestine through military depopulation.

The most notable case of this “depopulation” was the forced removal and ultimate displacement of 750,000 Palestinians from their homeland during al-Nakba in 1948, which literally translates to ‘the catastrophe’. al-Nakba is characterized by its grotesque military efforts — by the hands of Zionist militias — towards the ethnic cleansing of the land of historic Palestine, be it raiding villages to scare them off, forcing them to leave at gunpoint, or outright murdering them via village massacres. The year of al-Nakba was a year of death, suffering, and ultimately colonial conquest as the goal of al-Nakba was to create a ‘land without a people’ — although that plan gravely fell short as nearly 5 million Palestinians continue to live within Israel and the Palestinian Territories.

19 Wolf, Patrick. “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native” *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8 (2006): 387-409.

20 Kattan, Victor. *From Coexistence to Conquest: International Law and the Origins of the Arab-Israeli Conflict 1891-1949*. Pluto Press: 2009; 8.

21 Chomsky, Noam & Pappé, Ilan. *On Palestine*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2015; 50.

Chapter 2: The Challenges of Remembering al-Nakba

Yes, it was and is the Nakba. Yes, it has been and continues to be 60 years of dispossession and resistance and Palestinian/Lebanese self-defense. But, being the dinosaur that I am, please allow me to remind you that 1947-1948 was only the date of the birth of Nakba. And that the date of its conception goes back to the first Zionist Congress held in 1897.

- Walid Khalidi²²

It is important for us to realize, as Walid Khalidi describes, that al-Nakba was not a defensive response, nor a sudden happening, but rather a preordained act of terror and genocide against the Palestinians once they — as the indigenous population — stood in the way of the Zionist settler-colonial project. The mere existence of the Palestinian people posed an anathema to the Zionist myth of historical Palestine, as discussed in the previous chapter, through countering the fallacy that Palestine was a “land without a people for a people without a land.” Nevertheless, it was an easy solution to simply regard the Palestinians as non-people, which aided the Zionist project in terms of geopolitical leverage, yet the physical presence was an obvious barrier towards their goals. During the years of widespread Jewish settler-colonialism in historical Palestine, it was expected that the indigenous population would diffuse to the other corners of the Levant (i.e Greater Syria), yet that was far from what actually happened²³. In fact, the colonial efforts of the Zionists only strengthened the national identity of the Palestinians and motivated them to remain on their own land and in their own homes. As a result, a more drastic and radical measure had to be taken if a Jewish state was to exist in Palestine. In short, their efforts openly and officially shifted from establishing a cultural Zionist enclave to forcibly expelling the indigenous population and effectively taking over the land.²⁴

The ‘Ancient Promise’

There is a need now for a strong and brutal reaction. We need to be accurate about timing, place and those we hit. If we accuse a family - we need to harm them without mercy, women and children included. Otherwise, this is not an effective reaction. During the operation there is no need to distinguish between guilty and not guilty.

- Ben Gurion²⁵

The result was the Zionist ‘master plan’ known as Plan Dalet²⁶. The result was a concentrated military effort of Zionist militias, such as Irgun and Haganah, to take over historical Palestine with as little Palestinians remaining as possible. The result was a catastrophe, the year of al-Nakba, and the violent uprooting of Palestinians and the bloody ethnic cleansing of Palestine. The result was 1948 and the redemption of the ‘ancient promise’ of God and Abraham where a ‘Jewish national home’ had finally been established in Palestine²⁷. Nearly 500 villages were either destroyed or completely depopulated, leading to over 750,000 Palestinians forcibly expelled and displaced.

The birth of the State of Israel, similar to any settler-colonial project, was founded under clearly violent and morally absurd conditions; and thus, the legitimacy of the Jewish State was in jeopardy. Legitimizing the State of Israel following al-Nakba became just as important as the military efforts of seizing the land in the first place. In order to solidify this sentiment, and thereby solidify the legitimacy of the new State of Israel, the ‘redemption’ had to have been made a passive action. The ‘Arabs’ had to be painted as the colonial settlers and the Zionists as the indigenous population. al-Nakba was, after all, the redemption of God’s ‘ancient promise,’ and as such Palestine had to represent the promised land. Therefore, the history and culture of Palestine went

22 Khalidi, Walid. “The Nakba.” Lecture, University of London, London, UK, Feb 21&22 2009.

23 Masalha, Nur. *Expulsion of the Palestinians: The Concept of “Transfer” in Zionist Political Thought, 1882-1948*. Washington, D.C: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1992; 161.

24 Pappé, Ilan. *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. Oxford, UK: Oneworld Publications Limited, 2006; 41

25 Gurion, Ben. *David Ben-Gurion, War Diaries. 1947-1949*.

26 Pappé, Ilan. *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. Oxford, UK: Oneworld Publications Limited, 2006; 44

27 Khalidi, Walid. “The Nakba.” Lecture, University of London, London, UK, Feb 21&22 2009.

through a forced judaization that was more concentrated in the immediate following of al-Nakba. Mapping became a very useful tool in this regard, as it was used to ‘judiaze’ the regions of historical Palestine and erase as much Palestinian and Arabic legacy as they could. This was mainly done in terms of re-naming cities, landscapes, and more from what they were into Hebrew names; typically drawing inspiration from biblical sources or simply Hebraizing the Arabic names.²⁸ New Jewish villages and cities were built on top of the dust and ashes of Palestinian ones, while the villages that survived the violence and destruction of al-Nakba met a more melancholic fate as they were repopulated with Jewish settlers.²⁹ This was done within the year of the villages’ depopulation; with the homes still containing the owners’ furniture, possessions, and even the food on their plates.

The fate of the Palestinian village

Although the efforts and strategies of al-Nakba was very concentrated and methodized, the effects at first glance may seem somewhat inconsistent as the fate of Palestinian villages came in different forms. For the most part, Palestinian villages were razed to the ground and expelled through violent and forceful means. On the other hand, the expulsion came before the destruction as some villages ended up surviving, structures intact. To illustrate the aftereffects of al-Nakba more clearly, I’ve chosen two important villages with different but incredibly significant fates that tie into the discourse of Palestinian remembrance today: al-Tantura and Ayn Karim.

Only a shrine, a fortress, an ancient well, and a few of the houses remain. One of the houses (the house belonging to al-Yahya) was built in 1882, according to an inscription. Many date palm trees and some cactus plants are spread about the site. The site has been turned into an Israeli recreational area with swimming facilities.

- Walid Khalidi³⁰

The legacy of al-Tantura is one of incredible significance that pertains to how we can understand Palestine through the extend of the lens of Zionist settler-colonialism. Tantura has stood as a Palestinian village since the Iron Age, albeit going by different names. There seemed to be a shift in economy and lifestyle, as records from the 18th century depict the village as a village of herders where their chief exports were cattle and goats. It wasn’t a harbor built North of the village until the economy shifted towards fishing and agriculture. Palestinians today remember the years where al-Tantura was a self-functioning fishing village, situated on a small hill by the seashore of the Mediterranean in historical Palestine. The village also served as a medium between Haifa and several other old cities and centers via access to the coastal highway and even the coastal railway/train station. Tantura was also known for having two large schools for boys and girls, established in 1889 and 1937/38 respectively. Before the massacre of Tantura village, there were approximately 1,730 Palestinians living in the community.³¹

Sometime between May 21st-23rd 1948 — a week after the declaration of the state of Israel — Tantura was attacked, depopulated, and occupied by the Haganah’s 33rd Battalion (aka. The Third Battalion of the Alexandroni Brigade) in the military operation “Coastal Clearing”. What followed was what many scholars refer to as “exceptional acts of killing” with hundreds of unarmed Palestinian villagers massacred and the rest of the village forced into mass exodus. Some were displaced throughout the Triangle (geographic region) while around 1,200 Tantura villagers were expelled to al-Furaydis (a neighboring village). Unfortunately, those in al-Furaydis were expelled yet again, most likely settling in northern regions such as Haifa and Southern Lebanon. Aside from a few minor exceptions, the village was destroyed and paved away from Zionist colonial projects. There is the Kibbutz Nahsholim, which was immediately established following the massacre in 1948 by Zionists immigrants from the US and Poland. In 1948 we see a residential settlement ‘Dor’ established by Zionist immigrants from

28 Masalha, Nur. *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory*. London, UK & New York, NY: Zed Books Ltd, 2012; 106.

29 Masalha, Nur. *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory*. London, UK & New York, NY: Zed Books Ltd, 2012; 107.

30 Khalidi, Walid. “The Tantura Massacre, 22-23 May 1948” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 30, no. 3 (2001): 5-18.

31 Khleifi, Michel & Sivan, Eyal. *Route 181 Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel*. 2003. Institute for Palestine Studies: 1992.

Greece.³²

I remember my parents talking about Ayn Karim and how it was one of the few villages in Palestine to have an elementary school. One for boys and one for girls. My father studied in the village's school before 1948. Ain Karim had a Bus station, library, pharmacy, post office, and a soda factory for drinks before 1948.

- Mahmoud Allan, Palestinian Refugee³³

Ayn Karim was located west of Jerusalem and was renowned for its natural beauty in terms of the springs, valleys, and gardens that surround it. Earliest recordings of Ayn Karim date back to 16th Century Ottoman records, yet the archaeological archive indicates that it stood as a village as far back as the second millennium B.C. Many local stories and oral folklore recount Ayn Karim as the birthplace of John the Baptist as well as a place where the Virgin Mary has visited - as signified by the spring of Ayn Maryam (i.e. "Mary") that flowed through the mosque's courtyard. Records from the early 20th century indicate that Ayn Karim was a self-sustaining village, with two elementary schools, a bookstore, and even a pharmacy. The social community was large and flourishing as the village was a major cultural center in terms of entertainment through music, art, and theater. There were several religious monuments in the village as well, from the central mosque to several monasteries and churches. There were 3,180 Palestinians living in over 500 homes in Ayn Karim before 1948.

On July 18 of 1948, Ayn Karim was attacked by Irgun and Haganah and forced into exile by the military assault. According to the New York Times, Ayn Karim fell "without a struggle" with only a few shots fired against the Palestinians. Part of this was most likely due to the recent gossip surrounding the massacre of Deir Yassein, an event similar to that of Tantura, which led to less of a resistance. Another explanation would be that an especially violent military attack was not in the interest of the Zionist project when it came to villages such as Ayn Karim in particular given its biblical history and proximity to Jerusalem. Ayn Karim was one of the few villages to survive al-Nakba, and only a few months later in December we saw a repopulation of the village by Jewish settlers. The structures still stand, yet the Palestinian homes are now filled by Jewish families who immigrated to Palestine.

All in all, these efforts had two main purposes: to remove any trace of Palestinian culture and identity from the land, and to replace that culture and identity with one that is both Jewish and Zionist in nature. Yet there was still a lacking element in the Zionist project as the expelled Palestinians still carried the memory of a Palestine before the year of 1948 and al-Nakba — the memories of a *Palestinian* Palestine. In order to maintain this newfounded Zionist account of Israel and Palestine, they had to change the historical framework to reproduce a broken narrative about the Palestinians and their suffering. A framework that aimed to deny the memories and trauma of those who suffered and continue to suffer.

A fragmented archive

Israeli history is deeply rooted in the aim to appropriate the history of Palestine while silencing the Palestinian voices.³⁴ It isn't that Palestinian archives did not exist, but rather that they were - and continue to be - looted and destroyed as a direct result of al-Nakba. The years following 1948 were characterized by the seizure and destruction of tens of thousands of Palestinian books and archives. al-Nakba was not only a massacre of physical proportions, but one of cultural as well; creating a completely broken framework as to how we can understand Palestine and the Palestinians.

It is not unusual for us to see an entire system, be it professional or abstract, to operate against a certain group of people. Author and activist James Baldwin explores this idea, as he opens his speech at UC Berkeley with a powerful statement: "What a writer is obliged at some point to realize, is that he is involved with a language that he has to change."³⁵ According to Baldwin, the English language operates in a way that works against black

32 Khleifi, Michel & Sivan, Eyal. *Route 181 Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel*. 2003. Institute for Palestine Studies: 1992.

33 Allan, Mahmoud. Personal interview. 2016

34 Masalha, Nur. *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory*. London, UK & New York, NY: Zed Books Ltd, 2012; 137.

35 Baldwin, James. "James Baldwin Speech" (speech, Berkeley, CA, January 15, 1979), C-Span, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?170651-1/james-baldwin-speech>.

Americans. For Baldwin, the enemy is the English language itself rather than those who use it; given the metaphors it contains and the way it reproduces a grammar of white supremacy. This idea refers to the manner in which the English language is primed with the debasement of the 'black term': "dark as sin", "black heart", etc.³⁶ While the English language is the enemy for Baldwin, a means of working against black Americans, he also understands that it is very much his own language as well - as an American writer. This becomes a very complex situation, as Baldwin is simultaneously writing in the same language he is trying to change. Not only that, but the English language also serves as the source of his efforts to change that very language and narrative. Baldwin's speech poses a very interesting idea, as he explores how an entire system can work against a group of people while also serving as a means of changing that same system.

In many ways, 'history' plays the same antagonistic role for Palestinians, similar to Baldwin's ideas about the English language. Although history doesn't produce metaphors, it produces and reproduces a broken narrative and way of thinking about the Palestinian Nakba; going against fact and truth. Samera Esmeir explains, in their essay "Memories of Conquest: Witnessing Death in Tantura", that there was a necessity for the Zionist forces to deny the year of the Nakba and the memories of its atrocities, such as the massacre of Tantura village. According to Esmeir, the Palestinian narrative was viewed as contradictory or anti-history. The history in this case is not one that is based on actual truth or archives, but rather a history that is based in romanticism. Romanticism centered around the birth and founding of Israel as a 'Jewish state'; highlighting the victimization of the Jewish people in Europe and the need of a Jewish - or rather 'Zionist' - state in historical Palestine.³⁷ What this romanticization of history does is essentially perpetuate several myths about the Israeli state and its origins. The biggest myth of all is the claim that the Nakba never actually happened: "Israel, in its official story, denies the very occurrence of the Nakba; it denies that it was established on the ruins of the Palestinian people and suppresses attempts to expose the oppressive realities of the 1948 war".³⁸ There was no ethnic cleansing, no displacement, and no massacres. The traditional narrative is that the Palestinians who left, left by their own free will and were not driven out through violence or the threat of violence. 'History' is very much a system that works towards the debasement of Palestinians and their memories of the Nakba. Like in Baldwin's case, however, the efforts for the Palestinian struggle and catastrophe to be remembered and acknowledged must be through the same means that work against it. The Palestinian voice is only heard within the context of 'history' and the goal of Palestinians is to change that very history.

Saidiya Hartman addresses a similar situation in *Lose Your Mother*, as she explores the notion of "collective tragedy" in regards to the Middle Passage. During her observations, she notes that there are many holes in the historical archives, leading to a fragmented record of the tragedies that took place. As we expand upon these themes in the context of the Palestinian Nakba and diaspora we are able to explore the melancholy of remembering the Nakba and what it means to have one's memory held by the enemy.

This idea of a fragmented or stolen narrative is prevalent in Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother* as she writes about the African Diaspora and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Hartman concludes that there is a major necessity to narrate the history of the slave trade, as a means of remembrance and respect for the dead, yet the archives are filled with holes, making it near impossible to do so.³⁹ As her great-grandfather recalls stories of the "dark days", they are never able to go into the details due to the associated pain and trauma: "Alongside the terrible things one had survived was also the shame of having survived it. Remembering warred with the will to forget". The history of the Middle Passage is fragmented, incomplete, and almost empty, as Hartman soon realizes, and the act of narrating slavery has now become a task of writing a story with nothing.⁴⁰ In Palestine, we see a very familiar story where the problem of the archive becomes a source for misconceptions and historical

36 Baldwin, James. "James Baldwin Speech" (speech, Berkeley, CA, January 15, 1979), C-Span, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?170651-1/james-baldwin-speech>.

37 Esmeir, Samera, and Lila Abu-Lughod. "Memories of Conquest: Witnessing Death in Tantura." Essay. In *Nakba, Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*, edited by Ahmad H. Sa'adi, 247-69. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007, 255-56.

38 Esmeir, Samera, and Lila Abu-Lughod. "Memories of Conquest: Witnessing Death in Tantura." Essay. In *Nakba, Palestine, 1948, and the Claims of Memory*, edited by Ahmad H. Sa'adi, 247-69. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007, 260.

39 Hartman, Saidiya. *Lose Your Mother*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006; 3.

40 Hartman, Saidiya. *Lose Your Mother*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006; 7.

fallacies regarding the Nakba. As a result, we see a system of ‘history’ produced that leaves many stories hidden and many voices unheard.

As the Palestinian and African slave narratives both face the situation of appearing within a fragmented archive, they suffer from the same symptoms as well. The absence of a narrative for the oppressed creates several opportunities to create fictitious ‘narratives’ to fit in place. In other words, the stories of the slaves whom Hartman writes about and the Palestinian people are at the mercy of their enslavers and colonizers, since they are ultimately the ones who tell the story under the framework of ‘legitimate history’. Of course, that means that the oppressors are the ones who change and tell the stories as they see it - or rather how they want it to be seen - and essentially ‘completes’ the fragmented archive yet fills the gaps with fallacy rather than fact. We see this in *Lose your Mother* as Hartman narrates the tragic death of a black slave as she is sailed across the Middle Passage aboard the *Recovery*.⁴¹ While Hartman tells a gipping and tragic story about the slave girl, who lacks even a name in the historical archive, as they are eventually tortured and murdered, there is a broader commentary on the tragedy of the archive. As Hartman explains, there were several differing accounts regarding the murder of the slave girl: “The girl declined to dance naked with the captain on the deck. The girl snubbed the captain and refused his bed. The girl had the pox and the captain flogged her as a cure for the venereal disease.”⁴² Despite the fact that the girl’s life - and ultimate death - were impossible to reconstruct, her story was still told in an act that signified a second murder. In Palestine, the memories and stories and stories that the indigenous people hold dear are not only denied and censored, but also told and reconstructed by the Israeli state; deformed to fit within the framework of history to reproduce the Zionist narrative: they are ‘Arabs’ not Palestinians, they ‘left’ and were not driven out, they don’t remember 1948 ‘appropriately’, etc.

This parallel only expands once we analyze the significance of memory and the drive of the oppressor to destroy and appropriate the memories of the oppressed. Hartman discusses the enslaver’s attempt to erase the memory of the slave: “In every slave society, slave owners attempted to eradicate the slave’s memory, that is, to erase all the evidence of an existence before slavery”.⁴³ The enslaved captives were forced to forget through various means of incantations and medicines; turning them into strangers of themselves. For example, there is a herb in the north of Ghana called ‘manta uwa’ which literally means “forget mother” in Hausa.⁴⁴ We see a very similar situation between what Esmeir and Hartman describe, as they both explore how people can become dispossessed of their own memories. In the case of Palestine, we see uprooted people who face an academic and historical framework that doesn’t consider what they have to say and take actions to debase them of a system for remembering as well as a platform for expressing their memories.

Expanding on the comparison between the question of the Palestinian narrative and experience of remembrance to that of the slaves which Hartman narrates, we see that there is a definite legal and technical barrier that prevents these memories from being explored and expressed. That is not to say that the Palestinian’s fragmented archive is solely of legal nature, which will later be explored. The Palestinian memories and archives are being held, but face obliteration in terms of the painful intrapersonal act of remembrance similar to the “dark-days” which Hartman’s great-grandfather recalls. The tragedy for Hartman is that the fragmented archive is that the archival gaps can never actually be filled. In the context of Palestine, on the other hand, there is a collective desire to remember their own suffering, despite the pain that may ensue, accompanied with strong efforts to do so. The only caveat is that the Palestinian people are in desperate need of a proper historical framework and system that can adequately understand the raw memories of Palestine and her people.

41 Hartman, Saidiya. “The Dead Book.” *Lose Your Mother*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006.

42 Hartman, Saidiya. *Lose Your Mother*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006; 136

43 Hartman, Saidiya. *Lose Your Mother*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006; 101

44 Hartman, Saidiya. *Lose Your Mother*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006; 102-103

Chapter 3: Route 181 and the Impact of Film on Palestinian Memory

When he filmed Route 181: Fragments of a Journey in Israel-Palestine (2004) together with Eyal Sivan, an Israeli director, he was reminded of a lesson from Jean-Luc Godard, that they were there to receive and not impose. Together, with love for their country and people, and for a history that is shared not divided, they set out for two months in the summer of 2002 to film. They agreed to have the same approach to everyone they'd interview, Palestinians and Israelis regardless of religion, along the green line – Route 181, named by the UN's peacekeeping treaty that split the land in two.

- Rebecca Jane Arthur ⁴⁵

Route 181, Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel succeeds where most forms of visual media fail when it comes to providing a lens to properly comprehend the Palestinian struggle in terms of their memory and trauma in an academic and scholarly manner. That is not to say that the film itself was received in a positive light. While it is regarded as a groundbreaking piece of work to academics and scholars who value the Palestinian narrative, it is met with disdain from the broader audience of historians and film critics. This is for the most part due to the impact that *Route 181* has on the mode of discussing Israel-Palestine. As we've explored, there are many different challenges that the memories of al-Nakba face in legal and official grounds. The traditional Zionist narrative is one that romanticizes the founding of the State of Israel and forgoes the tragedies - and memories of the tragedies - suffered by the Palestine people which served as Israel's foundation. Considering the film's role in exploring the Palestinian narrative, *Route 181* is unapologetic in the way it captivates the tragedies and suffering the Palestinians face on a daily basis.

Controversy and the Zionist narrative

The Zionist narrative isn't only within written academia, but film as well. Writer Jack G. Shaheen explains the Israeli/Zionist narrative of film as one that presents the Israelis as the victims of a violent onslaught by the Palestinians who are the victimizers.⁴⁶ This superficial narrative within films and documentaries, such as *West Bank Story*, offers nothing to the overall narrative of the conflict besides distorted half-truths and clear bias in favor of the military state of Israel. Rather than obtaining an insider's perspective with interlocutors, these films focus on presenting the Israeli narrative that subordinates the Palestinians as less-than and dispossesses them from their homes. *West Bank Story* in particular arranges shots in certain juxtaposed scenes that present the IDF as just in their cause for land-seizure from the Palestinians; essentially making the audience root for those actually taking the land as opposed to those who are having their land taken.⁴⁷ The Zionist narrative is fundamentally broken if we want to use it to gain not only an accurate portrayal, but and accurate *account* of what is truly going on in Palestine. This narrative fuels a convoluted system where Palestinians are dehumanized and stereotyped, leading to a desperate need in the realm of visual media for a film that manages to go against this troublesome narrative.

Any question of this narrative is met with strict criticism, as explored through the story of Theodore Kaz, and is ultimately 'debunked' via the Zionist frameworks in which academia in Israel operates from. In fact, Eyal Siva eventually 'fled' Israel as a result of socio-political stress due to his label as an 'anti-Zionist academic' which was ultimately the fate of many progressive scholars in Israel starting from the 1980s. With that said, the State of Israel places a great deal of emphasis on the manner in which it preserves the legitimacy of the Jewish State, through creating a society with one central view and belief in regards to the history and formation of their own country. This is the tradition Zionist and Israeli narrative, as prefaced in the introduction, that works through the frameworks of politics and academic history yet is ironically anti-history and instead based upon myths; as outlined by the New Historians such as Illan Pappé. Therefore, a film such as *Route 181* is in direct violation of that very narrative and as such has been the recipient of unjust and undeserved scrutiny.

As such, *Route 181* is a rare film. Rare not only in the sense that there are few films like it, but also in the sense of rarity in supply. That is to say that coming into possession of this film is a challenge in and

45 Arthur, Rebecca Jane. "Nearby" Sabzian, 2018.

46 Shaheen, Jack G. *The TV Arab*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1984; 98

47 Shaheen, Jack G. *The TV Arab*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1984; 95

of itself; scouring the internet for a valid form of the film in the correct region-lock and is relatively inexpensive. It is because of this rarity and criticism that the film itself has never truly been a center of academic or anthropological analysis; despite its major achievements as an ethnographic film/documentary.

In 2002, filmmakers Michel Khelifi and Eyal Sivan spent two months traveling together through Israel-Palestine along the border of the 1947 partition plan from the UN General Assembly Resolution 181. Throughout the film, they interviewed both Israeli Jews as well as ethnic Palestinians, and uncovered very powerful and moving accounts and testimonies regarding the Palestine-Israel conflict, especially in regards to the 1948 war and al-Nakba. Despite its critical acclaim in some areas, many individuals and organizations who share the traditional Zionist narrative felt threatened by the film which led to some screenings, such as the ones in the Cinema Du Rel festival, to be cancelled by foreign cultural ministries⁴⁸. The film struck a great deal of controversy amongst such foreign ministries who aim to appease the established Zionist narrative, with criticisms ranging from it being an “insult to peace” to borderline “anti-semitic” or “judeophobic”, despite the fact that the co-director was himself a Jewish Israeli.^{49,50} Worldwide, *Route 181* has been the subject of both harsh criticism and borderline censorship; which only aids in the broader censorship of the film in academia.

Route 181 & its filmic modes

To better appreciate the impact that *Route 181* had on the Palestinian narrative, we must contextualize the film-making motifs that Sivan and Khleifi seem to implement as drawn from notabile ethnographic filmmakers. To start, there is the notion of ‘event sequence film’ that was introduced in the late 60s and early 70s by filmmakers John Marshall and Timothy Asch in particular. Essentially, they were concerned with the ‘truthfulness’ of ethnographic film, as they noted several problems that prevented a filmmaker from crafting an accurate portrayal, or filmic ‘reportage’, of a group of people.⁵¹ Ultimately, they are concerned with how a film conveys what is happening. This leads us to a series of questions and problems: What do we include? When do we start or stop? What is the position of the filmmaker? The latter is in regard to the filmmaker’s position as either an “insider” or “outsider”, which affects what is filmed as well as the overall narrative of the film. ‘Event sequence film’ refers to the methodological response to these concerns, which aimed to structure the film with events before the camera. In other words, this method allowed Marshall and Asch to shift the filmic narrative to follow an event that is happening in real time rather than the filmmaker’s own perspective or dictation. In a sense, ‘event sequence films’ are directed by the events themselves as the disputes themselves take the audience on a journey of their origin, discourse, and eventual climax.

The basis of *Route 181* definitely shares a similar motif to the work of Marshall and Asch as it pertains to ‘event sequence film’, albeit somewhat indirectly. Sivan and Khleifi had a very simple premise: a two-month unadulterated journey in Palestine-Israel. Regarding the mass criticism the filmmakers face, against the underlying ‘agenda’ or biased ‘perspective’, those stem from a depressing misunderstanding of what and whom the film represents. That is not to say that there is no ‘goal’ of the film, only that the filmmakers themselves are not infringing on the subject matter and rather share the drive of Marshall and Asch to show the story as it is told in front of the camera as a sequence of events. In particular, film critic Harlan Jacobson refers to *Route 181* as a case of a ‘decontextualization of history’ where there is no mention of the historical nature of Palestine-Israel as it pertains to the geopolitical contexts of European and US involvement/influence.⁵² This is a common criticism towards the film: that it lacks context. The only way to aid in context, in the way that these critics seem to value, would be for a direct involvement by the filmmakers themselves, thus jeopardizing their relationship to the camera and to whom they film. Furthermore, the ‘history’ that such critics so desperately want can only conform to the historical narrative that debases the Palestinians of their memory and voice. As we’ve explored, the Palestinian narrative is a rare instance where ‘historical context’ and its framework is incapable of representing it and is often used against it. A ‘decontextualization of history’ is not some fault of the filmmakers, but rather a means to avoid forming a skewed narrative that takes away from the story that the interlocutors show and tell. This is what

48 Laurier, Joanne. “San Francisco International Film Festival 2004-Part 1.” World Socialist Web Site, 20 Apr. 2004.

49 Jacobson, Harlan. “Road to Perdition: Route 181.” Film Comment, Jan-Feb. 2005.

50 Pinto, Goel. “The Storm Over ‘Route 181.’” Haaretz, 18 Mar. 2004.

51 Asch, Timothy, John Marshall, and Peter Spier. 1973. “Ethnographic Film: Structure and Function.” In Annual Review of Anthropology (2): 179-187; 180.

52 Jacobson, Harlan. “Road to Perdition: Route 181.” Film Comment, Jan-Feb. 2005.

makes *Route 181* and its depiction of Palestine-Israel stand out from most visual media and what allows the film to establish a platform for Palestinians to speak without any overarching constraints.

Route 181 also addresses the narrative culture of Israel-Palestine through broadening the ethnographic representation through a variety of perspectives. Faye Ginsburg coined the term ‘parallax effect’ as a means of introducing the perspective of filmed indigenous peoples (i.e the film’s subject) into the mix of the ethnographic and filmic perspective.⁵³ In other words, the ‘parallax effect’ describes culture as a three dimensional phenomenon. Within the context of ethnographic film and filmmakers, the ‘parallax effect’ has significant implications to the way a film is made. First, different filming techniques can be implemented to establish a clear insider’s perspective; this could be via camera styles or the relationship and dialogue between the filmmaker and interlocutors. The most significant take away from the ‘parallax effect’ is that it makes collaboration between the filmmaker and ethnographic subject a total necessity in conducting such a project. Apart from being the filmmakers, Sivan and Khleifi play an important role as insiders. Eyal Sivan and Michel Khelifi, having been born and raised in the society of Israel-Palestine, are a part of the narrative culture which they aim to film and represent. Their roles as insiders does not contradict their roles as filmmakers in any way, but rather builds upon it and establishes a clearer ethnographic lens where the audience can better understand the narrative from the interlocutors perspective.

With the filmic modes of *Route 181* in mind, it becomes clear that the film itself seems to follow the footsteps of filmmaker Robert Gardner with respect to the idea of ‘sensory ethnography’ as it pertains to this kind of documentary. The idea of ‘sensory ethnography’ as a methodology refers to a multimodal, or multi-sense, approach to ethnographic film. Many filmmakers consider the world to be understood through many different channels and not simply through image and word. In other words, filmmakers use multi-sensical data as a means to create a holistic account of an experience, event, group of people, etc. It is here where we can consider the works of Sarah Pink and David MacDougall, implementing multisensory experiential data to immerse the viewer into the film itself. On the other side of the spectrum, we see Robert Gardner who is more concerned with the aesthetics of a film and how that relates to the sensual film experience, the immersion of psyche and sound. Consider the Gardener’s film *Forest of Bliss*.⁵⁴ Previous documentaries have constructed their own realities through narration or other filmic modes, however, Gardner employs aesthetics in a way to let the film speak for itself without the aid of cuts or narration.

Now we can consider the legacy left by Robert Gardner, as it applies to ethnographic film and filmmakers. In summary, there is a priority of the aesthetic-sensual that allows Gardner to tell a story without saying anything, which ultimately sets him apart from practicing anthropologists. *Route 181* displays a similar priority as shown by the long single-takes of driving through the countryside as well as a tendency to keep the interactions between themselves and the interlocutors relatively raw. Sivan and Khelifi, similar to Gardner, have a desire to immerse the audience within their film in a way that presents an unabridged story and discussion.

Route 181 is a mixture of various anthropological/ethnographic filmic motifs, as it combines the legacies of past filmmakers who valued an unabridged insider’s perspective to the ethnographic subject. It is not what the film says that makes *Route 181* stand out as a means of exploring the Palestinian narrative, but rather how it deconstructs the troublesome framework which historians and politicians force Palestinian memories to conform to. In this sense, *Route 181* is not only a groundbreaking film by its own merits, but most importantly it manages to provide a lens that we - those who want to represent and understand the Palestinians - can actually use accurately.

Deconstruction of the Zionist narrative

Despite the tribal allegiances imposed on us, which we reject, and armed with our common experience, we decided to return to our country. By doing so, we wanted to unveil the geographic and mental reality in which the men and women of Palestine-Israel are living today.... Our aim was to break with the usual approach in which people, places or events are filmed only because they coincide with the filmmaker’s ideological disposition, where nothing is really illuminated other than already familiar political discourses

53 Ginsburg, Faye. “Rethinking the “Voice Of God” in Indigenous Australia: Secrecy, Exposure, and the Efficacy of Media,” in Birgit Meyer and Annelies Moore, eds. Religion, Media and the Public Sphere, 188-206. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. 2006.

54 Gardner, Robert. *Forest of Bliss*. 1986.

or clichés on what is called the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.... We wished to construct a film which resists the idea that the only thing Israelis and Palestinians can do together is fight wars until they are both driven to oblivion.

- Sivan and Khleifi, *Route 181*

Route 181 shows a the harsh reality of Israeli society, and deconstructs nearly every statement and myth that the Zionist narrative attempts to produce. This alternative narrative shows that the foundations of Israel are deeply rooted in white supremacy and ethnocentrism, rather than its contemporary romanticized origins. The themes regarding Israel's foundations, as a racist state operating through means of settler-colonialism, is a general theme throughout each part of the film. Sivan and Khleifi show this in a very subtle way through their interviews. In particular, an employee of the Jewish National Fund⁵⁵ was interviewed by Sivan and Khleifi at a JNF museum:

JNF Employee: There was an Arab village here before 1948 called Kfar Huldeh. It hasn't existed since the War of Independence. You want to know where this land came from? Ur was the land of Arab villages. After the conquest, they fled or were chased out. The State took over the land. The land was legally bought and paid for in hard cash. Abraham himself bought the Cave of Machpelah. But let's leave it at that. How far back in history can you go?⁵⁶

"How far back in history can you go?" A very interesting remark considering —as our filmmakers brought up — that he went back 3000 years during that same statement. The Zionist narrative doesn't only contradict the truths behind Palestine suffering and memory, but it also contradicts itself. On one hand, the Zionist account has no problem justifying the violent colonial actions which Israel committed and continues to commit through the romanticization of the 'ancient promise'; that is how God literally promised Palestine to the Jewish people thousands of years ago. Yet, at the same time this very account fails to consider the events of al-Nakba as it was too long ago to matter today. Many of the other Israeli interlocutors share the same sentiment: "You have to think of the future, not the past". The framework of history which the majority of the world uses to understand Israel and Palestine is fundamentally broken. Not just in terms of failing to recognize the Palestinian perspective, but falling into logical holes and breaking the rules that it establishes. The irony in this interaction with the JNF employee was that he made this very statement while a poster was behind him titled "The Dream takes Root".

Regarding the specific histories of al-Nakba, the filmmakers soon discover that many Zionist Israelis, such as curator of the Nir Am Reservoir's museum, the 'Palestinians' are all but a forgotten group of people who have fled and 'disappeared' from the land. The curator recounts the history of Israel, drawing from his experience as an officer of Haganah, and paints himself as a pioneer. The conversation between the curator and director got heated as the topic of settlements on the Gaza strip was brought up. The curator denied any presence of Israeli settlements in Gaza; however, he later corrected himself after being pressed, claiming there are "some but they are negligible".⁵⁷ The filmmaker brought up the massacres of al-Nakba, to which the curator denied and called 'nonsense' only to angrily respond:

CURATOR: The Arab neighbors need to understand that in the war against Israel they will not taste victory. Okay? They will not win. It will only lead to Arab extermination, much worse than any previous ones. Then there'll be peace.⁵⁸

The Palestinians are ignored, yet at the same time are referred to by the same people as Israelis bear witness to the internal problem of 'the Arabs' — as the Palestinians are called. The Palestinians are not only of a

55 The Jewish National Fund was founded in 1901 to buy and develop land in historical Palestine for Jewish settlements leading up to Israel's establishment in 1948.

56 Khleifi, Michel & Sivan, Eyal. *Route 181 Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel*. 2003.

57 Haganah was a Zionist paramilitary group that operated in historical Palestine, playing a key role in the massacres of al-Nakba. After 1948, Haganah was integrated into the IDF.

58 Khleifi, Michel & Sivan, Eyal. *Route 181 Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel*. 2003.

lower status, but are seen and treated by Israel as sub-human and forced into a paradoxical status of existence and nonexistence within the overall Zionist society of Israel. As the film's directors pass through military checkpoints, they interview the IDF soldiers who make statements such as "we're human, unlike the Arabs." For members of the Israeli military to say such a thing shows the value that Israel has towards the life of Palestinian — virtually none. Of course, the Palestinian interlocutors don't treat the conflict as a battle between 'Arabs' and 'Jews' but instead a struggle of resistance against the occupier by the occupied: "Regarding segregation, the problem isn't that the Jews can't live with Arabs — they lived together before. It's the problem between the occupier and the occupied".⁵⁹ With this in mind, the film's significance comes from providing this alternate take on the Palestine-Israeli conflict; one that isn't rooted in ancient feuds nor a battle between faiths. The Zionist narrative would have us believe that Arabs and Jews could never get along and that the conflict is rooted in the anti-semitic drive from the Palestinians against the Israelis. *Route 181* shows us that the Palestinians view the conflict as a struggle for human rights under the harsh rule of military occupation.

The Zionist narrative is especially strong in convincing those committing acts of violence are doing it for a just cause and that the victims are simply *victimizers*. In the second part of the film, we see an IDF commander sharing his tastes in literature with the directors:

IDF COMMANDER: I'd gladly read "The Trial" again. Have you read it? It corresponds well to the present situation in the world and in Israel. Our world is Kafkaesque. And "Before the Law"? Have you read it? It's about a man who confronts a guard of a door that exists only for him. Kafka's a giant, one of the greatest. He waits at the door. He waits until he's about to die and the guard says that the door is for him alone and that he must break the law to enter. But there is no law. Descartes... Greek philosopher. 19th century philosophy. Not very consistent. 20th century philosophy, Levinas, Buber. You know Buber? What else? I'm religious, I read a lot on these subjects. Maimonides, all those who speak of that. That's all.

FILMMAKER: You know "The Banality of Evil"?

IDF COMMANDER: Who's it by? Is it a book or a concept?

FILMMAKER: Hannah Arendt.

IDF COMMANDER: Never heard of her.

The filmmaker mentioned Hannah Arendt and her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* which describes the monstrous small deeds performed by regular people which add up to an even greater evil. The IDF Commander remains oblivious to the connection as he and his fellow soldiers confine people into their homes via curfew and restrict access to roads by ambulances and firetrucks. Surrounded by guns, tanks, and other forms of heavy artillery, the Israeli military refuses to acknowledge their actions as inherently violent in nature nor that they feed into the evil against the Palestinian people. The irony is startling, but with Arendt's work in mind we can consider that the oppression against Palestinians has not only been normalized, but has become a characteristic of every seemingly 'normal' Jewish Israeli: "The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that the many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal".⁶⁰

Of course, such actions have been committed by Zionists nearly a century prior as we consider the events of al-Nakba. Many of the members of the Zionist's military forces, such as Haganah, were not soldiers to begin with, but were mostly 'normal'. One of these individuals, seventy year old Aaron Greenberg who was apart of Israel's 'Operation Matateh', was interviewed by Sivan and Khleifi, and their testimony was shocking to say the least; not in material, but in how it was presented:

59 Khleifi, Michel & Sivan, Eyal. *Route 181 Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel*. 2003.

60 Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. New York, NY: The Viking Press, 1964; 129.

AARON GREENBERG: We swept them out. We needed them out of the region to create a Jewish territorial continuity. We formed a chain. We were armed, of course. When they saw us coming they fled. We were the Iftah Regiment, a battalion of 1500 men. It's not complicated. We gave chase, we advanced. Pushing them to Jordan. Once in Jordan, they couldn't come back. It didn't take us long to create an Arab-free region.

Greenberg recounts on his crimes not with pride nor with disdain, but rather in a completely nonchalant manner. As we were children playing in the background, we are told this brutal story of forced displacement of Palestinians during al-Nakba. Of course, this was justified by Greenberg, as he believes that the Palestinians — be it the men, women, or children — would retaliate if given the opportunity. Operation Matateh was one of the many military operations that took place in 1948 which had the aim of displacing the Palestinian population. Like al-Nakba, the name 'Matateh' has a special meaning of its own.

AARON GREENBERG: Matateh means a broom, to clean the earth, because we swept out the Arabs, especially the nomads. We had to chase them. The aim was to get rid of them for Jewish settlements and kibbutz. The land went to kibbutz and moshavs.⁶¹

The romanticized myths surrounding the birth of the Israeli state are deconstructed as a result of the several interviews within the film *Route 181*, as we see that the true history of Israel is not centered around an 'ancient promise' but rather a drive to ethnically cleanse the land of historical Palestine. The Palestinians are not only treated as if they do not belong, but also as if they have no right to exist and live in Palestine.

Route 181 does not only succeed bringing reality into the Zionist narrative, but also in placing a Palestinian narrative in its place. The film gives a voice for the Palestinian people to speak and a platform for them to remember and express their memories, achieving a Palestinian perspective that has been absent. Several of the interlocutors are themselves ethnic Palestinians and share stories about themselves, their families, and their own histories. Of course, this isn't a platform exclusively for resistance but for melancholy as well. As the filmmakers pass through construction sites of settlement walls, they note that there are Palestinian workers among the labor force. This is a devastating realization to the filmmakers as they see an oppressed people working for the oppressive state (i.e the colonial regime) as they build the settlements where the colonizers live and the walls that further segregate the two peoples: "We live in this State. We're Israeli nationals. Why shouldn't we do this work for a living?"⁶² This scene is as confusing as it is depressing, as the Palestinians living under Israeli sovereignty have a sense of shame regarding their own ethnicity and background. There are many psychological side-effects to colonization which we see in Palestine, where the Palestinians become ashamed of who they are; desperate to belong to Israel as they are citizens of the state, yet despite their efforts to hide their own 'arabness' they will never achieve such status. There is a sense of confusion that one gets while watching *Route 181*, as the relationships and dialogues are not simple by any means, yet they all share a commonality — being symptoms of an oppressive colonial regime that lacks an outlet to properly examine and understand it. Despite the confusion one may feel, there is no real contradiction in play, as opposed to the frameworks in which the Zionist narrative operates. Ultimately, *Route 181* achieves the impossible as it explains the histories of Israel and Palestine and the memories of the Palestinians through a proper lens where every voice is heard and every dialogue is considered.

Each demolished home is a memory lost forever!

- Elderly Israeli Citizen⁶³

As we've explored, there is a clear effort to erase the memories of al-Nakba —and thereby the memories

61 Khleifi, Michel & Sivan, Eyal. *Route 181 Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel*. 2003.

62 Khleifi, Michel & Sivan, Eyal. *Route 181 Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel*. 2003.

63 Khleifi, Michel & Sivan, Eyal. *Route 181 Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel*. 2003.

of the Palestinians — similar to the act of ‘forgetting’ which Sayida Hartman experiences throughout her own research. The film shows us that this is a conscious act that is not only acknowledged by the Jewish-Israeli population, but actually praised by them. While older Zionists reminisce on the horrid military actions of the Israeli military during the wars of 1948 and 1967, they make such statements with pride and gloat about their own atrocities against the Palestinian people. The demolished homes of villages that were in some instances literally razed to the ground is one of the strongest tactics that the Israeli government used - and continues to use - against Palestinian memory. The houses and villages are not only rooted in material structure, but contain an obvious symbolic element of one’s own home and familial memory. It was where they were born, where their parents were born, where their grandparents were born, and so on. The goal of destroying the home is to sever this connection between the Palestinian and the land of Palestine through erasing this very sense of memory and legacy.

Of course, the destruction of homes is also a form of collective punishment against a specific Palestinian community: “The demolition of homes is a form of collective punishment — the rape of an entire people. Every Israeli soldier is a boss unto himself.”⁶⁴ In the event of imprisonment of one of their own members, a village is usually subjected to military harassment and in extreme cases events such as the ones described in the film. Collective punishment would ultimately lead to a collective trauma on the ‘psyche’ of the Palestinian people, affecting them psychologically through the manifestations of specific symptoms.

64 Khleifi, Michel & Sivan, Eyal. *Route 181 Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel*. 2003.

Chapter 4: Collective Trauma and the Palestinian Psyche.

How come he cannot recognize his own cruelty now turned against him? How come he can't see his own savagery as a colonist in the savagery of these oppressed peasants who have absorbed it through every pore and for which they can find no cure? The answer is simple: this arrogant individual, whose power of authority and fear of losing it has gone to his head, has difficulty remembering he was once a man; he thinks he is a whip or a gun; he is convinced that the domestication of the "inferior races" is obtained by governing their reflexes. He disregards the human memory, the indelible reminders; and then, above all, there is this that perhaps he never knew: we only become what we are by radically negating deep down what others have done to us. Three generations? As early as the second, hardly had the sons opened their eyes than they saw their fathers being beaten. In psychiatric terms, they were "traumatized." For life.

- Franz Fanon⁶⁵

In *Wretched of the Earth*, psychiatrist Franz Fanon takes a psychiatric approach to colonialism and analyzes the mental effects of trauma and dehumanization. Fanon argues, through a series of five case studies, that colonial war produces mental and psychiatric suffering, across both the colonized and the colonizers, which makes it a "purveyor of psychiatric hospitals".⁶⁶ We see the case of a 37 year old Algerian man who develops homicidal impulses after witnessing a massacre by the French military. Similarly, a European police inspector also develops violent tendencies, beating his wife and children during his "fits of madness".⁶⁷ We see a theme of the lingering effects of violent experiences during the colonial war in Algeria, which is suffered by not just Algerians but also by French. Fanon understands mental suffering to be linked to experiences and atmosphere.

Within the context of his case studies, Fanon makes it clear that mental suffering is inherently linked to the effects of "colonial war" and the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer, revealing what he calls the "colonized personality". In the "colonial war" there is an almost genocidal drive that seeks to ignore the existence of the colonized, dehumanizing them, inferiorizing them, and destroying a civilization (thereby producing mental suffering). In the introduction, Fanon claims that "curing" a colonized subject is inadequate as it forces the subject to socially fit within the colonial lens. In other words, the French military's attempt at "curing" the Algerian subjects is simply another means of colonization and oppression, as it involves the systemized dehumanization of the other and feeds into the colonial production of mental suffering.⁶⁸

While Fanon's psychoanalytic lens is important towards the understanding of Palestinian trauma in regards to settler-colonialism, there are some differences within what Fanon studies and the ongoing 'colonial war' within Israel-Palestine. While Algeria — at the time of Fanon's writing — and Palestine are similar in regards to their status as living through a settler-colonial project, it isn't an exact parallel. Writer Patrick Wolfe explains that settler-colonialism does come in many different forms, and Palestine is a very unique case⁶⁹. As a settler-colonial project, we see a similar story within Israel-Palestine to that of the French colonization of Algeria which Fanon analyzes. The franchise colonies that we see in "British India" is based on some "superiority" of the colonizers within the colonized society as well as collaboration with the "native" government to exploit the native's land and resources. The end of such colonialism would result in the settlers returning to their own countries and a transfer of power to the indigenous people. Wolfe notes that this colonial experience is totally different when compared to the settler-colonies of Australia and the colonization of the aboriginal Australians. This form of colonialism was characterized by the settler's intent to replace the native inhabitants (i.e to "become" Australians). There is a difference between this form of settler-colonialism and what we see in Algeria and Africa as despite the fact that there were settlers in those countries, it wasn't exactly a case of settler-colonialism. The key difference is that there was no real effort or intent of the settlers to replace the indigenous people. In other words, what Fanon

65 Fanon, Franz. *Wretched of the Earth*. New York, NY: Grove Press, 1961; Preface II.

66 Fanon, Franz. *Wretched of the Earth*. New York, NY: Grove Press, 1961; 181.

67 Fanon, Franz. *Wretched of the Earth*. New York, NY: Grove Press, 1961; 185-197

68 Fanon, Franz. *Wretched of the Earth*. New York, NY: Grove Press, 1961; 182

69 Wolfe, Patrick. "Comparing Colonial and Racial Regimes." Lecture, American University of Beirut, Beirut, Lebanon, 23 Apr. 2013.

sees in Algeria is ‘colonialism with settlers’ rather than ‘settler-colonialism. Therefore, to understand the colonial effects on Palestinian trauma, it is important to consider Israeli’s own desire to make the settler ‘native’ and the native ‘settler’.

Colonization of the body and mind

Frantz Fanon’s theory of racialization is highly concerned with his concept of the “epidermal racial schema,” which in Fanon’s case refers to the manifestation of his character as a black man based on a racialized schema. This epidermal racial schema goes hand in hand with presupposed/historic definitions and stereotypes of what a ‘black man’ is and should be. Those definitions and stereotypes have proven to be detrimental to the black body, as it effectively causes what Fanon describes in his introduction as “the epidermalization of inferiority”.⁷⁰ In other words, rather than black people being inferior, the stigma becomes ‘to be inferior is to be black’. This idea of epidermalization is how Fanon understands racialization in relation to the black body; rather than certain qualities being ascribed to color, color is ascribed to certain qualities. As a result, we see the dehumanization and objectification of the black man by the white: “Disoriented, incapable of confronting the Other, the white man, who had no scruples about imprisoning me, I transported myself on that particular day far, very far, from myself, and gave myself up as an object”⁷¹.

This process of epidermalization/racialization could not be possible without what Fanon describes as the white ‘gaze’; which he understands to be at the beginning of every racialized experience. Similar to how a caring gaze could help build the life of a newborn baby, a destructive gaze has the power to bring death.⁷² This destructive gaze exists within a colonial relationship, where one side is denied humanity and recognition. In this sense, the gaze is used as a stare that inferiorizes an individual with no ontological resistance in place; it is impossible for one to think about the being of the other. The gaze is also unconscious, and as a result, it is passed down and inherited by the gazed, Fanon’s process of sociology and social transmission. Fanon is forced to cast the gaze upon himself; observing himself as not just a black man, but a black man in relation to — and under the gaze of — the white man.⁷³ With the gaze comes a series of racial fantasies and stereotypes which are reproduced and reinforced into the epidermal racial stigma, devaluing the humanity of the black body and affixing blackness towards objectification. Ultimately, the gaze fixes Fanon as a black body within a narrowed and racialized character of ‘the inferior’; something that is not only less than white, but less than man: “I see in this white gaze that it’s the arrival not of a new man, but of a new type of man, a new species. A Negro, in fact!”⁷⁴

Even within the borders of 1948, the Palestinian people can be understood as colonial subjects, and are therefore impacted by these same processes of racialization which Fanon describes, although not exclusively through the same ‘epidermal racial schema’. Despite this, the ‘gaze’ plays an important role in the ongoing colonization and occupation of the Palestinian people through wearing down their process of colonization as well as the internalization of their faults. In Israel today, there is a clear division within the living conditions of the Jewish Israelis and the Palestinian citizens. I would call this a situation where the Palestinians are forced into the status of a second class citizen, yet the consequences of settler-colonialism within Israeli society forces the Palestinians into an even lower status. Fanon reflects that the French sector of Algeria is lavish and clean while the colonized Algerians are forced into a ghetto sector.⁷⁵ Psychoanalysts Lara and Stephen Sheehi reflect on the significance of Fanon’s work within Palestine itself. The same divide, as Fanon describes, can be said when analyzing the relationship between the Jewish Israelis and Palestinian citizens⁷⁶.

Fanon appears all over Palestine, within the seven decades of struggle and oppression that the indigenous population of Palestine suffers as a consequence of the settler-colonial project known as the State of Israel. Regarding the ghettoized colonized sectors within Israel, there is the same destructive ‘gaze’ casted upon the

70 Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. 1952; Intro

71 Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. 1952; 92

72 Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. 1952; 87

73 Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. 1952; 92

74 Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. 1952; 95

75 Fanon, Franz. *Wretched of the Earth*. New York, NY: Grove Press, 1961; 4

76 Sheehi, Lara & Sheehi, Stephen. “The settlers’ town is a strongly built town: Fanon in Palestine” *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies* 17 (2020):183-192

Palestinian people which feeds into their racialization; that ultimately subjects them to further trauma. There is a re-emergence of the word 'Arab' as the Palestinians are referred to by the Israeli government as well as psychological centers/institutions. The term 'Arab' has become extremely racialized, as discussed in *Chapter 1*, yet under this psychoanalytical lens one could also understand the word 'Arab' to share the same psychological effects associated with the destructive gaze. Yet beyond this racialization, there is the use of psychology and psychiatry as a weapon of the State to colonize Palestinians through their individual psyche, which Sheehi and Sheehi explore further in their article. Be it through training, collaboration, or medical/psychiatric service, the institution of 'Israeli psychology' ignores the indigenous modes of being and seeks to replace those modes with a colonial structure. In particular, Lara Sheehi and Stephen Sheehi explore the relationship between Palestinian supervisees and Israeli supervisors within a psychiatric/psychological training centers.⁷⁷ Here, language plays an extremely important role in producing and reproducing this case of 'colonized psychology', as Palestinians - native Arabic speakers - are forced to work with Hebrew as the primary language and must go back and forth between their native tongue and the language of the colonizer. Additionally, as mentioned before, there is the tendency for Israeli institutions to negate the everlasting psychological pressures of settler-colonialism (i.e. in regards to the occupation and al-Nakba).

As a result, there is an internalization of those occupational pressures that results in the colonization of the mind. The colonized Palestinian begins to see themselves as inferior and deserving of their suffering (i.e. at fault) while the Israelis see themselves as the source of psychoanalytical knowledge in the 'primitive' Arab world, a notion that psychoanalysis would not exist in the Arab world if not for Israel. This relationship is clearly based on fallacy, which can be easily shown through the historic presence of 'psychology' within the Arab world prior to 1948; be it in the form of proto-psychoanalytic theory or even psychiatric hospitals. For example, there are psychologists in early 20th Century Egypt such as Yusuf Murad, who sought to intertwine the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud with classical Islamic thought.⁷⁸ Furthermore, there were local clinics in historical Palestine, pre-1948 and shortly afterwards, which were established to address the issues regarding trauma under the context of settler-colonialism. What results is an internalization of inferiority and backwardness within the Palestinians which leads to induced trauma and ultimately the colonization of not only the body, but the mind itself.

The 'Palestinian psyche' and the physical manifestations of trauma

While interviewing Lara Sheehi, she expressed concern over my use of the term 'Palestinian psyche'; which I used to describe the collective psychological embodiment of psychological trauma suffered by the Palestinians. According to Sheehi, the idea of a 'Palestinian psyche' is also rooted within the same colonial mechanisms that Israel uses to further objectify and colonize the Palestinians:

LARASHEEHI: We resist anything called the Palestinian psyche. That in of itself replicates the settler-colonial narrative around something called 'The Palestinian Psyche'. When we name it, it can be contained, worked on, and analyzed. We resist any categorization like that, because we want to center Palestinians in this.⁷⁹

The tendency for clinicians and psychologists to utilize the term 'Palestinian psyche' stems from a Eurocentric view of trauma which fails to address the different ways of collective and psychological processes that occur via colonialism. The term forwards the narrative that a 'Palestinian psyche' can only be understood in terms of settler-colonialism, and that without settler-colonialism there could be no psyche. Sheehi explains that the reality is that settler-colonialism operates within the context of the 'Palestinian psyche' and requires its existence to survive. This is a similar approach to what Fanon discusses as the French are in need of the Algerians and not the other

77 Sheehi, Lara & Sheehi, Stephen. "The settlers' town is a strongly built town: Fanon in Palestine" *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies* 17 (2020):183-192

78 Shakry, Omnia El. *The Arabic Freud: Psychoanalysis and Islam in Modern Egypt*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017.

79 Sheehi, Lara. Personal Interview. 2021.

way around.⁸⁰

The ‘Palestinian psyche’ runs the risk of individualizing the trauma suffered, which factors into the internalization of fault and the ignorance of the effects of settler-colonialism. The ‘Palestinian psyche’ is not hegemonic, it fails to account for the differences within the Palestinian community in relation to psychoanalysis and trauma. The ‘Palestinian psyche’ is not generated by the indigeous people and can therefore never be used as a way to talk about Palestinian trauma, as it disavows the very source of said traume (i.e settler-colonialism). The ‘Palestinian psyche’ relies on the internalized inferiority of the Palestinian people as they are categorized, discussed, and operated on through an institutional narrative that fails to understand them. What we see instead, as Sheehi explains, is a set of practices that has been ongoing as a psychological commons: “a constant collective Palestinian psychological commons rather than an internalized psyche”.

Sheehi also recounts the cases they’ve seen in regard to the manifestations of colonial trauma within Palestine within the Maana Center of EMMS Nazareth Hospital in Nazareth (al-Nasirah)⁸¹. For the most part, there are several cases concerning one’s difficulty of breathing and feeling of entrapment. One could argue that these are direct manifestations of the psychological trauma endured by the Palestininas; paralleling the struggle for breathing and fear of being trapped to that of the literal military entrapment of the material body. Furthermore, Palestinians experience anxiety symptoms linked to public spaces as well as delusions of floating or being lifted up. Again, the material parallels can be understood when you consider the acts of unfair incarceration of the Palestinian people as well as the unjust and continuous seizure of their homes. What we see it ultimately clusters of Palestinian people who have a drive to remain at home to be ‘rooted’. This is an indirect link all the way back to al-Nabka, where the fear of such actions (i.e destruction/seizure of homes) may happen to them at any point in time.

Memory & sumud

By what mechanism are the Palestinian memories of colonial trauma and oppression passed down from generation to generation? In *Ghosts of War in Vietnam*, Heonik Kwon takes an almost Feudian approach to death as he writes about the aftermath of the American war in Vietnam; bringing into question what it means for a country to be divided in the context of grief, sorrow, and mourning. The idea of ‘ghosts’ is a prevalent theme in Kwon’s writing; through it he explores the relationship between the living and the dead. One could view this relationship as one between the collective psyche/gaze and the historic trauma. In other words, the “ghosts” that we see throughout the book are really spiritual embodiments of collective trauma. According to Kwon, the effects of war deeply affects the collective psyche as well as the souls of the living and dead; as seen in Vietnamese tradition. Kwon tells several stories of ghosts having their own untold stories that they wish to be heard, playing out a metaphysical scenario of remembrance of a collective tragedy or trauma. I asked Lara Sheehi if there were any ‘ghosts’ found in Palestine, to which I received a surprising answer:

LARA SHEEHI: There are no ghosts in Palestine. There are living, breathing, and embodied human beings. Settler-colonialism wants to see ghosts, because then you can talk about it in the past.⁸²

That is not to say that the memories are not present, only that we cannot understand them through Kwon’s notion of ‘ghosts’ because we risk losing the embodied form. In other words, the material conditions of Palestine under occupation and settler-colonialism has been the same for over 70 years, and therefore we must focus on the material reality of the Palestinians when discussing remembrance. In looking for the ghosts, we end up missing the people who are physically still there. Remembrance, as Sheehi describes, is a part of the physical world; from picking an orange from a tree to holding the key of your grandparents’ seized home. For the Palestinians, memories are something that they *physically* hold on to. Furthermore, similar to Esmier’s explanation, Sheehi also considers memory to be expansive across time, which is part of the reason as to why there are no ‘ghosts’ in

80 Fanon, Franz. *Wretched of the Earth*. New York, NY: Grove Press, 1961.

81 Sheehi, Lara. Personal Interview. 2021.

82 Sheehi, Lara. Personal Interview. 2021.

Palestine, since the past is not thought of by the Palestinians as the ‘past’, but rather is experienced simultaneously with the present. Walid Khalidi states that 1948 was only the “birth” of al-Nakba. al-Nakba can never result in any ‘ghosts’, as Kwon describes them, since al-Nakba has never truly ended. The concept of ‘ghosts’ in Palestine also fuels the settler-colonial narrative through its discourse on trauma similar to the terminology used to describe the ‘Palestinian psyche’. The Israeli state wants Palestinian ‘ghosts’ to exist in order to bind the Palestinians, and the consequences of al-Nakba, temporally in the past. As Lara Sheehi puts it: “Nothing heals when something is still happening.”⁸³

You, Samid, choose to stay in that prison, because it is your home, and because you fear that if you leave, your jailer will not allow you to return. Living like this, you must constantly resist the twin temptations of either acquiescing in the jailer's plan in numb despair, or becoming crazed by consuming hatred for your jailer and yourself, the prisoner.

- Raja Shehadeh⁸⁴

While there may not be a presence of ‘ghosts’ within Palestine, there is still a spiritual linkage that connects Palestinians to their memories via a similar mechanism to that of Kwon’s ghosts. This is *sumud* (سومد) which literally translates to “steadfastness” or “perseverance”, although its meaning holds much more weight, and is used to describe a collective understanding of remembrance and steadfastness in the face of oppression. Lara Sheehi also expanded on the absence of ‘ghosts’ Palestine with a different concept that achieves a similar spiritual purpose.

LARA SHEEHI: There is the concept of *sumud* - ‘stalwartness’. It is the collective understanding of how one continues to be strong, stalwart, and resistant in the face of oppression and *remember*. *Sumud* is a part of remembrance and has been passed along Palestinians collectively. That could be something spiritual.

Sumud is not bound on any real temporal scale, but is instead completely fluid and flexible depending on the time, place, and person. *sumud* represents the anti-colonial strategy of the Palestinians, be it in terms of politics, art, or simply oral history/stories, and helps decolonize the mind, body, and the land. Watching your home be taken reflects this sense of *sumud* as it is the refusal of conforming to the colonial reality being enforced upon you. Like ‘ghosts’ it is used to reproduce the memories of trauma, in this case colonial trauma, yet it is not exclusively melancholic in nature but rather righteous and ultimately hopeful. Additionally, it is not necessarily connected to death but is understood as a practice of living. It is ultimately because of *sumud* that the Palestinian people are the worst victims in colonial history, as it concerns their constant persistence, and why Zionism is ultimately a failed project.⁸⁵

Writer and activist Raja Shehadeh understands *sumud* as a non-violent third way to oppose settler-colonialism and the occupation of Palestine and is characterized by the refusal to collaborate with state⁸⁶. ‘Refusal’ is in fact the best term to refer to the decolonization strategies fueled by *sumud*: refusal to back down, refusal to accept defeat, refusal to run away, refusal to give into the occupation, etc. If a Palestinian speaks Arabic in Israel, that is *sumud*. Likewise, the protests and demonstrations of the first Intifada are also *sumud*. Lena Meari analyses the forms *sumud* takes, and its complex series and relationships, within the context of colonial prisons and the refusal of Palestinian prisoners to confess or jeopardize Palestinian resistance for their own immediate benefit⁸⁷.

83 Sheehi, Lara. Personal Interview. 2021.

84 Chomsky, Noam. *Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel, and the Palestinians*. London, UK: The Electric Book Company, 1999; 263.

85 Sheehi, Stephen. “Psychoanalysis under Occupation: Nonviolence and Dialogue Initiatives as a Psychic Extension of the Closure System” *Psychoanalysis and History*. 20, no. 3 (2018): 353-369

86 Shehadeh, Raja. *The Third Way: A Journal of Life in the West Bank*. UK: Quartet Books, 1982.

87 Meari, Lena. “Sumud: A Palestinian Philosophy of Confrontation in Colonial Prisons” *South Atlantic Quarterly*. 113, no. 3 (2014): 547-578.

Regardless of what route a Palestinian chooses to embrace and manifest their sense of *sumud*, it will aid in the ongoing decolonization process and Palestinian liberation in terms of the body, mind, and soul.

Conclusion

The Palestinian people experience trauma in many different forms, however, the commonality between the physical, psychological, and spiritual trauma which they endure is the fact that they are all sources of settler-colonialism. The identity of the Palestinians has been under attack ever since the British Mandate, however, the Zionist Congress introduced a concentrated effort to remove any trace of the Palestinian people from Palestine. This was done in two ways: ignorance of the indigenous population of Palestine and the attempt to eradicate that same population. When the 'Arabs' remained in their native land, the Zionist effort was focused towards removing them via al-Nakba. The ultimate goal was, of course, to establish a settler-colonial state where a Zionist population would remove and replace the Palestinians.

The onslaught known as al-Nakba resulted in the forced expulsion of over 750,000 Palestinians from their land and the demolition of near 500 Palestinian villages. The fate of these villages were used to attempt to achieve the goal of removing the Palestinians and establishing Zionist immigrants as the true natives of historical Palestine, fulfilling the 'ancient promise'. What followed was a Zionist narrative that shared the settler-colonial sentiment of Palestine being exclusively for the Jewish people while denying both the existence of the Palestinian people as well as the memories their home and al-Nakba. As we learn with the story of Theodore Katz, the denial of al-Nakba is an official legal position of the State of Israel rather than a mere social stigma. It takes place on the legislative level and creates a system of 'history' that acts in opposition to the voices, memories, and lives of the Palestinians. What this creates is a fragmented archive, not caused by lack of information, but a lack of an outlet to project the memories and records which the Palestinian people hold in the hearts and in their hands.

Route 181 Fragments of a Journey in Palestine-Israel is a case where the Palestinian narrative can be properly told and understood, as opposed to the Zionist colonial narrative which could never be used as an accurate lens. As a result of the film's efforts in presenting the Palestinian narrative, Route 181 has been subjected to both harsh criticism and heavy censorship, where screenings have been canceled and distribution of the film made limited. In terms of filmic strategies and modes, it seems that Sivan and Khleifi are interested in obtaining the insider's perspective of Palestine's indigenous Palestinians, which they achieve by also being a part of the group of people they choose to film. As such, they draw from filmmakers such as John Marshall and Timothy Asch with their notion of 'event sequence film' as well as Faye Ginburg with their notion of 'parallax effect'. Ultimately, I would say that their biggest influence is Robert Gardner and his legacy of 'sensory ethnography' which is their use of film methodology in a multimodal and multi-sense approach. Sivan and Khleifi show just how problematic the Zionist narrative becomes as they reveal the society which it ultimately produces. A silenced people, who believe that their voices may never be heard by the world and an oblivious crowd who's violence against the Palestinians has been normalized to the point where they don't even consider it.

As we approach the notion of collective trauma suffered by the Palestinians under the settler-colonial and psychoanalytical lens of Franz Fanon, we notice that Fanon can be seen and understood across Palestine, despite the differences between the French occupation of Algeria and the Zionist occupation of Palestine. Settler-colonialism establishes the occupational conditions where the Palestinians become colonized in terms of not only the body, but the mind as well. Every Palestinian - be it in the Palestinian Territories, Israel, or in diaspora - is a colonial subject and is impacted by the psychological traumatic effects of settler-colonialism. This is seen in terms of Fanon's notion of racialization and the destructive 'gaze' against the colonized/oppressed. We also see this within psychological institutions of Palestine where the indigenous mode of operating has become weary and broken down to be replaced by the modes of the colonizers. As a result, we see the internalization of backwardness as well as the manifestation of psychological and physiological symptoms that indirectly reconnects to al-Nakba. My interview with Lara Sheehi showed that we must resist the notion of a 'Palestinian psyche' lest we fall into the ethnocentric colonial system where we indirectly deny the Palestinians of self-determination when it comes to their own minds.

There is the ultimate question of how the Palestinians can manage to overcome the occupation and decolonize their minds and bodies. Lara Sheehi best explains that it is in fact the efforts by the Palestinian communities to express themselves as they see fit as well as through the notion of *sumud*. For example, Maana Center poses the best solution to decolonizing the mind through establishing a psychological training center that

utilizes only Arabic and exclusively serves the Palestinian community. Although it is the only center in Israel that is ran for Palestiniand and by Palestinians, the center manages to overcome the issue of having the indigenous process of the colonized be destroyed and replaced by that of the Zionist colonizers. Psychoanalysis absolutely does have a place in Palestine, as it has for years prior to 1948. In order for it to be successful in decolonizing the mind and body, however, it must utilize the Palestinian's narrative. The narrative that has been continuously denied and replaced by the Zionist narrative. The narrative that *Route 181* explores it, yet is condemned for. Despite the obvious struggle to project the Palestinian perspective and the ongoing consequences of al-Nakba, the Palestinian community throughout the entire world remain strong and Samudeen.

Sumud is an integral part of the Palestinian identity, that helps them maintain their identity as ethnic Palestinians who belong to historical Palestine. *Sumud* is seen in the ongoing Nakba that started in 1948, as their remembrance of al-Nakba remains strong in the face of the challenges posed by the Zionist narrative for the past 70 years. *Sumud* is seen through the art and visual media, such as ethnographic documentary/film, which establishes an outlet for Palestinians to express themselves and for people to hear the unheard voices. *Sumud* is the psychological act of remembrance and struggle against an occupational colonial state that seeks to dominate and subject the minds of the colonized. To be *samudeen* is to remember your own history and trauma, despite the pain and suffering it may cause. While Ursa, in *Corregidora*, has the responsibility of holding the memories of her ancestors, it is almost a burden given the reproduction of violence on the body, mind, and soul. This is why Ursa becomes 'free' - in the tragic sense - as she discovers that she can no longer have her own children and therefore cannot pass down those memories of generational trauma. While *sumud*, as a form of Palestinian remembrance, is an alternative Ursa's 'freedom' it is by no means a burden. Ironically, it has a strong element of freedom and empowerment, despite the fact that it reproduces the same violence and suffering as in Ursa's case. This complexity of *sumud* can be best characterized by it being resistance through remembrance.

In *sumud* is the refusal to fall victim to the efforts of the Israeli state to forget the Palestinian history and the history of al-Nakba. *Sumud* is extensive and seen in every aspect of Palestinian life throughout the world, coming in different forms. Only on the terms of the Palestinian people can the Palestinians be understood. Through *sumud* the Palestinians acknowledge their common struggle under settler-colonialism through a collective psychological commons that reinforces the drive to refuse conformity to the narrative which is placed upon them by outsiders who not only do not understand the Palestinians, but seek to destroy them.

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