

Introduction

“Jewish villages were built in the place of Arab villages. You do not even know the names of these Arab villages, and I do not blame you because geography books no longer exist, not only do the books not exist, the Arab villages are not there either. Nahlal arose in the place of Mahlul; Kibbutz Gvat in the place of Jibta; Kibbutz Sarid in the place of Huneifis; and Kefar Yehushu'a in the place of Tal al-Shuman. There is not one single place built in this country that did not have a former Arab population.”

*Moshe Dayan, Address to the
Technion (Israel Institute of
Technology), Haifa (as quoted
in Ha'aretz, 4 April 1969)*

There is no denying that the Zionist colonization of Palestine, which began in the early 1880s and continues to this day, represents one of the most remarkable colonizing ventures of all time, and certainly the most successful such venture in the twentieth century.

Within one life-span, a nearly total revolution was effected in the demographic, socio-economic, cultural, and political status quo as it stood in Palestine at the turn of this century.

In the process, two momentous developments evolved in opposite directions. On the one hand there was the steady concentration of and encroachment by an immigrant Jewish presence accompanied by the relentless consolidation of its control over the natural resources of the country. On the other hand, there was the corresponding marginalization, dispersal, thinning out, and beleaguerment of the indigenous Palestinians who until 1948 constituted the vast majority of the population.

For historical parallels of these twin phenomena, the closest analogies that come to mind are the impingement of European settlers in North America on the native American and that of settlers of British stock on the aboriginal populations of Australia and New Zealand.

But there are also striking differences. (1) In Palestine, the displacement/replacement process occurred within decades as opposed to two or three centuries in the other cases. (2) The process occurred in a tiny and already relatively densely settled country where there could have been no perception of a vast untapped wilderness crying for Western exploration and exploitation. (3) The Palestinian phenomenon evolved in the post-heyday of the classical European colonization of Asian and African countries and in the wake of the (at least verbal) espousal by the Western democracies of the principle of national self-determination. It anachronistically accompanied the demise of the old imperial regimes in the former colonies and straddled two World Wars ostensibly fought for the core values of Western civilization. And (4) the colonization of the homeland of the Palestinians took place in the modern age of communication and continues in full vigor under the glare, however fitful, of the electronic mass media.

This book is about the fate of the 418 Palestinian villages destroyed and depopulated in the 1948 war, the ineluctible climax of the preceding Zionist colonization and the great watershed in the history of the Palestinian people, marking the beginning of their Exodus and Diaspora. The loss of these villages was only part of the debris left on

Palestinian soil by the advance of Zionism. The other part was the fall of more than a dozen of the major urban centers of the Palestinian people—towns exclusively populated by them (Acre, Beersheba, Baysan, Lydda, Majdal, Nazareth, al-Ramla), others where they were either the vast majority (Safad) or had substantial pluralities (Tiberias, Haifa, and West Jerusalem), and their ancient seaport Jaffa, where they also made up the vast majority and in whose hinterland they had pioneered the cultivation of the orange that bears the city's name. With few exceptions, notably Nazareth, these urban centers were also emptied of their Palestinian residents. Their immovable assets—commercial centers, residential quarters, schools, banks, hospitals, clinics, mosques, churches, and other public buildings, parks and utilities, all passed en bloc into the possession of the citizens of the nascent State of Israel. Also appropriated intact by Israelis were the personal movable assets: furniture, silver, pictures, carpets, libraries, and heirlooms—all the accoutrements of middle class life of the erstwhile Palestinian residents.

Grievous and irreplaceable as was the loss of these urban centers, their fate is not the subject of this volume, in which only passing reference will be made to them. Instead, this work concentrates on the fate of the Palestinian countryside. The decision to focus on the 418 Palestinian villages destroyed and depopulated in the war of 1948 was deliberate. The fate of the urban centers, at least that of the more major ones, has been noted by the outside world, however perfunctorily. The Palestinian pre-Diaspora structures in many of these centers still stand—the once elegant mansions of the residential quarters of Haifa, Jaffa, and West Jerusalem—while the cities' names, albeit in Hebraicized versions, still grace the modern maps of Israel.

The same cannot be said of the villages. They have remained altogether anonymous to the outside world and might as well never have existed. A dozen or so, though depopulated, were spared or suffered only minor damage. The rest were either totally destroyed or virtually so. They have literally been wiped off the face of the earth. The sites of their destroyed homesteads and graveyards, as well as their orchards, threshing floors, wells, livestock, and grazing grounds were all parcelled out among Jewish colonies that had been their neighbors or among new ones established afterwards on the erstwhile village lands. The Hebrew names of these latter have replaced their Arabic predecessors, sometimes faintly and mockingly echoing them. The inheritors of these villages and their patrimony come from all the major Zionist/Israeli collective, cooperative, or small holder agricultural movements (kibbutzim and moshavim). These movements are affiliated to Israeli political parties that span the entire spectrum from the most liberal to the most hardline, with the lion's share going to those closer to the former.

Some hundred or so Palestinian villages in the areas conquered by Israel in the 1948 war were neither destroyed nor depopulated, and continue to exist to this day within Israel's 1967 borders. One might note, however, that over 80 percent of the lands of these Palestinian/Israeli citizens who never left their homes have been confiscated since 1948 and put at the exclusive disposal of the Jewish citizens of the state. Still, the 418 villages that are the subject of this book constituted almost half of the total number of Palestinian villages that existed within the borders of Mandatory Palestine on the eve of the UN General Assembly partition resolution in November 1947. From these, some 390,000 rural refugees radiated into the West Bank and the Gaza Strip or streamed overland across the borders or by sea to neighboring Arab countries. These village refugees of 1948 made up over half the total number of refugees uprooted by the war—the balance being the urban refugees from the cities and towns just mentioned (about

254,000) as well as some 70,000–100,000 semi-sedentary Bedouin. The total number of refugees of the war, both rural and urban, constituted 54 percent of the total Palestinian population in Mandatory Palestine. The area of Palestinian village lands summarily divided among the old and new Jewish colonies was about 6 million dunums, about four times the total area of Palestine purchased by the Zionist movement in the previous seven decades of colonization.

These figures indicate the scale of the catastrophe that befell the Palestinian rural population within the borders established by Israel in 1948. Other peoples have suffered worse fates in history; to be dispossessed of one's patrimony, dispersed and pauperized, even on such a scale, is still more merciful than wholesale physical annihilation, though no less than 13,000 Palestinians were killed in the process. But what is probably uniquely distinctive of the Palestinian fate is that they were dispossessed of their country *as a people*, and to this day they continue to be maligned for having suffered such dispossession. At the same time, the triumph of the internationally organized and financed dispossessors over the local Palestinian share cropper, peasant, small holder, and townsman, while causing occasional twitches of conscience in the West, is by and large hailed by Western political elites (if not always by their public opinions) as the vindication of the very principles of democracy the violation of which made the Zionist revolution possible in the first place.

Be that as it may, the majority of the survivors of the rural refugees of the 1948 war and their descendants continue to live in refugee camps in the occupied territories and the neighboring Arab countries. It is from their ranks that to a considerable measure the PLO has drawn its strength since the mid 1960s; it is from their despair that the seeds of the intifada grew.

As the reader will find in the following pages, most of these 418 villages resembled one another in their limited resources, their primary dependence on agriculture, and the mixed type of land ownership made up of small holdings and communal lands traditionally cultivated in alternate plots annually reassigned among the villagers themselves. But there were also considerable variations in population and wealth, in the crops and other agricultural products, depending on the village's soil, terrain, water resources, and distance from the district capital. Most of the villages showed an urge for self-improvement and a pattern of expansion and social evolution, particularly in the field of education. In many, there were the beginnings of economic diversification (e.g., in the services sector) and of affiliation to rudimentary cooperative marketing enterprises. Each village had its mosque or church, though the vast majority of the inhabitants were Muslims. Perhaps most distinctive of each village were its shrines, named after local saints or benefactors whose reputations were embedded in the collective memories and traditions of the villagers themselves.

Many of the villages had been bypassed by history, but many others had over the centuries borne witness to major battles, the passage of great armies, or the visits and largesse of Caliph or Sultan. Others yet had produced Islamic scholars, sufi mystics, or administrators. A remarkable number throughout medieval and later times were visited by travelers from near or distant Arab or Muslim lands en route to Jerusalem, Damascus, or Cairo. Some of these recorded in Arabic, Turkish, or Persian the impressions of their visits. An Ottoman Tax Register compiled towards the end of the sixteenth century mentions in detail the taxable products of 145 of the 418 villages. It is clear from this and other written evidence that most of these villages had been in existence under their Arabic or Arabized names for many centuries before 1948. Archeological

remains further attest to the continued existence of human settlement at these sites since time immemorial.

Thus the dispossession of the Palestinian village population of 1948 did not involve a transient or migratory population, but an ancient indigenous farmer community as settled as any in the Mediterranean basin or indeed anywhere else. While pre-industrial, the villagers belonged to a civilization that had enriched the human heritage with its contributions in the fields of religion, literature, philosophy, architecture, and the sciences. They were no less rooted in their patrimony and communal associations than any other people anywhere. It should not therefore be difficult to imagine the depth and longevity of the trauma that afflicted the generations that were uprooted in 1948 or to understand why their state of mind has been transmitted to their descendants in their Diaspora.

All That Remains, by rescuing (if only on paper) these 418 villages from the oblivion to which they had been consigned, is an acknowledgment of the suffering of hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children. It is a gesture of homage to their collective memories and their sense of ancestral affiliation. It is a tribute to their credentials as three-dimensional beings, and to their entitlement to the self-esteem that is anchored in the roots of one's identity and heritage.

Retrospective as this book is, it is not a call for the reversal of the tide of history, nor for the delegitimization of Zionism. But it is a call, on the threshold of the second century of the Zionist-Arab conflict, for a pause, for a moment of introspection by the contemporary engineers of Zionism and their sympathizers. It is a call for, as it were, a break into the chain of causation which has, since the beginning of the Zionist colonization of Palestine, created the dimensions of the tragedy of the Palestinian people as we know it today.

Such a call is all the more compelling because of the gathering on both sides of the Zionist-Arab divide of the forces of atavistic fundamentalism. In the absence of a modicum of justice for the Palestinian people, this encounter could blight well into the coming century the lives of generations yet unborn both within and outside the confines of the State of Israel. It is in this spirit that this volume has been compiled, as a reminder that in much of human endeavor, building for one's self is often accompanied by destruction for the other. If only on prudential grounds, the exultant builder could well take into his appraisal both the monument of his achievement and the debris left in its wake.

If *All That Remains* further helps to draw the attention of the outside world, and of Zionists and their supporters, to the price paid by Palestinians so that Israel could be established and the conscience of Western Christendom salvaged for its own anti-Semitic crimes, then it might also be of some relevance today in the search for an honorable and peaceful resolution of this century-old conflict.

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