

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE MEMORY OF DISPOSSESSION, DISPOSSESSING MEMORY: ISRAELI NETWORKS COMMEMORISING THE NAKBA¹

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Introduction

In 2005 the British Council sponsored the Dublin production of the Tricycle Theatre's *Bloody Sunday: Scenes from the Saville Inquiry* (Tricycle 2005: 1). The extraordinary thing about the British Council's support is that this verbatim theatre show² documents the inquiry into arguably the worst act of *state* violence against unarmed civilians in Northern Ireland, a statelet (Lentin and McVeigh 2006) still under British rule. Panellists in a pre-show discussion called the show a 'memorial to the dead.' This act of commemoration, before the findings of the Saville Inquiry had been published and the perpetrators' culpability established – enacted and supported by the perpetrators rather than the victims – can be read as a bizarre *lieu de mémoire* (Nora 1989), but also an attempt to make this controversial murder of civilians part of the British consensus.

The events this memorial theatre performance commemorates raise a parallel with the aftermath of October 2000, when 13 unarmed Palestinian citizens of Israel were shot by Israeli special police sniper units during demonstrations against Israel's oppressive policies against Palestinians in the Occupied Territories after the onset of the al-Aqsa Intifada.³ The Israeli government set up a Commission of Inquiry chaired by Justice Theodore Or, which not only did not deal with the historical oppression of Israel's Palestinian citizens, but also attempted to shift the blame for the demonstrations onto Israeli Palestinian elected representatives. *Sikkuy*, the Association for Civic Equality in Israel, has been monitoring the progress of the investigation and of Israeli-Palestinian relations within the state of Israel in the wake of the Or Commission, its website serving as a memory site maintained by the perpetrators' society (*Sikkuy* 2005; Ozacky-Lazar and Ghanem 2003), arguably in an attempt to make the implications of the killings part of the Israeli consensus.

In this chapter, however, I explore another act of commemoration of atrocity by members of the society which perpetrated it – the contemporary commemoration by networks of Israeli intellectuals of the Palestinian *Nakba*, the name given to the 1948 catastrophe when 800,000 Palestinians were expelled or escaped from their homes, leading, according to UNHCR, to the existence today of more than four million Palestinian refugees (Kuperman 2005).

The 1948 Palestine war, which led to the creation of the state of Israel on 78 per cent of historic Palestine, resulted in the destruction of 531 villages and 11 urban neighbourhoods, and thus of much of Palestinian society, and Arab landscape, by the Zionist pre-state leadership, the *Yishuv*, a predominantly European settler community who had migrated to Palestine since the 1880s. About 90 per cent of Palestinians were driven out from the territory occupied by the Israelis in 1948, many by psychological warfare and/or military pressure and a very large number at gunpoint.

Palestinians began telling the story of the *Nakba* immediately after the 1948 war (Masalha 2005a, 16; Pappé 2006, xiii). However, even though the Israeli historian Ilan Pappé's argument that the destruction of Palestine can be defined as 'ethnic cleansing' is entirely persuasive, the perpetrators of what elsewhere has been defined as a war crime and a crime against humanity have managed to evade justice and will most probably never be brought to trial: 'beside the trauma, the deepest form of frustration for Palestinians has been that the criminal act... has been so thoroughly denied, and that Palestinian suffering has been so totally ignored, ever since 1948' (Pappé 2006, xiv). In addition, Palestinian internal refugees (those who remained in Israel after 1948) have been excluded from international protection and from any future negotiated settlement (Masalha 2005b).

Israelis began telling the *Nakba* in the 1980s when so-called Israeli new historians began publishing research which shattered the Israeli consensus that during and after the 1948 war the majority of Palestinians either left their homes because they were instructed to make room for the invading Arab armies, fled in ill-informed fear, or departed along with the defeated Arab armies. Either way, before the publication of studies by these Israeli new historians, the accepted Israeli narrative was that the plight of the Palestinian refugees was neither the fault nor the responsibility of the Zionist leaders who supposedly greeted this emptying of Palestine as a welcome surprise. However, the work of new historians such as Simha Flapan (1987), Benny Morris (1987, 1994, 2004), Ilan Pappé (1988) and Avi Shlaim (1988) made it clear to many Israelis that ‘the maps of meaning provided by Zionism are simply no longer adequate’ (Silberstein 2002).

Since the first Intifada (1987-93), many Israeli and Israeli-Palestinian networks have created protest and dialogue fora in the midst of the ongoing conflict, operating on several globalisation from below non-state and anti-state levels, mostly initiated by Israeli Jews. Theorising these oppositional groupings as networks – many of whose members belong to more than one grouping, moving in and out of oppositional activism – fits Zygmunt Bauman’s differentiation between relations, partnerships and other forms of mutual engagement, and networks, in that ‘network suggests moments of “being in touch” interspersed with periods of free roaming’ (Bauman 2004, xii). Networks, according to Stephen Fuchs (2001), consist of relations, and while the network’s behaviour does not follow any unified plan or intention, network construction and extension are never finished, unless the network disappears or falls apart. Those who do participate are also likely to participate in other encounters, groups, organisations and networks (Fuchs 2001, 270-1).

In line with this analysis, it is interesting to note that in recent times, particularly since the onset of al-Aqsa Intifada, the erection of the Separation Wall and the deepening of the checkpoint regime in the West Bank, several writers have detected activism fatigue among members of Israeli oppositional networks. Writing about the dilemmas members of the Israeli left have in speaking against the ongoing occupation, sociologist Lev Grinberg (2005) bemoans the dearth of oppositional discourse, arguing that ‘there are no words to describe the process of humiliation and appropriation’ and that this paucity of words has replaced political discourse with post-colonial and post-modern theories.⁴ As a result, according to Grinberg, oppositional activists

undergo a process of disconnection... as a small, elitist community of those in the know... all the words we put forward ... do not become a common language of collective, public and political significance... This lack of language has become critical since the second Intifada. The absence of a popular resistance movement against the state’s response to the Intifada, and of a common goal, has silenced and immobilised us (Grinberg 2005, 190, 192).

The dilemmas of the Israeli resistance movement result on the one hand from the dominance of a globalised Israeli-Palestinian ‘peace industry’ – a ‘white industry’, governed by the need to apply for funding from the European Union and the Nordic countries, and dominated by public relations strategies and marketing gimmicks. As Yael Barda, an Israeli human rights lawyer, notes, ‘Palestinian and Israeli [activists] must study the EU language and the grammar of grant applications’. On the other hand, grassroots activists, who conduct localised and less ‘sexy’ socio-economic campaigns, are left outside the lucrative ‘peace industry’ (Barda 2006, 17-8). Crucially, the Israeli resistance movement often feels paralysed because of the worsening reality of the separation wall and checkpoint regime. For example, the Israeli-Palestinian network *Ta’ayush*, established after the events of October 2000 as an attempt by the Israeli left to create alternatives to the nationalistic reaction to the second Intifada, is in deep crisis due to network members’ powerlessness vis a vis the increasing oppression in the territories, accelerated house demolitions, the worsening Palestinian economy and the devastating effects of the separation wall (Leibner 2006).

Against this crisis in the Israeli anti-occupation and resistance movement, this chapter focuses on one Israeli resistance network, *Zochrot* (meaning remembering in the female form), established in 2002 to promote awareness and knowledge of the Palestinian *Nakba* among the Jewish population of Israel, in Hebrew (Bronstein 2005).⁵ I present *Zochrot*’s activities as a performative *lieu de mémoire* (Nora 1989), and – proposing that the underlying issue of the Palestinian right of return is subverted,

rather than assisted by this memorial act – I question whether its work signals the attempt to appropriate and ultimately, dispossess *Nakba* memory.

I use several lines of inquiry in approaching this task. I begin by discussing the Israeli historiography of the *Nakba*, examined under the themes of assuming responsibility for the *Nakba*, timeframes, and the issue of Palestinian subjectivity. I then discuss the relevance of Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire*, and problematise the position of the witness of catastrophe, after Primo Levi and Giorgio Agamben (1999), drawing links between Holocaust and *Nakba* testimonies, difficult as such links might seem. My exploration of *Zochrot's* work also highlights the role of the Palestinian witness-victim in the telling of this very Israeli-Jewish story. The chapter also comments on the nature of *Zochrot* as a network, which, through ongoing work allows members to identify themselves as movement activists (Fuchs 2001, 271).

I am an Israeli Jew, living outside Israel, and, having been engaged in oppositional politics since the 1967 war (see Lentin 2002), I am well aware of the dilemmas of the Israeli resistance movement. I am writing this chapter in the wake the 2006 Gaza and Lebanon war and against the backdrop of the daily practices of the Israeli racial state (c.f. Goldberg 2002; Lentin 2004a). I want to suggest that the intertwining of dispossession, memory, and responsibility, and more specifically, the vexed issue of the right of return, makes this interrogation both urgent and, in a curious way, also redundant.

Evading the continuous past: The treatment of the *Nakba* and its aftermath by Israeli academics

Terms designating catastrophes have meanings and histories. One example is the term 'Holocaust', coined in the early 1950s, and disputed because its meaning of 'burnt offering' designates Christian meanings to the sacrifice of Europe's Jews (c.f. Agamben 1999, 28-31). The term *Nakba*, according to Nur Masalha (2005a, 16), was first coined by the Arab philosopher Constantine Zurayk (1956) immediately after the 1948 war. A major history of the *Nakba* by the Palestinian historian 'Arif Al-'Arif was published in Beirut in 1958-60 (Al-'Arif 1958-60). The ongoing conflict is discursively determined through the oppositional terms used to narrate the 1948 war: the War of Independence for Israelis, the *Nakba* for Palestinians.

The first major Israeli attempt to rewrite the history of the *Nakba* was by Simha Flapan (1987), soon superseded by Benny Morris's landmark *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem 1947-9* (1987), based on an exhaustive trawl through Israeli archives then available. The works of Ilan Pappé (1988) and Avi Shlaim (1988), offering alternative interpretations of the circumstances surrounding the 1948 War of Independence were seen as taboo-breaking and paradigm shifting and began an ongoing debate in Israeli academia. However, with the exception of Pappé, these 'new historians' tend to regard their work, by being free of the worst errors of heroic Zionist narratives, as more suitable for a mature and self-confident Israeli society, rather than an attempt to subvert Israeli state and society. Subsequent works by 'new historians' and other critical scholars (Benvenisti 2000; Kimmerling 2003; Kimmerling and Migdal 1994; Morris 1994, 2004; Pappé 1992, 2004a) can be usefully examined under the themes of responsibility for the *Nakba*, timeframes, memocide, and the issue of Palestinian subjectivity.

Responsibility

While Israeli new historians, especially Morris, uncovered material delineating individual cases of expulsions and massacres as well as plans – notably *Plan Dalet* (Pappé 2006) – for the removal of Palestinians, they were unwilling to accept the Palestinian contention that *Plan Dalet* was a Zionist master plan for ethnic cleansing. It seemed that accepting unambiguous responsibility for creating Palestinian dispossession inexorably led to accepting responsibility for solving that problem, namely the right of return (Pappé 1999). Thus while Flapan (1987) does blame Israel for creating Palestinian refugees, most Israeli historians, following Morris, prefer to believe that '*war and not design*, Jewish or Arab, gave birth to the Palestinian refugee problem' (Morris 2004, 588, emphasis added). This approach allows scholars to accumulate evidence about the expulsion of Palestinians while denying

the existence of a pattern or a policy, denoting an unwillingness to understand and connect that Edward Said (1998) characterised as schizophrenic. Indeed Morris's failure to acknowledge that the documentation he unearthed points to a policy of expulsion has been severely criticised (Pappe 1992, 2006; Finkelstein 1995) as has his failure to contextualise the events of 1948 within the overall framework of Zionist plans for transfer (Masalha 1992).

However, in recent years, increasing numbers of Israelis have been willing to accept that transfer was central to Zionist thought (Morris 2002) and that their state did indeed conduct systematic ethnic cleansing (Kimmerling 2003; Morris 2004; Pappe 2006). This may not simply be because it is no longer intellectually tenable to deny this, but rather because such an acceptance can justify present and future attempts to transfer Palestinians (Pappe 2002, 2004a, 2006). Indeed, right-wing Israeli intellectuals are increasingly comfortable with the idea that their country was built on ethnic cleansing (Gutwein 2002), with Morris himself declaring his disappointment that the *Nakba* was not more thorough (Shavit 2004).

Timelines

The concentration by most Israeli historians – again with the exception of Pappe – on the events of 1948 when talking about the Palestinian refugee problem, is striking. Focusing on specific events which led to specific groups of Palestinians vacating specific plots of land, contextualised only by what fighting was going on in that area around that time, achieves two objectives. Firstly, encapsulating what happened to the Palestinians within the narration of the military history of the war leads inexorably to the conclusion that the Palestinian refugee problem was a result of war. Secondly, placing the refugee issue within this narrow historical time frame closes the problem off from the present; it can thus be presented as an episode of history which is now over, in accordance with Israeli governmental policies that seek to dissolve the political dimension of the refugees' dispossession (Piterberg 2001; Masalha 2003). Thus while pre-war continuities in transfer plans are grudgingly accepted, post-war continuities are not acknowledged or linked to contemporary everyday acts of transfer and land dispossession.

In contrast, non-Zionist scholars operate within a different timescale and highlight the continuities between pre-war Zionist expansionism, wartime policies and post-1948 ethnic cleansing. They treat the *Nakba* as a high point of an ongoing policy of expulsion and expropriation, rather than a fait accompli which ended a long time ago (Karmi and Cotran 1999; Pappe 2004a).

Memoricide

While Israeli scholar Meron Benvenisti (2000) partially adopts this approach, examining the ongoing process of erasure of the Palestinian landscape, he declares that what he calls 'memoricide' has been so successful that it has disconnected any meaningful Palestinian link with the land, except for those Palestinians living in Israel. His aim is to draw a new Israeli map which, by acknowledging the white spaces which constitute the previous Palestinian presence, establishes a more meaningful Israeli connection with the land. What was lost, Benvenisti claims, needs a tombstone, not restitution. In contrast, Pappe documents the methodical memoricide of the Palestinian landscape through the renaming of Palestinian places so as to Hebraicise Palestine's geography (Pappe 2006, 226; Benvenisti 2000). He further argues that the Israeli landscape, which Israelis are encouraged to reclaim as part of their Zionist identity through hikes, picnics and trips, hides any remnants of 'non-Jewish' history on the 'motherland':

Only a few of us can discern ... the reversed signifiers of the past: a ruined house here, an abandoned orchard there... anywhere there are almond, fig or olive trees there was a village where people lived. They now live in refugee camps, in the territories, or in other villages, in Israel or across the border. Between the lone orchard trees, by the abandoned terraces, under the ... picnic tables... there are remnants of the houses and fields of the Palestinians expelled in 1948 by the Israeli army (Pappe 2005b, 90).

Palestinians as objects

By concentrating on the landscape, Benvenisti largely evades the issue of Palestinian subjectivity. He is not alone in this; Joel Beinin points out that for most new historians, ‘Jews are the subjects of history. Arabs are objects of Jewish action’ (Beinin 2004). Morris’s total reliance on Israeli sources and the eerie absence of any Arab voices from his account pose serious methodological problems. Pappé argues that because Morris took the Israeli military reports he found in the archives at face value, he was able to ignore such atrocities as poisoning of water supplies with typhoid, numerous cases of rape and dozens of massacres (Pappé 2006: xv). Moreover, his refusal to deal with Palestinian sources stems not merely from his inability to speak Arabic, but as Beinin (2004) and Laor (2004) argue separately – from contempt for their point of view. Such a refusal to regard Palestinians as anything other than objects corrupts most Israeli histories of the *Nakba*. Even when the suffering of the Palestinians is acknowledged and highlighted, they are rarely allowed interpretive possession of their history. Morris’s view that ‘there are no good Palestinian historians’ (cited in Pappé 2004b) appears to be commonplace in Israeli academia (see also Gelber 2002). Likewise, Benvenisti appears to believe that there are no good Palestinian geographers, ridiculing their painstaking efforts to map the land as ‘Palestinian sacred geography’, comparable to pornography in its obsession with an unreal image rather than the authentic landscape, which for him only those living in Israel can possess.

While Palestinian writers cite both Israeli and Palestinian sources, and stress the need for academic dialogue, Ilan Pappé is exceptional among Israelis in reciprocating and in stressing continuities between Palestinians inside and outside Israel as well as temporal continuities. His work favours the Palestinian rather than the Israeli narrative, while at the same time deconstructing and bridging both national narratives (Pappé 2004a). However, Pappé is outside the Israeli academic consensus, subject to a policy of exclusion amounting to an effective boycott (Podur 2005). Clearly, Israeli academics do not wish to cede interpretive control over the *Nakba*, which for all their differences, is geared towards severing temporal and causal connections which may offer a challenge to their present control over the land of Israel.

A recent collection edited by Nur Masalha (2005b) combines Palestinian and Israeli Jewish contributions on internal Palestinian refugees who stayed within the Israeli state after 1948. It is a refreshing dialogic site, though it reveals the contradictions between Israeli and Palestinian historiographies. While Palestinian and international contributors (e.g. Masalha 2005a; ‘Issa 2005; Humphries 2005) focus on the centrality of oral history in telling the *Nakba*, the Israeli historian Hillel Cohen uses archival sources to argue that by naming them ‘Israeli Arabs’ or ‘present absentees’, and by persuading some 50 per cent of the internal refugees to accept financial reparations, the state of Israel deliberately erased the identity of Palestinian internal refugees, an identity revived thanks to the work of some twenty local associations of internal refugees (organised under a national committee) (Cohen 2005).⁶ Paradoxically, Cohen’s argument that ‘Israel is the only state to have solved the problem of Palestinian refugees’ (personal communication, November 2005), is in line with conceptualising internal refugees as an ‘internal Israeli problem’ and refusing to accord the second and third generation refugee status.

Interestingly, while the new Israeli scholarship about the *Nakba* depicts the Palestinians as victims of Zionist ethnic cleansing, recent Palestinian research casts narratives of *Nakba* experiences in terms of active agency. Fatmeh Kassem, who studied *Nakba* narratives of illiterate urban Palestinian women, demonstrates that their choice of discourse denotes a sense that ‘the Palestinians can still determine their lives and that the loss is not total; despite the dispossession. Palestinians continue to be dynamic and active in the struggle for the land’ (Kassem 2006, 71).

***Lieux de mémoire*: memory or memoricide?**

Pierre Nora’s concept of *lieux de mémoire* as sites of collective remembering in contemporary historical understanding is useful to this discussion of the performative commemorating of the *Nakba* by Israeli intellectual networks. Nora’s seminal article in *Representations* (1989) helped inaugurate a ‘memory boom’ and can be linked to an explosive revival of interest in Halbwachs’s framework of

collective memory (1992). Nora's article can be read as an elegy for the decline of 'authentic' memories (see also Yerushalmi 1992). Nora argues that we continue to speak of memory because there is so little of it, and contrasts 'real memory – social and unviolated' (Nora 1989, 8) in primitive societies and among peasants, with contemporary memory. Claiming that we can retain sites of memory because this is the best we can do now there is no spontaneous memory, he writes that '*lieux de mémoire* are fundamentally remains, the ultimate embodiments of a memorial consciousness that has barely survived in a historical age that calls out for memory because it has abandoned it' (Nora 1989, 12).

According to Nora, people are increasingly attempting to research their individual memories, with archives being kept not only by state and other large institutions, but by everyone. Memory thus becomes an individual duty, and *lieux de mémoire* come in various shapes as 'memory attaches itself to sites, whereas history attaches itself to events' (Nora 1989, 22). However, Nora is clear about the limits of *lieux de mémoire*; for while they aim to stop the world from forgetting, their mutable nature makes this an impossible task as each generation invests *lieux de mémoire* with different interpretations so they become their own referent.

Yael Zerubavel (1994) disagrees with Nora that memory is in decline. Indeed, with the huge expansion of memory studies since the 1990s, it is difficult to argue with her. With specific reference to Israel, the valorisation of certain sites of memory over others is an ongoing process: see for instance the juxtaposition of *Yad Vashem* – The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Memorial and a valorised site of Israeli collective memory, with *Deir Yassin* – the neglected and deliberately forgotten site of the 1948 massacre only 1,400 metres away (Eisen 2003; Shadid 2005). This illustrates the argument that collective memories are constructed equally by what is forgotten (Forty and Küchler 1999; Zertal 2000).

The relative failure to build up a 'sacred geography' of Israel, one which would provide Israeli Jews with a network of *lieux de mémoire* through which they can control the landscape is highlighted by Benvenisti (2000), who attempts to replace the old 'failed flawless Hebrew maps' of Zionist provenance with a more complete and encompassing Israeli narrative, in order to achieve possession. It may well be such a wish to belong to the land and to incorporate it into the collective memory of Israeli (Ashkenazi) Jews,⁷ which also informs the work of *Zochrot* discussed below.

Writing about the inability to proceed from Holocaust past to post-Holocaust present, Laurence Langer distinguishes between 'common memory' which 'urges us to regard the Auschwitz ordeal as part of a chronology, (freeing) us from the pain of remembering the unthinkable', and 'deep memory' that 'reminds us that the Auschwitz past is not really past and never will be' (Langer 1991: xi). Attempting to combine both kinds of memory and to construct a coherent self founders on the 'intractable return of the repressed and recurring deep memory' (Friedländer 1992, 41). Langer's distinction between 'common' and 'deep' memory makes sense in relation to the difficulties some Holocaust survivors experience in living in the present. However, it is less analytically useful in a situation where the Palestinian dispossessed live side by side with the Israelis who re-possessed their lands, deprive them of their refugee identity, triumph at their expense, and erase the memory of their catastrophe through a series of legal and governmental technologies which cast them forever as second-class citizens.

There are huge differences between the Holocaust and the *Nakba* and between Holocaust and *Nakba* commemoration. While signposting locations of deportations and Jewish dwellings in contemporary Germany works to monumentalise genocide (Young 2000), financial compensation for the Nazis' victims was usually not in doubt, nor were there questions of 'return' or of territorial claims and counter-claims, so central in the case of Palestinian refugees, where, despite widespread dispossession and ethnic cleansing, the term genocide does not apply. However, on the testimonial level some similarities do exist, for instance in relation to the self-silencing of the trauma due to shame or survivor guilt (see Tamari 2002 for a discussion of the development of the Palestinian narrative of exile). Katalin Katz, who facilitates 'Collective and individual memory and interpretation' seminars in the Hebrew University, compares the self-silencing in the families of children of Shoah survivors and children of Palestinian refugees (Katz, 2000; see also Lentin, 2000).

Zochrot: A performative lieu de mémoire?

According to Edward Said (Said and Mohr 1986), the dominance of the Israeli historical narrative and the present geographical fragmentation of Palestinian society create blockages in attempts to present historical accounts of the lived experiences of Palestinians. Increasingly, however, Israel's Palestinian citizens are refusing to bury the memory of their humiliation. Film director Hani Abu-As'ad believes that Palestinian artists and intellectuals must take on the commemorative role once assumed by Jewish intellectuals: 'We lost the war. We are ready to accept the loss, but not the blame... We must – just as the Jews have done for 2000 years – keep the story alive and breathing... The Palestinians today are a nation that refuses to surrender, regardless of the force used against it' (Pinto 2005). Furthermore, in December 2006, the Mossawa Centre – the Advocacy Centre for Arab Citizens in Israel – released a position paper regarding the legal status of Israel's Palestinian citizens, including a demand to allow internally displaced refugees to re-settle abandoned 'unrecognised' villages. According to Muhammad Baraka, a Palestinian member of the Israeli Parliament, himself internally displaced, the question of the internally displaced is central: 'We won't agree, for the sake of co-existence, to erase our narrative as Palestinians. For many of us the refugee issue is not merely political or national, but also personal and familial. This is why we have not and will not agree, for the sake of co-existence, to a dictated Zionist narrative' (cited in Khouri 2006).

While detailing the Palestinian historiography of the *Nakba* is beyond the scope of this chapter, I can safely say that while Palestinian oral history projects documenting the stories of *Nakba* survivors (e.g., Masalha 2005a; 'Issa 2005) target Palestinian and global consumption, *Zochrot's* activities specifically target a Jewish Israeli audience. *Zochrot* was founded in 2002 when members joined the annual March of Return, initiated by the Association for the Defence of the Rights of the Internally Displaced in Israel on Israel's Independence Day. From that first march *Zochrot*, a network of Israeli Jewish intellectuals, was about *performing* the memory of the *Nakba*, through giving a 'sermon' on the *Nakba* in Hebrew (Bronstein 2005, 217).

Zochrot organises tours to Palestinian villages and towns destroyed during and after the 1948 war, during which clearly visible signs are posted to commemorate the sites and provide the Israeli public with basic information about the *Nakba*. The tours include the distribution of printed material written by former Palestinian inhabitants and the unveiling of often-masked remnants of destroyed villages and urban quarters. *Zochrot's* practices aim to uncover 'a kind of memory that was deliberately and systematically hidden' from Israeli Jews, and, crucially, 'Hebraicise' the *Nakba* by creating a space for it in the 'written, spoken and public discourse of Hebrew Israel', thus promoting an 'alternative discourse on memory'.

However, the ultimate aim is far more ambitious than mere commemoration. According to the network's founder and chair, Eitan Bronstein, acknowledging Israeli-Jewish responsibility for Zionist ethnic cleansing, massacres and property confiscations, aims to 'bring about an end to the conflict and promote true reconciliation between the two people' (Bronstein 2005: 217).

While *Zochrot* is an organisation, with an office and salaried workers, it is useful – following Thompson's distinction between three organisational arrangements, hierarchies (characterised by command/authority), markets (characterised by competition/price), and networks (characterised by cooperation/consensus/mutuality) (Thompson 2003, 14) – to theorise it as a network. However, networks are clearly never fully horizontal, nor are they characterised by a complete lack of hierarchy. There is little doubt that *Zochrot's* activities are directed by the Tel Aviv office. But through its 100 members, and its email list with more than 1,000 addresses, it arguably operates as a network, attracting dozens and sometimes hundreds of participants to its tours. Like other Israeli organisations which form the peace industry discussed above, *Zochrot* is a regular provider of alternative tours, including those organised by Israel-critical and pro-Palestinian groups, including Jewish groups. Some examples are Jews for Justice for Palestinians, a network of British Jews, who oppose Israeli policies that undermine the livelihoods, human, civil and political rights of the Palestinian people (www.jfjfp.org); European Jews for a Just Peace (www.ejpp.org); *Tikkun*, a US inter-faith movement which publishes a bimonthly Jewish critique of politics culture and society (www.tikkun.org); Jewish Voice for Peace (a San Francisco Bay area grassroots organization dedicated to the rights of Jews, Palestinians, and all peoples in the Middle East,

www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org); various country-specific Palestine Solidarity Campaigns; Olive Co-operative (seeking to raise awareness of the difficulties faced by Palestinians, and to support those working for a just peace in Palestine and Israel, www.olivecoop.com); and ICAHD UK (the UK branch of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions). These tours – a mode of global and transnational networking, well beyond the boundaries of Israel and Israeli Jews, and conducted in English, thus moving beyond *Zochrot*'s remit of publicizing the *Nakba* in the Hebrew language for the Israeli-Jewish public – support *Zochrot* by publicizing and making donations towards its activities; but they also fix it – through their inscription on *Zochrot*'s and other groups' websites – as a vital part of the global network of peace work in the Israel-Palestine context.

Beyond the tours, a second mode of global networking is the listing on the *Zochrot* website of many groups and associations with which it networks, including donor bodies – mostly based in Europe and North America. Palestinian groups *Zochrot* networks with include *Badil* – Resource Centre for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, Bethlehem, Palestine; the Association for the Defence of the Rights of the Internally Displaced in Israel (*Va'ad Ha'akurim*); The Association of the Forty – a non-profit organisation which seems to publicise the plight of unrecognised Palestinian villages; al-Awda – the Palestinian Right to Return Coalition (www.al-awda.org); and the Emile Touma Documentation Centre in Haifa.⁸ In a recent interview, Eitan Bronstein was keen to stress *Zochrot*'s networking with Israeli Palestinian groups such as the Association for the Defence of the Rights of the Internally Displaced in Israel:

With them we do two main things, one we participate in the Right of Return conference... and we invited our audience... And we [also] participate with them every year in the right of return march... [on Israel's] Independence Day ... for the last four years. And since then there are many more Jews every year. Of course, most of them are Palestinians, many of them are displaced, but not only... And the big change began when *Zochrot* joined this because until then there were some Jews, non-Zionist Jews participated on a personal level. There was really no organisations that participated as an organisation of Jews.

While *Zochrot* is keen to emphasise a sense of Israeli-Palestinian cooperation, my conversations with Palestinian citizens of Israel working on *Nakba* commemoration indicate different agendas.⁹

Some of the Israeli groups *Zochrot* networks with include *Halonot*, a network which organises Jewish-Arab encounters; *Bat Shalom*, a feminist grassroots organization of Jewish and Palestinian Israeli women working for peace grounded in a just resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict, and an equal voice for Jewish and Arab women within Israeli society (www.batshalom.org); and New Profile, a Movement for the Civilisation of Israeli Society (www.newprofile.org; see Adina Aviram's chapter in this volume). However, Bronstein makes it clear that networking with Israeli Jewish groups is more complex, and perhaps less fruitful, than working with Palestinian groups which act as conduits to Palestinian refugees who serve as witnesses on *Zochrot*'s tours. This denotes class and ethnic privileges which seem to underpin the Israeli resistance movement, and reminds us that networking activities are always laced with power relations:

...people who are most close to us are mostly Ashkenazi Jews, mostly, not underprivileged circles of society. And we have [network links] here and there – you know New Profile, we are doing something related to 60 years of the *Nakba* in two years, and so we are active with them, [working] in coalition with New Profile.¹⁰

Fuchs argues that applying network analysis to social movements assists us in understanding not what a network is, but rather what it has and will become. Social movements face grave challenges since they usually have no coercive apparatus and often involve long delays in gratification (even though in some cases the gratification is immediate in terms of providing members with a sense of identity and role within the group. Fuchs observes that as very often network emergence happens against all odds, 'nothing activates like activism', and activism is more the result of movement participation than its antecedent cause (Fuchs 2001, 270-1).

Network analysis falls into two main strands: network morphology and a more qualitative analysis which looks at network members' narratives to evaluate the nature of its networking activities (Holton forthcoming). This chapter is based on work in progress and thus it does not engage in a close network analysis of *Zochrot*. However, I want to use the remainder of this chapter to ask

whether *Zochrot's* undoubtedly vibrant networking activities constitute an active movement dedicated to commemorating the *Nakba* in Hebrew, or whether, ultimately, both the *Nakba*, and the hectic networking, are the pegs upon which this group of Israeli-Jewish intellectuals hang their activism.

While *Zochrot's* commemorative acts are a welcome negation to the ongoing erasure of the *Nakba*, I argue that they constitute a problematic, very Israeli, *lieu de mémoire*, as I now go on to explore. Firstly, although based on the testimonies of Palestinian refugees, their testimonial voice is subsumed by *Zochrot's* Israeli narrative of the *Nakba*. Discussing Primo Levi's proposal that the witness whose testimony we most need to hear, the only 'complete witness', is s/he who had reached bottom and who therefore cannot testify (in Levi's case, the *Musulman*), Giorgio Agamben argues that this makes the true testimony of catastrophe unspeakable: 'the relation... between language and the archive demands subjectivity as that which in its very possibility of speech, bears witness to an impossibility of speech' (Agamben 1999, 146).

As Bronstein acknowledges, *Zochrot's* activities not only do not 'depend upon the consent or approval of the Arabs in Israel, even those internally displaced', they 'might even *exclude* Palestinian groups in Israel because the main target is to change fundamentally the discourse in the "national Jewish camp"' (Bronstein 2005, 233, emphasis added). Representing Palestinian refugees as mere victims and stressing their ongoing dispossession compounds the trauma yet it often deprives them of voice. The question as to who is the 'complete witness' of the *Nakba*, s/he whose 'unspeakable' testimony we need to hear, is neither addressed nor resolved. The material distributed by *Zochrot* is written by its Palestinian witnesses-informants, but edited and produced by *Zochrot*, usually without mentioning the writers' and witnesses' current residence, or the fact that some witnesses may be prevented from giving testimony if they live in the Occupied Territories and can therefore not cross military checkpoints.

This usage of Palestinians as native informants, whose oral experiences are presented for others to interpret and decipher, has an uncomfortable parallel in academic research in/on Palestine. Here, as Salim Tamari notes, 'a division of labour' emerges in which "visiting scholars" are able to dictate the terms in which Palestinian discourse is packaged and presented, while Palestinian "consultants" serve a proletarian function in this scholarly multinationalism' (Tamari 1995, 24). This may be seen as a reproduction of the practices of classical Orientalism whereby the Orient, seen in terms of what meanings it brings to the European subject, is viewed as incapable of representing itself, but must be represented by the Orientalist, who is then able to encompass its realities for the benefit of the colonising society (Said 1979).

Secondly, a central part of *Zochrot's* activities is posting new signs to commemorate the Palestinian site; the new sign is not intended to conceal or replace the existing sign bearing the Hebrew place or street name, but rather add to it, pointing to another layer of existence in this space. As Leshem (2005) argues, *Zochrot's* signposting attempts to construct a 'memorial community' by proposing an alternative reading of the Israeli landscape, which is almost entirely controlled by authorities such as the Jewish National Fund, and creating spaces for the Palestinian physical and mental existence within the Israeli memorial landscape. Even though all the signs posted by *Zochrot* are removed soon after being posted, the very signposting practice subverts the hegemonic landscape and re-politicises it. While Bronstein (2005, 225) reminds us that the word for signpost in Hebrew, *shelet*, derives from the same root as the word 'control' – *shlita*, my question is whether this signposting is enabled by ultimate Israeli control of the geo-political landscape and its re-memorialising. None of the Palestinian village associations who have been marching to their destroyed villages since the 1980s have engaged in re-signposting; this landscaping act remains the prerogative of the privileged children of the Israeli-Jewish hegemony.

However, if we agree with Nora that we continue to evoke memory because there is so little of it, *Zochrot's* website (www.nakbainhebrew.org), despite the fact that it mostly documents *Zochrot's* activities, may arguably serve as a *lieu de mémoire*, albeit representing the *Nakba* as a fading memory that only Israelis can rescue. By comparison, Palestinian *Nakba* websites (such as the London-based www.palestineremembered.com) are more directly dedicated to mapping and commemorating the *Nakba*.

Thirdly, Pappé argues that as the ethnic cleansing of 1948 – the heart of the Palestinian problem – is no longer disputed by political elites in the region and internationally, it is up to civil society's 'politics from below' to create a 'real roadmap for peace and reconciliation' (Pappé, 2006, 257). While *Zochrot* privileges reconciliation, by appropriating the story of the *Nakba*, it risks perpetuating, rather than bringing about the solution of the problem.

Fourthly, although allegedly in favour of the Palestinian right of return, *Zochrot's* performative actions, original and courageous as they might be, remain symbolic. Bronstein speaks tentatively about 'the return of the *sign*' and 'the possibility that Palestinians *might* return to Palestine'. At the very least, the memory of Palestinian life in the Israeli-Jewish space through the action of *Zochrot* 'holds the potential of acknowledging the "right of return" (even if not necessarily the actual act of returning' (Bronstein 2005, 231); or, as Hillel Cohen puts it for 'pragmatic reasons', 'the right, not the return' (personal communication). By contrast, the Association for the Defence of the Rights of the Internally Displaced in Israel, in commemorating the *Nakba*, explicitly works for the right of return (*Va'ad Ha'hakurim* 2005), leaving the symbolic to the privileged occupiers of the land.

Conclusion

The performance of memory, commemoration, and memorisation – which I term 'commemoration' – has become a central part of the discourse of identity making. Within this memory boom, Palestinian memory has not only become paradigmatic of dispossession but also a shortcut to denote ethnic and political conflict, regardless of which side you are on. The 2006 war in Gaza and Lebanon made it clear that the Palestinian issue is central to any new Middle East and this must include the resolution of the refugee issue.

My final point is that by engaging with the *Nakba* past without linking it to the contemporary oppression of Palestinians, *Zochrot* tinkers with, but does not subvert the Israeli racial state. By engaging with the Israeli landscape and the Hebrew speaking public, without critiquing the state, or linking the *Nakba* to the present, *Zochrot* aims to enter the consensus, thus tacitly ratifying the status quo. *Zochrot* has emerged against the crisis of the Israeli anti-occupation movement, and has used networking, fund raising and marketing strategies effectively and creatively. Yet in commemorating the *Nakba*, *Zochrot* does not always make an explicit link with present-day oppression of Palestinians. However, although it refrained from publicly joining other Israeli peace groups in protests against the Lebanon and Gaza war, *Zochrot* could not remain silent, performing its protest in its own inimitable way by staging a leaflet dropping event in Shenkin street, Tel Aviv's most fashionable street.

In its position paper on the war (www.zochrot.org/index.php?id=454), *Zochrot* stressed it is working 'to change Jewish public consciousness' through the realisation that, like in the 1948 *Nakba*, although 'Israel is not solely responsible and at fault for the conflict, there is no doubt that Israel is stoking its flames by displaying violent and disproportional force and by causing most of the casualties – a majority of whom are civilians'. This statement, like other *Zochrot* statements, stresses parallelism, seeking to equate Palestinian victimhood with Israeli responsibility but also Israeli victimhood. Both, according to *Zochrot*, can be assuaged only by addressing the roots of the conflict, which it sees as stemming from the 1948 Palestinian *Nakba*. However, *Zochrot's* commemoration performances – eye catching and effective as they are – still remain at the level of the symbolic.

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¹ I am indebted to my research assistant David Landy, Institute of International Integration Studies (IIS) and Department of Sociology, Trinity College Dublin. This article is based on work in progress which is part of the Global Networks project, funded by the IIS. Special thanks to my soul mate Nitza Aminov, who inspired this research and has supported me throughout.

² Verbatim theatre has become the principal form of theatre for the representation of subjects too sensitive to embody; see Singleton in this volume.

³ The al-Aqsa Intifada is the wave of violence that began in September 2000 between Palestinian Arabs and Israelis; it is also called the Second Intifada. 'Intifada' is an Arabic word for 'uprising' (literally translated as 'shaking off'). Many Palestinians consider the intifada to be a war of national liberation against foreign occupation, whereas many Israelis consider it to be a terrorist campaign (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Aqsa_Intifada).

⁴ Yet there are clearly words, and Palestinians and their supporters use them. It is surely the refusal to relinquish the position of belonging to the oppressor society and the unwillingness to identify with Palestinians rather than the idea that this run-of-the-mill military occupation is uniquely horrible, that causes this silence (I am thankful to David Landy for this comment).

⁵ The insistence on the use of the Hebrew language stems from *Zochrot*'s objective of addressing the Hebrew-speaking Israeli-Jewish public, not from some specific properties of the Hebrew language.

⁶ Naming internal refugees 'Israeli Arabs' also isolated them from those beyond the borders, convincing the world that 'Israeli Arabs' were an internal Israeli issue (Humphries 2005: 149), even though a 1989 survey by Nadim Rouhana showed that 75 per cent of high school and university students who Palestinian citizens of Israel used the term 'Palestinians' (Rouhana 1997, cited in Humphries, 2005).

⁷ See Abarjel and Lavie 2006 on the ethnic divide between Ashkenazi Jews (European) and Mizrahi Jews (originating in Arab countries and North Africa).

⁸ Some of this information was provided by Norma Musih of *Zochrot*, interview May 2006, Tel Aviv.

⁹ This is work in progress. See Lentin forthcoming for a more detailed discussion.

¹⁰ Both quotes from an interview with David Landy, Tel Aviv, October 2006.