

Remembering Palestine in 1948

Beyond National Narratives

Efrat Ben-Ze'ev

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The war of 1948 in Palestine is a conflict whose history has been written primarily from the national point of view. This book asks what happens to these narratives when they arise out of the personal stories of those who were involved, stories that are still unfolding. Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, an Israeli anthropologist, examines the memories of those who participated in and were affected by the events of 1948, and how these events have been mythologized over time. This is a three-way conversation between Palestinian villagers, Jewish-Israeli veterans, and British policemen who were stationed in Palestine on the eve of the war. Each has his or her story to tell. Across the years, these witnesses relived their past in private within family circles and tightly knit groups, through gatherings and pilgrimages to sites of villages and battles, or through naming and storytelling. Rarely have their stories been revealed to an outsider. As Dr. Ben-Ze'ev discovers, these small-scale truths, which were collected from people at the dusk of their lives and previously overshadowed by nationalized histories, shed new light on the Palestinian–Israel conflict, as it was then and as it has become.

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Remembering Palestine in 1948

Beyond National Narratives

Efrat Ben-Ze'ev

Ruppin Academic Center, Israel



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Preface

When I first began exploring the memories of Palestinian refugees in the mid-1990s, I did not think that it would lead to a long-term research project. At the time I was immersed in what was for me a new experience: exploring the Palestinians' viewpoint after having been raised as a secular, Zionist Jew in Israel. My choice to study three villages south of Haifa was not accidental. These three villages – Tirat Haifa,¹ ‘Ein Hawd, and Ijzim – were located on the slopes of Mount Carmel, where I had worked during my army service as a tour guide for the Israeli Society for the Protection of Nature.² When I got to know their remains in the 1980s, these settlements consisted of a few old Arab houses, now populated by Jews, and sparse traces – trees, fences, graves; all very neglected. For me, researching Palestinian histories of these villages was a journey of rediscovery, one that allowed me to see the Arab landscape, alongside the Jewish one I had earlier been made to see. The post-Oslo accords and the peace agreement with Jordan made it fairly easy to make contact with those Palestinian refugees living in the occupied West Bank and Jordan.

My encounters with the refugees turned what was initially abstract knowledge into concrete life stories. My Palestinian interviewees were patient enough to tell me these stories in great detail. Theirs was not merely a tale of national disaster but also a painful description of villages and families disintegrating. Refugee memories surfaced through both words and objects, mementos of a lost way of life. I was served wild herbs, mushrooms, and fruit that were all the more significant because they were from the interviewee's village of origin. The Palestinian catastrophe became increasingly palpable to me through these stories, tastes, and objects.³ The new understanding I gained was not only one of knowledge; it was a sense of who I was and who my people are.

At this point, my initial research seemed incomplete; I now wanted to study what loomed at its edges: the interface and overlap between the Palestinian and Israeli narratives. My own complacency in this history called for such attention. If some of my Palestinian acquaintances were bombed from the air, driven out of their hiding places, placed on trucks,

and abandoned at the newly created borders, who were the people, my people, behind these deeds? And, perhaps of equal importance, how did they live with their memories of these events? The answers were to be found at home, among the Israelis who were soldiers in 1948.

My next study was of a Jewish-Israeli Palmach unit, which had participated in the 1948 fighting.⁴ This was triggered by my acquaintance with uprooted Palestinians and was, inevitably, an inquiry into the contested and nonheroic sides of 1948. My aim was to juxtapose the Palestinian and Israeli versions of this time, side by side. Through the discrepancies in these narratives, I hoped to explore the partiality of each historical rendering, each set of memories, their convergences and divergences.

By 2005 I felt that the picture needed to be broadened even further; another point of view seemed essential: that of the British Mandate and its agents. While writing my doctoral dissertation in Britain, I was struck by the easy availability of historical information on Palestine. Palestine mattered here, it seemed. Indeed, Britain ruled Palestine from 1917 until 1948 and played a decisive role in the crystallization of Palestine/Israel. The British Mandatory legacy, I felt, left a lasting mark on the land's inhabitants, not merely while Britain ruled but long after it had departed. I decided to incorporate British perspectives on Palestine, and chose to study two subjects: one was the memories of British police veterans who had been stationed in Palestine; the other was topographical maps of Mandate Palestine. While the police veterans' interviews uncovered the everyday British experience on the eve of 1948, the maps disclosed the British administrative scheme: the construction of the landscape and methods to control it.

This study, throughout, was very close to my heart; whether studying Palestinians or the British – and certainly when studying Israelis – it was anthropology at home. The theater of the events, with alternating spotlights, was familiar to me. Indeed, at times the research touched directly on my own family's history. For instance, when sifting through transcribed interviews of Hagannah members, I came across an interview with a woman who used to tour and map the Mediterranean coastal area.⁵ She notes that she would hide her maps “under the sofa of a man named Zussman in Hadera.” Was there another Zussman in Hadera apart from my grandfather, I wondered? I had never heard this story before, nor had I even known that my grandfather was a member of the Hagannah. “Of course it was my father,” said my mother when I inquired. “Your grandfather was a member of the Hagannah and I remember the blue sofa this woman is talking about.” This book, I came to realize, is the outcome of my search into the dimly lit storage box underneath my grandparents’ blue sofa.

The search for memories, often long stored away, was not a lone journey. Many joined in – first by giving out hints to these shadowy pasts, then by a willingness to lighten up the cracks – talking about the unspoken, taking me on trips and giving life to buried remains, touching on what has often been left out. I have long waited to express my gratitude to them in print. I treasure my interviewees' generosity of heart and thank them for having transformed my understanding of the world. However, I have chosen to use pseudonyms.⁶ The only ones to be named are those interviewees who have agreed to be in the book's illustrations, and I am very grateful for that: Mahmoud and Rasmiya Abu Rashed, Zeid, the late Salma, Khalil, and Su'ad Sheikh Qassem Darawshe. I wish to thank those who were my special guides and friends: Mohammad and Safia Abu al-Heija and their family, Dr. Mohammad and Shifa Abu Rashed, Prof. Afif Abdul Rahman and his family, and Omar Abu Rashed, whose exceptional personality and untimely death have left a painful void.

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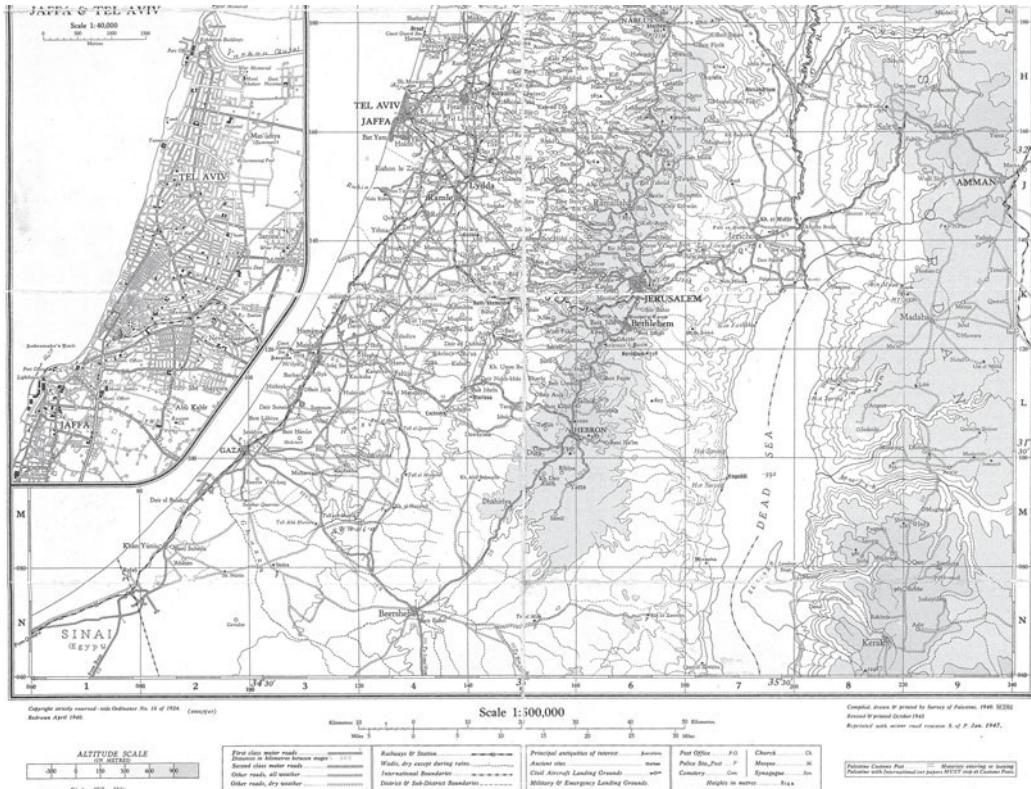
This book would not have been written, and this is not a cliché, if it had not been for Jay Winter, who for many years has showed me the beauty of memory, history, and much more. I thank Jay for having read and commented on the full manuscript many times, and I cherish the gift of having such an inspiring teacher and friend.

MOTOR MAP
(1947 EDITION)

1:500,000

SURVEY OF PALESTINE





Map of Palestine prior to 1948

Introduction

Beyond National Narratives

Histories are written from fundamentally different – indeed irreconcilable – perspectives or viewpoints, none of which is complete or completely “true.”

Joan Wallach Scott (1991:776)

This book explores the ways through which anthropological data and analysis contribute to the understanding of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict and its formative year, 1948. Anthropology can shed new light in three different ways. First, it endorses a closeup perspective, with the intent of uncovering the microhistorical setting of memories. It attends to details, some which have been obscured by overarching narratives, usually political in character. Second, it gives access to changes over time and the fluidity of narratives; it is attentive to these transformations. Third, in contrast to history, it favors alternative versions and their juxtaposition; versions are often understood as complementary rather than competing or invalidating one another. It should be noted, though, that historians such as Joan Wallach Scott have begun to adopt a postpositivistic point of view.

Once we open the framework to incorporate multiple understandings of a conflict, we can recognize that nationalism is part of the story, but not the whole. This was true in 1948, and it remains true today. It is through personal narratives that I follow changing perceptions of the Israel–Palestine conflict. These narratives bear all the traces of the interviewees’ social origins, generational belonging, gender, social class, and local affiliations. Sticking to the national level reveals little of these multiple identities and the ways they shape the stories people tell about what happened to them in 1948.

There have been some promising ways in which a subnational understanding of the conflict has been noted in the literature.¹ Salim Tamari and André Mazzawi (Tamari 2009) had different populations in mind when dealing with the portrayal of the city of Jaffa; their social composition differed. While the former was more attentive to the middle-class refugees who were forced to leave in 1948, the latter focused on those Palestinians who stayed on after Israel’s conquest. An oral history study conducted

in Jaffa among its elderly population, both Arab and Jewish, further revealed inconsistencies between personal narratives and formulations using national categories alone (Hazan and Monterescu 2005). These studies of Jaffa illustrate the impossibility of achieving a uniform portrayal even within a local setting, and demonstrate the existence of collective pasts and the pasts of different collectivities.

The study of generations is another significant marker in the move away from an overarching national identity. The Palestinians who lived through 1948 have popularly been defined within Palestinian society as *jil al-Nakba*, meaning the Nakba generation. Studies have followed this classification, contrasting it with other generations (Sayigh 1979; Rosenfeld 2004; Sa'di and Abu-Lughod [eds.] 2007; Ganim 2009). The term *jil al-Nakba* embodies innocence, the virtues of village life, attachment to the land, and victimhood. It is a nostalgic evocation of a lost world. There is an idiom for the parallel Israeli generation of 1948, *dor tashah*, used both in popular speech and in the literature. *Dor tashah* means the 1948 generation, drawing the name from the Hebrew calendar. Its image is different from that of *jil al-Nakba*, and embedded in it is the romantic story of the young heroes who fought and brought about the rebirth of the Jewish people in Palestine (Sivan 1991). The Israeli 1948 generation is composed of elements of purity, courage, and self-sacrifice.²

Both generational terms have become emblematic in the subsequent history of the two sides. In the Israeli case, *dor tashah* dominated the literary and political life of Israel for at least three decades. *Jil al-Nakba*, in contrast, was silenced and silent in terms of reaching a wide audience. Until the late 1980s the narratives of the latter circulated primarily among family and friends.³ Yet from that point onward Palestinians, their families, and their communities felt a sense of urgency in gathering the 1948 stories and publishing them. The younger generations measure themselves against *jil al-Nakba* and participate in this move toward oral recording and written documentation of what happened sixty years ago, before this generation dies out.⁴ In both cases there were, and still are, attempts to mobilize the two generations in support of the national version. At the same time, *jil al-Nakba* and *dor tashah* preserve their unique voices.⁵

A second set of developments that bypasses the national framework is the move toward microhistory. Anthropologists have always tended to focus on the small scale and the local, but this pursuit is now spreading to other disciplines. Historian Bishara Doumani edited a volume on Palestinian social biographies and family histories. He noted that his goal was to expose “the complexity of daily life and the multiple historical trajectories, both of which are masked by nationalist constructions of

the past” (2007:6). Yet Doumani was also hesitant, fearing that his approach might “subvert the political language of a people who have not yet achieved the right of self determination” (2007:5). He argued that such a move is less threatening to Israelis, who live in a well-established state.

Doumani may have been underestimating the corrosive effects of subnational conversations about 1948 among Israelis. If one probes beneath the surface, one realizes that on both sides there are those who speak of their history without locating it consciously within the needs and clichés of their political leaders and national movements. The fact that the Israeli state exists does not diminish the parallel between practices of remembrance on both sides. Some of these practices are national, especially in the Israeli case, but even then, storytelling of various kinds goes on at the subnational level among Palestinians and Israelis alike.⁶ Listening to these voices is remote from the scholarship of advocacy.

Memory

This book cannot and should not establish the veracity of one or another account of events in 1948. Rather, it aspires to revisit 1948 in the footsteps of Kurosawa’s *Rashomon* and expose diverging narrative strands. It is essential to state that each narrative, in and of itself, is dynamic; people constantly reconstruct their past. The narrators do not use memory as a snapshot, but as a prism. Memory is far from being a camera that can supposedly reproduce eyewitnessing. Walter Benjamin likened it to a theater, writing that “he who has once begun to open the fan of memory never comes to the end of its segments; no image satisfies him, for he has seen that it can be unfolded, and only in its folds does the truth reside” (1979:296). The process of remembrance, an ongoing excavation, is the heart of the matter and is crucial for any understanding of current circumstances.

Concentrating on small groups enables us to see how remembrance happens and how it is reinforced by the social exchanges that span decades. The work of Winter (1995) and later Winter and Sivan (1999) reintroduced Benjamin’s emphasis on the process of remembrance. Moreover, their work demonstrated how social remembrance is something one can follow as it evolves within civil society; in particular, in the fictive kinship of small groups. Their work, as does this book, contrasts with much of the literature on social memory, which has dedicated its attention to more hegemonic manifestations of collective memory,

primarily national memory and its change over time (Schwartz 1991; Confino 1997; Sturken 1997; Schwartz 2000).

This book examines settings that are even more intimate than those described by Winter and Sivan. It enters a space where it is appropriate to employ the term “microsocial remembrance.” Both Palestinians and Israelis get together with kin and friends, and each time they do they deepen the affective bonds they share. When members of a small army unit continue to meet year after year, long after they ended their military service, they form a tightly knit group of people who tell the story of their past together. The same is true for displaced Palestinian families and friends. When they meet in homes, on pilgrimage to the village site, or to view a video cassette of such a visit, they retell their story and their fate. Social remembrance and its rituals are embedded in the calendar and in special spaces, but also in the vernacular.

Here we enter into the domain of what Halbwachs (1992 ed.) termed the social frameworks of memory, “les cadres sociaux de la mémoire.” These groups continue over generations to construct memory as a joint enterprise of people who go through life-framing experiences together. And it is together that they narrate the shared story of their common past. Remembrance, argues Halbwachs, is meaningless outside a social network. We are told who we are by parents, relatives, and neighbors, and learn about the past in collectives such as village folk or veterans. Social groups, often small ones, circulate memories and thereby give meaning to them.

Remembrance needs tight social groups, but it also needs interactions located in space. What is crucial in the cases examined is that remembrance is a social practice; it is a practice defined both by how the people who come together treat each other and by how they relate to the landscape and their material environment. Scholars have long followed the lead of Marcel Proust, and dwelled on the material and embodied nature of memory. Halbwachs demonstrated the entrenchment of the past in the landscape when writing on the “legendary topography of the Gospels in the Holy Land.” He noted that “a group in a sense takes with it the form of the places where it has lived” (1992:203). At the same time, the landscape adapts to the images that the group wishes to construct and preserve.

Roger Bastide ([1960] 2007) elaborated on the embodiment of memory in his study of the African religions of Brazil. Bastide argued that while myths tend to change and mutate, rituals are more enduring. The act of narrating the past should be understood as a practice of remembrance. The ritualized practices of remembrance in this book are often pilgrimages: those held by Palestinian refugees to their demolished

villages, by Jewish Palmach soldiers to their battlefields, and by British policemen to Palestine. Practices also include the embodiment of what came to be seen as symbolic acts: preparing and serving Palestinian food from one's village, giving it to those who appreciate the origin of that food, and exchanging objects that are imbued with sacred characteristics, such as soil from the village.⁷

Practices of remembrance are inseparable from the landscape. In the course of the last sixty years Palestine's landscape has changed dramatically. The changes are due to the rapid pace of development as well as a systematic obliteration of many Palestinian sites. This may have been anticipated by the veterans of the Palmach; less so by British ex-policemen and by Palestinian refugees. In both latter cases the encounter with the old land in its new form was often disappointing, to say the least. The scale of change was astounding. Some Palestinians developed practices of reappropriating the village by retracing the map they have in their heads about where the village well was, where there was a flight of steps, or a cave, where the old café stood, where the graveyard was, where the fields were that their fathers had tilled. These fields had individual names, and their evocation brought them to life. Despite vast changes, the landscape is still dotted with pre-1948 remains. Those who come back to survey the site of their memories can find them.

While Israel obliterated or neglected Arab-Palestinian remains, it preserved many of the British governmental buildings. In fact, the Israeli authorities often used them for their original administrative purpose. This is still the situation today (2010) with respect to some of the court buildings and government offices, as well as police stations and army bases. Many Tegart police stations built in the 1930s still serve as police and army outposts, while a few have been turned into historical museums.⁸ The Survey of Israel (Merkaz Mipui Yisrael) is located in a building that once served as the Mandate's Department of Surveys (in Tel Aviv). The Israeli Department of Antiquities is located inside the Rockefeller Museum of archeology in Jerusalem, which was established during the Mandate period for the very same purposes. Despite the salient presence of these buildings throughout the country, they go unnoticed as institutions of British origin. They are sites of neither pilgrimage nor of memory (other than for the small number of British ex-policemen and soldiers who come for visits), and there are no political struggles surrounding them.

Yet the presence of these institutions throughout the country is a reminder of the British impact on Palestine's governmental infrastructure as well as its urban and rural outlay. By incorporating into the analysis some of the Mandate government's fundamentals, I hope to

further break down false dichotomies between a global category called the Palestinian Arabs and another called the Israeli Jews. The British voices are not merely another, external, component, but rather allow a vertical gaze. Although this was a Mandate, as opposed to colonies elsewhere, the British managed Palestine with a similar rationale and manner to that which pertained elsewhere. The same issues of control and policing applied to Palestine as in Sri Lanka, Malaysia, or nearby Cyprus. Moreover, what transpired was the unintentional convergence between British and Jewish interests. Upon the British departure, and even before that, Israeli Jews were trying to step into their shoes and establish themselves as a hegemonic power, dominating a subject population, which they did – first in 1948 and again in 1967.

Methodological choices

This research is based on qualitative methods. The period of research spanned ten years (from 1996 to 2006) and incorporated participant observation, interviews and casual chats, and the analysis of sources such as archival matter, films, memoirs, prose, poetry, and material objects; ethnography consists of these varied elements. However, this study places the voices of the people at its heart. Many meetings were not a one-time occasion but rather ongoing relationships; trust was acquired, usually after multiple visits. The Palestinian families with whom I spoke were well aware of the danger of meeting an Israeli intelligence agent or journalist posing as an anthropologist. These fears were mitigated by repeated visits, but suspicion always lingered. The veterans of the Palmach I interviewed were also wary, since many of them did not want to reopen the story of 1948. There were secrets there, and they were often hesitant to talk about them. This hesitation intensified when the Palmachniks learned that their stories would be juxtaposed with those of Palestinians. However, fieldwork was made possible through the belief shared with many interlocutors that their stories need to be told. The time has come. However, due to the sensitivity of the topic, I have used pseudonyms for most of the interviewees and most of the place names. The two exceptions are the interviews with cartographers (who are far less sensitive) and the British policemen (whose interviews are open to the general public).⁹

In fieldwork, anthropologists recognize the danger of identifying or empathizing uncritically with interviewees. Such a danger exists in the current political context, since I am an Israeli and some of my conversations were with Palestinian refugees. Empathy is unavoidable, and at times necessary, but I have tried not to sanitize stories which show

kindness and courage alongside frailties and faults. Such contradictions are built into the subject positions of the researcher and of the individuals who spoke to me about their lives and their memories (Abu-Lughod 1993; Bornstein 2001).

As an anthropologist I sought to make the voice of the individual accessible. Individuals draw on social constructions and feed into them, yet anthropology tries to maintain the uniqueness of each voice. I aimed to minimize my interventions and maximize the time and space for every interviewee's narration. Often, when transcribing my interviews, I rebuked myself for having interrupted the flow of speech; the longer the monologues were, even when interspersed with silences, the more revealing they tended to be. Had I been eliciting life stories, I would have paid more attention to the structure of the narrative – to the way monologues began and ended, to what was incorporated into a biographical narrative and what was left out.¹⁰ Had this study placed an emphasis on linguistic aspects, it would have been more attentive to the use of certain words and syntax, to pauses and lapses. However, the narratives of this book circled around memories of 1948 rather than life stories or linguistic choices. At times, the life course and the language did matter, and were examined. The fact that Hebrew is my mother tongue and that the final product is in English adds to the distance from the speakers' original expressions. However, at all times I have tried to preserve and present the unique voices of the interviewees.

This emphasis helped me see the gendering of narrative events. In traditional Palestinian society, history is the domain of men (Muhawi and Kanaana 1989; Slyomovics 1998; Fleischman 2003). Folk tales and the domestic sphere form the domain of women. I was usually directed to men because I defined my fieldwork as an exploration of 1948. On the few occasions when, in the company of men, women tried to add to the historical story, they were usually hushed (see Chapter 5). Yet sometimes, when I would visit with my baby son, this subject position complicated my role. When breast feeding, I was confined to the company of women, and there women tended to discuss domestic matters. Recurrent visits also enabled more contact with the women, including, at times, a few younger women who were considered knowledgeable in history. Such a division between men and women was different when interviewing the Palmachniks, as it was almost always on a one-to-one basis; I was meeting either a man or a woman. This made the women's memories more accessible. Here too, however, women's memories differed from those of the men.

This book is more about men than about women. In time of collective strife and war, men are usually at the front of the stage. Their memories are about what they were and what they are. The men of this book are

not necessarily the powerful patriarchs or independent fighters they sometimes appear to be. It is true that they have made choices, but once they were part of the social and political system, it was the system and its logic that defined the contours of their experience and their interpretation.

Representativeness

The choice to focus on two specific social groups – Palestinian rural refugees from the Carmel region and Palmach veterans of one unit – inevitably brings up the issue of representativeness. While there are similarities in the ways the Palestinian rural populations narrate 1948, my interviewees' stories evolved within specific village communities and locales. Moreover, the rural experience cannot represent urban Palestinian forms of remembrance. The same is true for Palmach veterans: units varied in their ethos; the Palmach differed from the Jewish army at large; and why consider Jewish ex-soldiers rather than civilians? These are inherent challenges to anthropologists. While the beauty of the case study is in the way it exposes the details of the specific, case studies are necessarily few. In that sense they are not, and should not be, fully representative. At the same time, I have been acutely sensitive to the need to choose cases that are neither random nor exceptional. Like the Palmach members, the Palestinian farmers became national icons.

Palmach veterans have been part and parcel of Israel's nation building. Despite some subversive narratives that they may tell, they have been close to the centers of Israeli power. They have been part of the consensus surrounding the national myth; in fact, they were its heroes.¹¹ Moreover, they established ongoing organizations that allowed them to keep in touch, produce and circulate books and films, as well as establish a museum and thus be present and influential at the national level. The iconization of the Palestinian *fellahin* was different. In the first years of exile the refugees did not have a clear set of national myths with which they had to conform (or negotiate their own version). The sharing of memories and the construction of myths evolved in a diffused manner, often under vulnerable conditions, with the refugees lacking economic stability and unable to sustain the old village social networks. Yet the *fellahin* gradually turned into national icons – representing village life and personifying it as a kind of paradise lost. Moreover, they were idealized for enduring the difficult conditions in camps and becoming the *fida'iyun*, the freedom fighters of the 1960s and 1970s.¹² Precisely because prominence was attributed to the Palmachniks and *fellahin*, I dwell on these groups and the way they choose to tell their histories. Although I have posed the two sets of memories one alongside the other,

they are not simply in parallel. Rather, they are outcomes of these people's different roles in the past and present; the iconic role of both groups changed, and continues to do so over time.

To these two sets of memories I have added a third one, that of the British policemen. In terms of representativeness, the policemen were only a small segment of a much larger British administration. They could only grasp a partial picture but, as with the ex-Palestinian villagers and the Palmach veterans, it was one at the ground level; they were witnesses to daily life in Palestine just as 1948 was about to change everything. The memories of these three groups are in no way exhaustive; they portray segments of a complex event. However, each case study allows access to a unique perspective, created over sixty years, and together they reveal the disagreements and hidden transcripts in interpreting 1948.

The structure of the book

One has to be acquainted with the national formulations of the conflict to be able to see beyond them. [Chapters 1–3](#) provide this background for the “memories-based” chapters that will follow in [Chapters 4–9](#). [Chapter 1](#) begins by outlining some of the general developments that led to the 1948 war and affected its outcome. It is a very short introduction to these historical events, beginning with the British conquest of Palestine in 1917–18 and ending with the termination of the 1948 war. This is followed by a concise overview of the historiography of the 1948 war and the ways it has changed over the years.

[Chapter 2](#) traces some of the ways Palestine’s landscape was constructed by the Mandate government, using cartography as its prism. It follows the determination of Palestine’s borders, the choice of place names and the different elements that appeared on the maps. The maps reveal the consolidation of a “geo-body,” closely linked to the evolution of the nation-state. The salience and variety of Mandate maps demonstrate new methods of control based on extensive bureaucratization and official registration. It included parcellation and forestation, the classification of the country’s populations, and the choice of place names (Arabic, Hebrew, or English). These different means shaped the emerging political entity of Palestine.

[Chapter 3](#) considers the production and circulation of maps among Arabs and Jews during the Mandate period, dwelling on how these populations adapted to British administrative methods. It points to an evident convergence between British and Jewish cartographic practices that intensified as the Mandate progressed. This is somewhat paradoxical since, at

least at the policy level, Britain abstained from assisting the Jews, especially during the 1940s. Yet the British administration was involuntarily helpful to the Zionist establishment, and thus the latter was better prepared for the 1948 war. While this chapter still forms part of the contextual information, it begins to incorporate oral testimonies: the memories of cartographers who worked during the 1940s.

From [Chapter 4](#) onwards the focus is on social remembrance: first Palestinian, then Israeli, and finally British. [Chapter 4](#) focuses on a single Palestinian village during the war. It juxtaposes the memories of the villagers with army documents, demonstrating how the two sources complement one another, creating a detailed narrative at the local level. At the same time it also points to the differences between an official Jewish record (soon afterwards framed within a national logic) and a local social understanding (that of the Arab villagers). For instance, from the villagers' point of view the village began its disintegration long before it was occupied, and their retreat from home was understood as temporary long after they had left. Nationalism found little expression in the villagers' narratives.

[Chapter 5](#) examines the memories of rural Palestinian women. These women-turned-refugees in 1948 are witnesses who tell us something about the transition from an explicit national project to the messy local and familial stories of exile. Their memories defy a simplistic chronological and coherent narrative, binding the past to the present; their willingness to speak up depends on the social context; and they give testimony not only by way of speech but also of reenactment. Reenactment is further developed in [Chapter 6](#), which explores Palestinian refugees' return visits to their demolished villages, dwelling on practices of collecting traces of the past. Village plants, soil, and photographs are turned into a sacred substance and used in family settings, or even in shops, echoing a former life. Even when one is away from the village land, the mere naming of places is endowed with the sacred. While these practices may seem, at times, private, they are also part of a collective art of commemoration.

[Chapters 7 and 8](#) turn to the Jewish-Israeli memories of 1948 through the voices of Palmach veterans. [Chapter 7](#) explores how the male fighters coped with the gap between the public heroic descriptions of Israel's War of Independence and their own experiences on the battlefield. It focuses on the ways they describe comradeship, death, and their participation in the expulsion and killing of Arabs. Different silences are revealed now, sixty years on. The women of the Palmach are also voicing certain old-new matters now, and these are considered in [Chapter 8](#). The public portrayal of Palmach women tends to emphasize an egalitarian ethos of male-female comradeship and female salience in

combatant roles. However, this is not the way these women perceive themselves. In the interviews they describe their secondary role when compared to that of the men, and their exclusion – both during 1948 and in the years that followed. Their contemporary memories of 1948, which rarely find public expression, circle around the fictive kinship that characterized their units and their feminine roles as mourners, mothers, and lovers.

Finally, the last chapter discusses the memories of the British ex-Palestine policemen who were stationed in Palestine during the 1940s. These men describe their mission as part of a wider project to establish a modern and prosperous state.¹³ To them the rationale of imperial rule was, and still is, unquestionable. Their time of service is sketched as an honorable though failed effort at even-handed policing in an explosive situation. They long for their youthful Palestine years, laden with adventure and a love for the land's beauty, and regret that the Palestine that they had loved, a Palestine that remained central to their lives through the years, has gone sour.

The different chapters turn alternating spotlights on the theater of 1948. Each narrative is created by a group and for the group, and each is modified through the years. It is my hope that these testimonies will offer new ways to think about the Palestinian–Israeli conflict in general, and about 1948 in particular.

Part I

Constructing Palestine: National Projects

1 The Framework

In order to set the material presented in this book in perspective, it is necessary to say a word or two about the conflict of 1948 and the ways it has been interpreted. What follows is a thumb-nail sketch, and not a full scholarly account. Still, some understanding of the nature of the conflict and its outcome will be helpful in interpreting the narratives I examine below.

On the eve of 1948 the population of Palestine numbered roughly 1.3 million Arabs and 630,000 Jews.¹ Despite being a minority, the Jews of Palestine managed, during the 1948 war, to establish an independent state. In short order this war was named by the Israelis as alternately the War of Liberation (*shihurut*), Rebirth (*komemiyut*), and Independence ('*atzma'ut*). For Palestine's Arabs, the war of 1948 was a catastrophe. Its disastrous consequences continued long after the war ended, and do to a degree continue to this day – deprived of a homeland, forced into a prolonged exile, occupying a subordinate status as refugees, and ongoing secondary forced migrations. The war came to be known as al-Nakba, meaning the catastrophe, the disaster. Between 700,000 and 780,000 of Mandate Palestine's Arabs were turned into refugees, and roughly 400 villages and towns were obliterated.²

To understand the outcome of the 1948 war, one should consider the differences between the Arab and Jewish communities in Mandate Palestine. Generally speaking, Palestinian Arab society lacked patterns of collective action at the national level. With the eruption of violence, they mistakenly relied on the assistance of the neighboring states, which themselves were divided and lacking in the ability to deliver the necessary assistance. In contrast, Zionism established a relatively cohesive community in Palestine, united by both ideology and political organization.³ It had the political and financial backing of the Jewish Diaspora, and in the newly-formed United Nations, the international political support of both the United States and the Soviet Union. In the following pages I will expand on the disparity between the two communities in terms of political awareness, forms of solidarity, and level of institutionalization, offering here instead a very brief background on the circumstances that led to 1948.

A very short history

The British Mandate

During World War I Great Britain aimed to consolidate its influence in the Middle East, both through military engagement and by seeking local allies. In the 1915 Hussein–McMahon correspondence, Britain undertook to its Arab allies “to recognize and uphold the independence of the Arabs in all the regions lying within the frontiers proposed by the Sharif of Mecca.”⁴ Yet we should bear in mind that Hussein did not represent all Arabs and many remained loyal to the Ottomans until 1918. At the same time, the British Balfour Declaration of 1917 made a more explicit promise to the Zionists, declaring that “His Majesty’s government view[s] with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.” While the first document makes a more general statement, and the latter is more specific, both indicate that by that by World War I, some Arabs and Jews were aspiring for independence in the region and were hoping that, in return for supporting the Allied war effort, Britain would side with them. The Balfour declaration used the term ‘Homeland’ rather than ‘State’, but it was evident that Britain had made promises to both Arabs and Jews which to a degree contradicted each other (Manela 2007).

By late 1917 Britain had conquered Palestine, and by 1922 the League of Nations had granted Mandates to Britain over Iraq, Palestine, and Transjordan and to France over Syria and Lebanon.⁵ The stated aim of the Mandate (unlike a colony) was to prepare the local populations for self-rule through a process of state building. Yet it was also the path that enabled the British and the French to maintain a political hold on their dependencies and to secure their interests in the region. Palestine’s Mandate government established itself through a host of new institutions ranging from the Public Works Office to a forestry ministry, local municipalities, legal courts, police stations, prisons, hospitals, a survey and mapping system, a railway network, a coastal road, a modern port, and airports (Reuveny 1993:239–41; El-Eini 2003).⁶ Palestine was, on the surface, thus being molded as a new state and was evolving into a separate entity in the Middle East, though the reality of power still lay in London.

Political awareness

With the collapse of Faisal’s regime in Syria in July 1920, dreams of a unified Arab kingdom faded. Palestinian-Arab national sentiments crystallized as part of the struggle against the Zionist project and in quest of a self-ruling government (R. Khalidi 1997).⁷ National congresses were

convened and elected the Palestine Arab Executive, a committee representing all locales.⁸ In parallel, the British government established the Supreme Muslim Council and placed Hajj Amin al-Husseini as “Head of Islam in Palestine” (Nuwayhed al-Hout 1981).

The Jewish Zionist community, known as the *yishuv* (literally meaning the “settlement”), began arriving in Palestine from Eastern Europe in 1882. It was characterized by its strong internal bonds and a host of independent institutions. The most important ones were the Jewish Agency, representing the World Zionist Movement, and the National Committee, representing the local Jewish population, old and new, which together constituted the Israel Assembly (*Knesset Israel*). Other Zionist bodies included the Hagannah military force;⁹ political parties (including Mapai, the largest party, led by David Ben-Gurion); a labor union; medical services; and independent educational systems. The number of Jews in Palestine doubled in the first decade of the Mandate (reaching 174,606 in 1931), and the Zionists continued their efforts to purchase land from Arabs.

Such rapid growth did not characterize the Arab population. The Palestinian elite, divided along clan (*hamula*) and geographical lines, could not agree on the appropriate collective strategies to establish a political front, with the result that institutions remained weak and dysfunctional (Khalaf 1991; Sela 2003). Moreover, this led to a growing dependency on government services in public health and education (Tibawi 1956; Shepherd 1999:126–78).

Alliances and clashes

The expansion of the Jewish community led to periodic violent clashes, at first sporadic (in 1920, 1921, and 1929) and later, by 1936, in a more organized form. The Arab Revolt lasted intermittently from 1936 until March 1939, targeting the British authorities and their enterprises (such as the petrol pipeline from Kirkuk to Haifa), as well as the *yishuv*; at times, there was a civil war between the Arabs themselves.¹⁰ While the first phase of the 1936–39 violence was a six-month commercial strike and the non-payment of taxes, it later developed into armed attacks by guerilla forces.¹¹

In reaction to this unrest, the British established a Royal Commission, the Peel Commission, in 1937, which was the first committee to recommend a partition of Palestine. However, two years later, in response to the Arab rejection of partition and the ongoing revolt, the Mandate government issued a “white paper” in which it abandoned the partition plan and further limited Jewish immigration to Palestine and acquisition of land. In

1937, due to Hajj Amin al-Husseini's involvement in the revolt, the British deposed him as Mufti and declared the Arab Higher Committee illegal. Al-Husseini fled Palestine and found refuge and support initially in different Arab states, and later in Nazi Germany. In 1946, the Arab League reinstated al-Husseini as head of the Arab Higher Committee. However, his leadership was challenged by opposition from within Palestine as well as by the leaders of the Arab states (Khalaf 1991:161–230).

The suppression of the revolt framed the position of Palestine's Arab in the decade that followed. Their arsenal of weapons was small (and, due to harsh British measures, they hesitated before acquiring new arms); their political leadership was dispersed; and the revolt intensified internal disputes. In the years until 1948, the Arab community of Palestine did not consolidate its position either in terms of unifying around a national leadership or in preparing for countrywide war (Sela 1996:123–6; Khalaf 1997). In contrast, the *yishuv*, better organized from the start, gained more economic independence and internal cohesion following the revolt.

During World War II, as the Arab community was recovering from the upheavals of the revolt, the relations between the *yishuv* and the Mandate government developed in two contradictory directions. On the one hand, the *yishuv* grew hostile toward the government for closing Palestine's gates when European Jews could still be saved, thereby depriving the survivors of a refuge.¹² On the other hand, the common interest in defeating Nazi Germany determined the *yishuv*'s adoption of a policy of mobilization in contribution to the Allied war effort.¹³ Roughly 30,000 Jews living in Palestine joined the British army (Gelber 2001), in contrast to 6,000 Palestinian Arabs and 3,000 Arab volunteers (primarily from Syria and Jordan) (Sela 2003:300).¹⁴ In addition, the British, fearing a Nazi invasion of Palestine, trained a new Jewish force, the Palmach, which became the Hagannah's elite force and played a major role in the 1948 war.¹⁵

By the 1940s a variety of Jewish armed militias were in existence: the Hagannah (associated with the left-oriented majority of the *yishuv*);¹⁶ the right-wing Irgun¹⁷ (established in 1931); and the Lehi (named by the British the Stern Gang), which branched off from the Irgun in 1940. From its inception the Lehi targeted the British; as of 1944 the Irgun did the same; and between 1945 and 1946 the three organizations cooperated.¹⁸ While in 1946 the Hagannah decided to abstain from these attacks, the Irgun and Lehi continued the assaults. British casualties reached 141 dead and 475 wounded in the period between 1945 and 1947 (Charters 1989:205). These losses, and the British sense that the Mandate was too costly and too difficult to run, as well as the view that the local population was uncontrollable, contributed to their choice to end their Mandated role.

Britain departs

Britain was bankrupt in the aftermath of World War II. The estimated cost of the war was £25,000 million, while her postwar debt was estimated at £3,355 million (M. J. Cohen 1982:30; Lloyd 1993:271). The source of income for Palestine's government was local taxes, but security was financed by money from Britain (El-Eini 2003:17). Palestine was increasingly expensive, because of both the army troops still stationed there since the war and the growing demands on the police.¹⁹ More importantly, Britain faced ongoing resistance in India, which gained its independence in 1947.

Britain and the United States continued their alliance into the postwar period, and the former relied on the latter for postwar reconstruction loans and grants. During the administration of President Harry Truman, American Jews enjoyed considerable influence, and the fate of the Holocaust survivors featured on the government's agenda. Hence, both Britain and the United States were preoccupied with the question of Palestine and were searching for a diplomatic settlement. In late 1945 they established the Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry to decide on an immigration policy for Palestine, recommending the immediate admission of 100,000 Jewish refugees.²⁰ By 1947 Britain had decided to submit the Palestine question to the United Nations, which established its own commission of inquiry, the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP).²¹ UNSCOP favored the partition of Palestine into separate Arab and Jewish states as "the peoples of Palestine are sufficiently advanced to govern themselves independently."²² On 26 September 1947 Britain announced that, in the absence of an agreed Arab-Jewish settlement, it would withdraw from Palestine.

Following UNSCOP's recommendations, the Arab League took the decision that Arab armies would enter Palestine with the aim of establishing a unitary state and countering the implementation of a partition.²³ However, due to diverging interests the Arab states could not agree on the unification of their armies under a single commander; nor were they willing to allow Hajj Amin al-Husseini to lead the operation (Shlaim 2001). They resolved to establish a volunteer army, *Jaish al-Inqad al-Arabi* (the Arab Liberation Army [ALA]), based in Damascus, and enter Palestine from the north. They also decided that the invasion of the Arab armies would take place after the British had left (Sela 2004:208–13; Morris 2008:88–93).

1947–1948: Clashes and war

The very different recent histories of Palestine's Arabs and Jews influenced the stance of each side on the eve of war. The *yishuv* was motivated

by a sense of urgency as the full horror of the Holocaust emerged. As will become apparent in the soldiers' testimonies, they felt that the fate of the entire Jewish people was in their hands and would be determined by war (see [Chapter 7](#)). In contrast, most of Palestine's Arabs were thinking in terms of the 1936–9 events. They were expecting clashes, but they were unprepared for war (see [Chapter 4](#)). They did not imagine the irreversibility of the changes on their doorstep.

The UN General Assembly voted in favor of the partition plan on 29 November 1947, with both the United States and the USSR supporting it. While the Jews in Palestine and elsewhere reacted with celebrations, the Arabs held demonstrations and a commercial strike, and launched sporadic attacks.²⁴ Within a short period the violence was reciprocated. These "early" clashes took place primarily at the "mixed" cities (such as Jerusalem, Haifa, Safad, and Tiberias, where Arabs and Jews resided side by side) as well as along the seam lines between Arab and Jewish neighborhoods. They also included struggles over road control.²⁵ By March many Jewish settlements in the Galilee and the Negev, as well as Jerusalem, were cut off.

Despite the effectiveness of the Arab attacks on roads and convoys, Palestine's Arabs were significantly inferior in terms of their military strength. In early 1948 the Jewish forces numbered 15,000–20,000 troops, which were mobilized throughout the country (although not all forces were armed), while Arab troop levels barely reached 8,000.²⁶ The more organized forces were the ALA and the Army of the Sacred Jihad (Jaish al-Jihad al-Muqaddas). The ALA began operating in January 1948 under the leadership of Fawzi al-Qawuqji, who had previously fought in Palestine in the 1936–9 revolt), and numbered 4,000–5,000 troops (Shlaim 2001:81; Sela 2004:207; Parsons 2007). The Army of the Sacred Jihad was associated with the Mufti, Hajj Amin al-Husseini, and was headed by Hasan Salama and Abdel Qader al-Husseini (also a prominent officer in the 1936 revolt). Similar units bearing the same name were established throughout Palestine, in cities such as Haifa, Acre, Nazareth, Safad, Jenin, and Jaffa. This force consisted of a core of a thousand well-trained fighters operating like a regular army alongside a few thousand temporary troops (Tauber 2008:430–41). In many places the local Arab population had no external support and was left to defend itself.

The balance of power was not evident during the early months of these clashes. However, the military situation began to change in April 1948, when the Hagannah adopted an offensive strategy. This was a reaction to Arab attacks on Jewish military convoys, the dire situation of the isolated Jewish settlements, and the need to prepare a defense line for the expected invasion by the Arab armies. In April two large-scale Jewish operations

opened the road to Jerusalem and halted the ALA's progress near Haifa.²⁷ Another significant April event was the massacre carried out by Jewish forces at the Arab village of Deir Yassin, west of Jerusalem.²⁸ The widespread circulation of news of this massacre led to tremendous fear among resident Arabs.²⁹

Until the Deir Yassin massacre the Arabs who had fled Palestine were mainly temporary laborers, those caught in the line of fire in the mixed towns, and the wealthy urban classes who could afford to leave. But after the massacre Arabs throughout the country feared coming into contact with Jewish forces. At times they fled, at others they were expelled, and in some cases – concerning women and children – they were evacuated. The Jewish offensive of April and May led to the conquests of the mixed cities of Tiberias (18 April), Haifa (23 April), and Safad (11 May) and a growing flight of Arab refugees. In Haifa it is estimated that between 3,000 and 6,000 of its 65,000 Arab inhabitants remained following its conquest (Y. Weiss 2007:20–30). In Jaffa between 4,000 and 5,000 of its 70,000–80,000 Arab inhabitants remained (Falah 1996; Goren 2004; Morris 2004; Abbasi 2004; Abbasi 2008). The period from the outbreak of violence until mid-May 1948 is often described as “the civil war.” By April the Jewish military strategy of seizing control of towns and other sectors was already precipitating the cataclysmic events that would overcome the Arabs.

On 14 May, with the official termination of the Mandate and Ben-Gurion's declaration of the establishment of the State of Israel, the Arab armies moved their forces into Palestine: Egypt, invading from the south, sent a force of 5,500 soldiers; the Jordanian Legion, entering through the Jerusalem area, numbered 6,500; the Syrian army with 6,000 troops; plus 4,500 Iraqi soldiers and 2,000 Lebanese soldiers (Ilai 1996:67). These forces were aided by volunteers from Yemen, Saudi Arabia, and Libya. By this time the local Palestinian forces were hardly a factor; the battle was between the newly formed Israeli army and the armies of the Arab states. In the first set of battles, lasting less than a month, Israel largely succeeded in holding a defense line and preventing the Arab armies from capturing “Jewish areas” (Morris 2008:207–63).³⁰

A UN-mediated truce lasted from 11 June until 8 July, during which Israel acquired more arms (despite an embargo) and increased the army's manpower to almost 65,000 troops. Upon its termination, Israel launched a ten-day offensive (9–18 July) aimed at capturing more territories along “the corridor” to Jerusalem, including the conquest of the two Arab towns al-Lyd (Lydda) and Ramle, and the expulsion of their inhabitants. During these ten days a further 100,000 Palestinian Arabs became refugees (Morris 2004:181–232).

Throughout the months of war the UN mediator, Count Folke Bernadotte, made unsuccessful attempts to bring the sides to agree on a political solution. On 17 September he was assassinated by Lehi members. This murder was another indication that the outcome of the 1948 war was being determined by force rather than diplomacy. During its third and last phase, between the autumn of 1948 and the spring of 1949, the Israeli army repelled the Arab armies from the Negev and the Galilee, gaining effective control of 78 percent of British Mandate Palestine.

The war carried disastrous consequences for Palestine's Arabs. Hundreds of thousands lost their homes and land. The social life of towns and villages disintegrated, and their residents were scattered throughout the Middle East and further away. Israel declared the Arab refugees' property absentee property and transferred it to the hands of semi-state agencies (Yiftachel and Kedar 2000). Much of this property was then given to Jews, often newly arrived immigrants. Israel's policy was to prevent the return of the refugees and declare those who attempted to return infiltrators. Although some returning Palestinian Arabs did obtain citizenship, often through the "family unification" program, many were killed en route (Morris 1997:118–84). Approximately 160,000 Palestinian Arabs remained inside Israel, of whom one-fifth were internal refugees. The latter were defined by the state as present absentees; they lost their homes, land, and villages, becoming propertyless citizens (H. Cohen 2000; Masalha 2005).

In a nutshell, this is a rough outline of the 1948 war, during and after which multiple narratives – political, military, scholarly, polemical, poetic, personal, familial – emerged. I will now point to some of the seminal interpretive works on the 1948 war and the ways they have shaped and reshaped views of that period.

Historiography: terms and trends

The Arabic term Nakba, meaning the catastrophe of 1948, came into usage immediately after the war of 1948, in the writing of Constantine Zurayq, who published a book entitled "The meaning of the disaster" in that very year. The term Nakba was framed to encapsulate the disaster that overcame the Arabs of Palestine, and it has stood the test of time. The loss of lives, property, roots and traditions was immense in scale. The term Nakba was actually applied even earlier by George Antonius, when he described in *The Arab Awakening* the events in Palestine of 1920 (1938:312), but after 1948 it was that latter disaster to which the term referred.

With the emergence of a Palestinian national historiography of 1948, the term Nakba became more widespread. Most of this “early literature” was published in Arabic (Zurayq 1956; Qamhawi 1959), at times in the form of autobiographies or war memoirs (Hawari 1955;³¹ K. Sakakini 1955; Shuqayri 1969).³² Prominent among these works were six volumes entitled “The Nakba of the Holy Mount and the lost paradise” published in 1956 by ‘Aref al-‘Aref, (head of Jerusalem’s municipality in the 1950s).³³ In 1966, the historian Mustapha Murad al-Dabbagh published “Our country Palestine,” a multivolume compilation, including entries on each village in Palestine. These volumes have gone into many editions and are still popular in Arab bookshops today.

Israelis were also quick to disseminate their own versions of and terminologies framing the war. The 1948 war was considered a miraculous victory, although the casualties were high: 6,000 Jews died, out of a population of 600,000.³⁴ Immediately after the war Moshe Karmel, commander of the battalion that fought on the northwestern front, published his war account (Karmel 1949). In 1954, the large project of compiling the official history of the Hagannah began (Slutsky et al. 1954–1972), culminating with eight volumes in print. By the late 1950s, Nethanel Lorch, under the auspices of the army’s historical branch, was preparing the publication of a definitive history of the 1948 war. Yet the book, entitled “A history of the War of Resurrection,” was published only in 1959 and lacked an author’s name, due to criticisms from politicians and former officers regarding its content.³⁵ In parallel, Lorch (1958) published his own version, given the less pretentious title “The events of the War of Independence.”³⁶ Both the Palestinian and Israeli publications of the 1950s and 1960s were characterized by their self-centeredness; each side was crystallizing its national narrative. The point was to try to draw a definitive picture of what had happened by compiling a wealth of data. The books gave an overview of the events, and broad-brush strokes tended to predominate, at the expense of specific details.

From the late 1960s a slightly different body of work began to emerge on the Palestinian side. It was the time of the institutionalization of the national movement (Cobban 1984). The PLO established its research center in Beirut in 1965, and in 1971 inaugurated the journal *Palestinian Affairs* (*Shu’un filastiniyya*). It also supported a first oral history study on the Palestinian exodus from Galilee in 1948 (Nazzal 1974, 1978), and published memoirs of prominent Palestine figures (such as ‘Avni ‘Abd al-Hadi and Fawzi al-Qawuqji, edited by Qasimiyya in 1974 and 1975) and different histories on the Palestine question (‘Allush 1968; Kishtainy 1971). In parallel, independent Palestinian scholars began publishing in English, both in America and in Europe (Hadawi 1967; W. Khalidi [ed.]

1971; I. A. Abu-Lughod [ed.] 1971; Sharabi 1969, 1970, 1973; Said 1979; Zureik 1979), thus making the Palestinian versions accessible to a much wider audience.

In Israel, the Palestinians became more visible after the 1967 war, and more Israeli studies on the “Palestinian problem,” as it was often termed, appeared (Gelber 2007:409). Yehoshua Porath published two seminal volumes on the emergence of Palestinian nationalism (1974 and 1977). The marriage between Zionist ideology and scholarship was still strong, with Israeli experts on the Palestinian issue working both in the academy and as consultants to state institutions (Eyal 2006).³⁷ Research was thus bound to policy and state interests.

At the end of the 1980s a new corpus of Israeli writing emerged, often referred to as the New Historiography and the Critical Sociology.³⁸ These works critiqued the relatively uniform and pro-state scholarship of the 1948 war. Topics such as the mass uprooting of the Arab population (Morris 2004), the prewar secret agreements with Jordan (Shlaim 1988), and Britain’s pragmatic interests in the Middle East (Pappe 1988) led to revisions in scholarly interpretations of the events and opened up a discussion on the colonial nature of Zionism.³⁹ Although innovative and incorporating newly-released archival materials, this revisionist work mostly used the macro-lens. It continued to deal with state policies, leadership agreements, and military actions.⁴⁰

In the 1990s a shift toward particular Palestinian voices was evident in the literature surrounding 1948 and its aftermath. It was time to speak of plurality, or, as Fouad Moughrabi put it, it was time to see the Palestinians and not only Palestine (Moughrabi 1997).⁴¹ A salient development was a wave of oral history studies disseminated through journals and books, films, and the Internet.⁴² The surfacing of alternative narratives not only contributed to the “thickening” of descriptions of 1948; it also exposed how different individuals and groups framed their particular war experiences. Moreover, after years of imposed silence and self-censorship, new topics were now explored in public.

Parallel to the scholarly and semi-scholarly research described earlier, literature and poetry contributed much to the public discussion. In Israel’s early phase a generation of writers was identified as the 1948 generation.⁴³ Many of these writers served in the war as soldiers, thus gaining legitimacy to speak on behalf of this generation.⁴⁴ Prominent among the Palestinians who wrote of 1948 is Emile Habibi, born in Haifa in 1922. Habibi’s most famous novel, *The Secret Life of Saeed, the Ill-fated Pessoptimist* (1982), is a black-humored tale of the events that befell Saeed, who was forced to flee during the Nakba, but then manages to return, only to face ongoing tribulations with the new Israeli

authorities.⁴⁵ The prose of another well-known Palestinian writer, Ghassan Kanafani, born in 1936, is set in the shadow of the 1948 events. His popular short story *Return to Haifa* (2000) describes a Palestinian family, which escaped Haifa during the chaos of 1948, accidentally leaving a baby behind. They return after the 1967 war and discover that their baby had been adopted by a Jewish family and had become an Israeli soldier. Most famous among the Palestinian poets who wrote in the shadow of the Nakba is Mahmoud Darwish (1941–2008), who was forced to flee his village, al-Birwa, as a child, yet returned a year later to live as an internal refugee (since al-Birwa had been obliterated), only to become an exile once more in the early 1970s.⁴⁶

It is evident that literature and poetry played a major role on both sides in the construction of the imagery of 1948.⁴⁷ It was based on intimate experiences and carried affective power. In contrast, scholarly work was marked by detachment and distancing. What I hope to achieve in this book is to draw scholarly research closer to the personal experiences of those who participated in 1948.

Yet a note on the nature of what we term ‘experience’ is necessary at this point. Joan Wallach Scott has argued that experience is in no sense a singular definitive condition. It is “always already an interpretation *and* something that needs to be interpreted” (1991:797). Scott followed here de Certeau, who wrote that “representation . . . disguises the praxis that organizes it” (1986:203). Indeed, the representations of each of the actors portrayed here were and are prone to influence and change. It is their reaction to context as well as their fluidity rather than their fixed character that matters. Later chapters reaffirm this framework of multiple experiences and memories of 1948 and beyond. This book is about experience, and thus it is about changing perceptions of the past, in this case the violent past of 1948.

2 The British Cartographic Imagination and Palestine

Maps are a way of conceiving, articulating, and structuring the human world.
Brian Harley 2001:53

All the state simplifications . . . have the character of maps. That is, they are designed to summarize precisely those aspects of a complex world that are of immediate interest to the map-maker and to ignore the rest.

James C. Scott 1998:87

In this chapter we take a detour into the world of cartography, to follow the underlying principles behind the British Mandatory administration's use of maps prior to the emergence of a state in Palestine. In *Seeing like a State* James C. Scott explains why and how states strive to simplify and make legible their domain. The same logic applies to imperial and mandatory powers, perhaps with even greater force. At the heart of this process, which he names "high modernism," "was a supreme self-confidence about continued linear progress, the development of scientific and technical knowledge, the expansion of production, the rational design of social order, the growing satisfaction of human needs, and, not least, an increasing control over nature (including human nature) commensurate with scientific understanding of natural laws" (1998:90). High-modernist states adopted a synoptic, interest-oriented view, which reached a peak with projects such as the Soviet collectivization scheme and Nyerere's compulsory villagization in Tanzania. The taming of forests in Europe and the move to commercial monoculture was also part of this process: measurements were standardized, minimum diversity was a target, plants were understood as either crops or weeds, and trees meant timber. These changes were motivated by a bureaucratic desire to render the environment – both human and physical – legible, by a systematic rationalization and standardization.

Maps were a major tool toward such legibility. The only map that can evade simplifications is the one suggested in a short story by Jorge Luis Borges ([1954] 1973:141), of which he writes: "The Colleges of Cartographers set up a Map of the Empire which had the size of the

Empire itself and coincided with it point by point.” Maps are inherently simplifying images, and serve the high-modernist idea of condensing and remaking reality. Maps’ administrative language discards diversity and common local knowledge, often on the pretext that they are irrational, unorganized, naïve, or merely irrelevant. A salient example of a cartographic high-modernist enterprise is that of cadastral maps, whose purpose is to register property to serve as a basis for taxation. Cadastral maps are important artifacts in the representation of land ownership because they confer legitimacy to the newly created plots and parcels, making them simple, palpable, and distributable.

The British administrative project in Palestine echoes a high-modernist rationale yet is a lighter version of it. It aspired to promote progress, based on newly discovered technical and scientific knowledge, and was invested in increased control of populations and nature. However, its interventions in the lives of the country’s inhabitants were of a limited nature. For instance, the process of parcellation was carried out in some regions but not everywhere; a governmental office was established for forestation, but not all “empty” areas were planted with trees; some urban neighborhoods were preplanned to include or exclude inhabitants according to social class and ethnic background, but there was no extensive reorganization of urban space. This chapter follows selected cartographic projects and their role in standardizing the complexities of the human and geographical landscape of Palestine, beginning in the 1870s and ending at the end of the British Mandate in 1948.

Other scholars have corroborated Scott’s insights in other contexts. Cartography had a determining effect on both “state making” and “nation making”; it sketched external national borders, thus creating a logo-like entity for emerging national movements (Anderson 1991; Thongchai 1994); it registered and emphasized certain populations, such as the sedentary ones, while paying little attention to others (such as nomadic ones); it highlighted particular historical and archeological sites and overlooked others; it gave legitimacy to specific place names, often choosing one name and discarding others, such as Jaffa over Yafa and Yafo; and it chose the signs to appear on the legend, thus distinguishing between important and insignificant features. All in all, it played a role in the way the country was constructed on paper and in the imagination of those who used maps.

This chapter begins by reviewing British geographical and map-making enterprises prior to the Mandate period, and moves on to consider the emergence of a geographical-national body. Next it focuses on signs and categories as manifested in the topocadastral maps produced in Palestine in the 1930s.¹ This series reveals how legibility was created and how to this

end these maps made use of colors, size, categorizations, naming, and omissions. Finally, this chapter reviews the last mapping project conducted by the British on the eve of their departure. By considering these cartographic endeavors I hope to touch on the geographic imaginary that shaped the contemporary entangled Palestine–Israel entity. We should bear in mind throughout that the administrative point of view differed considerably from that of those who experienced everyday life in Palestine. Maps were optics of control and development, registering the world in ways different from those who were controlled and developed.

The subjectivity of maps and the mapping of Palestine

By the early to mid-nineteenth century the era of map ornamentations, lack of scale, and enlargement of “important sites,” characteristic of earlier maps of the Holy Land, had passed.² Mapping had become part of the greater project of what Matthew Edney defined as “the Enlightenment’s encyclopedic mentality, which produced massive tomes intended to present all available knowledge to their bourgeois readership in a systematic manner” (1997:5). Modern cartography emerged as a new science, registering, emulating, and unifying distant terrains into a coherent picture. Indeed, it was a new era in terms of the scientific rigor of data collection. Yet inevitably cartography maintained its subjectivity, both because it was committed to the principles of high modernism and because of the inclinations of the map creators and the context of their production.

Contemporary cartographers are well aware of this subjectivity. In the 1970s this was discussed under the title “map appreciation.”³ The prominent geographer and philosopher of cartography Arthur Robinson noted that “even the most rigorously-prepared, accurate, large-scale topographic map is an artistic creation” (1989:93). The leading scholar on distortion in maps was Brian Harley (1988, 1989, 2001).⁴ Interested in the interface between cartography and social theory, Harley dwelt on the bond between maps, imperialism, and the emergence of nationalism, noting that “in modern times, the greater the administrative complexity of the state – and the more pervasive its territorial and social ambitions – then the greater its appetite for maps” (2001:55). For Harley, maps did not merely predate and anticipate the emergence of empires, but also supplied retrospective legitimacy. From a Harleyan perspective, British cartography in Palestine served as a means toward reifying power, enforcing a status quo, and fixing social groups and interactions within clear categories and charted lines.

The British began mapping Palestine long before they conquered it. The Survey of Western Palestine, founded in London in 1865 by a group

of distinguished academics and clergymen, was conducted by the Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF) between 1871 and 1876. The PEF was an independent organization, not supported by the British imperial administration, yet many of its members were associated with the establishment. Between 1880 and 1884 it published ten large volumes (on archeology, demography, hydrology, names, fauna, flora, and so on) that included twenty-six map sheets.⁵ Originally the PEF had planned to map the entire area of what was then perceived as Palestine, both west and east of the River Jordan. However, the survey east of the Jordan was delayed and never fully completed. This was a first unintended step toward the emergence of a separate entity in Western Palestine.⁶

The head of the PEF survey for the bulk of its duration was Lt. Claude Conder, later joined by Lt. (later Lord) Horatio Kitchener. Kitchener was to have a distinguished military career, culminating in his appointment as secretary of state for war shortly after the outbreak of World War I in 1914. These army men had the expertise for the job, and military considerations were inherent to the survey.⁷ Just before World War I the PEF created another map of Palestine, which was in fact a military survey with an archeological cover.⁸ This map was used by the British army during the war, and possibly other earlier PEF maps, until the air survey produced new 20,000 and 40,000 scale maps.⁹

Yet the explicit motivation of the PEF was not a military one, but rather a study of biblical remains (Tuchman 1956). Special attention was dedicated to ruins and their identification. Local inhabitants were often portrayed as the descendants of biblical figures. George Adam Smith's influential book *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, published in 1894, lent further prominence to "biblical Palestine," along with other travelers' accounts of the Holy Land.¹⁰ Smith was a friend of John George Bartholomew, known as "the prince of cartographers." Bartholomew himself opened another avenue toward the creation of "scientific" geographical maps of the Holy Land with a strong biblical twist.¹¹ When General Allenby conquered Palestine in 1917 he read Smith's book, as did many of his soldiers.¹²

Smith's book explained Palestine's landscape using terms borrowed from British terrain. When writing of the Galilee, he noted that it is "almost as wooded as our own land" (1966 [1894]:273). When describing valleys, he occasionally named them "glens." When depicting the descent to Lake Tiberias, Smith noted that one comes across two "moors" (1966 [1894]:284). Moreover, Smith offered comparisons from the British Isles to illuminate certain points, as in the following passage:

Do we desire a modern analogy for the difference between Judea and Galilee in the time of our Lord, we find one in the differences between England and Scotland

soon after the Union. But Galilee had as much reason to resent the scorn of Judea as Scotland the haughty tolerance of England. (1966 [1894]:276)

Seeing Palestine through a British prism may be termed Anglicization. In addition to this form of Anglicization we should bear in mind that most of the cartographic decisions were taken in England and affected British mapping around the world. Collier (2006) demonstrated through the case of Southern Nigeria how sanctions were imposed on the director of surveys, who was primarily interested in fulfilling the cartographic needs of the colony rather than imperial interests; the Colonial Survey Committee aimed at unifying the mapping of colonies prior to World War I.

This unification of the empire's terrain was further influenced by a key document which in 1892 defined cartographic principles to be implemented throughout the empire. This document was drafted by the War Office and a committee of high-ranking officers.¹³ Some years later Charles Frederick Close (1905) published the *Text Book of Topographical and Geographical Surveying*, which further contributed to the standardization of mapping throughout the empire.¹⁴ His book was used by British and colonial surveyors for many years and led to the creation of what came to be known as the popular map.¹⁵

We can thus point to three main cartographic influences that predated the Mandate mapping of Palestine. One is the nineteenth-century PEF survey, with its emphasis on the history and archeology of the Holy Land. The second is the standardization of mapping at the turn of the nineteenth century throughout the British Empire, with the 1892 and 1905 documents serving as blueprints. Interestingly, work in the colonies, especially in India, led to the accumulation of new surveying techniques, and thus we are also dealing with a counterflow from the colonies back to England. Third, those who shaped British mapping were army officers, and thus mapping in general and topographical maps reflected military interests in particular.

In Palestine, some senior cartographers were aware of the role that maps played in the governance of the territory. Frederick John Salmon, head of Palestine's Department of Land and Surveys (1933–8), wrote that “a good topographical survey should be looked upon as a national monument of the first importance” (Gavish 2005:205). A monument for which nationality, one wonders: For the British Mandate multinational vision? For the Arabs? For the Zionists? Indeed, these national monuments may have served their purpose all too well.

For Salmon, the prime geographical motif of Palestine's landscape was the distinction between the desert and cultivated land (Gavish 2005:215).

This binary image was willingly adopted by the Zionists. In 1950 Avraham Adolf Reifenberg, a Jewish archeologist and geographer, published a book titled *The Struggle between the Desert and the Sown: Rise and fall of agriculture in the Levant* (Reifenberg 1955). This division persists, especially as it links well with the Zionist ethos of turning the desert into a blooming garden (*hafráhat hashmamah*). Therefore, beyond the general emergence of a geo-body (Thongchai 1994), specific features were also made palpable through maps.

The consolidation of Palestine's geo-body was not a unique process. Dominant European powers were carving out the Middle East into new entities, and were describing and disseminating these creations through trigonometric points, signposted boundaries, and maps. While the fixing of boundaries was one manifestation of this cartographic surge, the elaboration of maps was another.

Signs, symbols, and categories

The elements that cartographers chose to indicate on the map were often different from those experienced by those who live on the land. To grasp this distinction, I will compare Palestine's 1:20,000 scale topocadastral map series with local knowledge.¹⁶ This map series was set to the highest scale to cover the entire country excluding the Negev (Naqab). The series contains a profusion of boundary types: "International boundary," "district boundary," "sub-district boundary," "municipal boundary," "Triangulation Point boundary," "quarter boundary," "village boundary" (there are two types here – "defined" and "undefined"), "fiscal block boundary" (again "defined" and "undefined"), *qita'* boundary (*qita'* being the local Arabic term for a block of land), and "undefined limit," as well as a special symbol showing a change of boundary. This abundance of symbols is another form of Anglicization, reflecting a characteristic British preoccupation with boundaries. Note the number of English synonyms such as border, margin, rim, edge, and limit (all nouns), and verbs such as delimit, demarcate, and delineate. Neither Arabic nor Hebrew are linguistically so rich in this field. These boundaries indicate a form of administration and close control, employed both in the colonies and back in Britain.¹⁷

Green patches for agriculture on this set of maps give the general impression that there are plantations only where the green appears. However, a close look at the legend tells us that some of the uncolored area also had fruit trees, palms, and coniferous trees. These plantations were not colored green as they were scattered and the surveyors followed a set of specifications as to what should and should not be shown.¹⁸

REF E R E N C E

Triangulation Point (irr & height).....		Land Mark, Traverse Point.....		International Boundary.....		District Boundary.....		Road Metalled.....		Road Unmetalled.....		Bushes.....		Isolated Building.....		Citrus Grove.....	
Boundary Stone, Cairn.....		Bench Mark.....		District Boundary.....		Sub-District Boundary.....		Railway, Standard Gauge.....		Railway, Narrow Gauge.....		Quarry.....		Cropping Rock.....		Banana Grove.....	
Kilometre Post.....		Railway Station.....		Municipal, T.P. & Quarter Bdy.....		T.P. Bdy.....		T.P. Bdy.....		T.P. Bdy.....		Minaret, Sheikhs Tomb.....		Threshing Floor, Pumping Engine, Lime Kiln.....		Olive Grove.....	
Church.....		Synagogue.....		Village Boundary.....		Fiscal Block Bdy.....		Fiscal Block Bdy.....		Fiscal Block Bdy.....		Slope.....		Well, Cistern, Spring, Water Trough.....		Orchard (Orn.).....	
Mosque.....		Mosque.....		Wall, Hedge, Fence, Canal, Ditch &c.....		Undefined Limit.....		Uncultivated Land.....		Marsh.....		Palm.....		Vineyard.....		Coniferous Plantation.....	
School.....		Post Office.....		Symbol showing change of Bdy.		Contours.....		Contours.....		Contours.....		Conifers.....		Other Trees.....		Other Plantations.....	

PRICE Mounted..... 150 mils.
Unmounted 100 -

NOTE:- For Registration Blocks in Villages under Settlement, See 1:20,000 Scale Village Index.
Areas given are in standard dimensions. Heights in metres above Approx. M.S.L. Given.

Contours above 160 are at 20 Metres U.L.
Spot Heights Given.....

Fig. 2.1 Boundaries of legend of British Mandate topocadastral maps surveys, 1929–1932 (Courtesy of Sage Publications)

The general impression of such a representation, when “scattered trees” are not painted green, is that the bulk of the land was fallow. Yet this was not the case on the ground: Many of the local trees were (and still are) grown by Arab farmers in a scattered manner on the mountains (figs, for example) or in small terraced patches (olives, almonds), but those would hardly be evident on the map. The role of these “scattered trees” is further played down by including in the non-green area the following categories: “bushes,” “cropping rock,” “uncultivated land,” and “scrub”; as if scattered trees are not tended and have no owners. The green agricultural patches, representing modernized mechanized agriculture, contrast with the otherwise colorless map, giving less weight to local forms of cultivation.

In a similar vein, grazing land is also not mentioned on these maps. We should bear in mind that raising goats and sheep was a vital component of the Arab rural economy. Most farming families owned a few “head” of goats and sheep, and wealthy families would be in possession of tens or hundreds (Nadan 2006). However, pastures and pasture animals are absent from the topocadastral maps. So once again the impression is of an empty terrain. When one is acquainted with the landscape only through the maps, one might think that it is mostly vacant, awaiting development. Both the British Mandate government and – even more so – the Zionist institutions were in search of such unoccupied land. This, of course, does not imply that grazing land or scattered trees were omitted deliberately; the logic of the cartographers’ enterprise was decisive here, not any plan to create an impression of emptiness. They had their own agenda, the consequences of which had a life of their own.

The plantations that are mentioned by name in the legend are citrus (abbreviated as C.), banana (B.), olive (Ol.), vineyard (V.), orchard (O.), palms (P.), coniferous plantations, and deciduous plantations. This was probably the outcome of a British discourse of development, encouraging the production of surplus and export. This categorization unified the fruit trees and failed to mention almonds, figs, pomegranates, or mulberry (salient for local consumption).¹⁹ There was also a large variety of vegetables and grain crops that passed unmentioned (such as chickpea, sesame, black-eyed pea, pumpkin, squash, wheat, and barley), probably because the same crop would not normally be grown in the same field every year. Inevitably, plantations for the market – those from which tax revenue was raised – received more attention than those whose produce was locally consumed.

Marshland received little attention in these maps. The British government encouraged projects for drying these areas (as part of a Malaria eradication program and for its fertile agricultural land), often with

Zionist collaboration (Kedar and Forman 2003). Even before these marshlands were dried, little was indicated in the maps about their utilization. Yet they were used by Arab inhabitants, who made a living from rearing water buffalo (*jammus*) for dairy and meat, and produced mats from marsh reeds. These two agricultural products are not mentioned in the maps. Their absence can be interpreted as a step toward the eradication of a lifestyle that existed in Palestine and ceased to exist during the Mandate and Israeli period (such as the Kabara, Hula, and Ghor marshlands).²⁰

Just as the Arab population of the marshlands received scant attention in Mandate maps, so did the Bedouin one, which was much larger. The maps register sedentary settlements, and encampments were often disregarded. Some nomad populations were mentioned on the maps because they were in the process of settling in permanent dwellings, often due to government “encouragement.”²¹ However, most of the Bedouin population of the Negev was nomadic and their presence was not indicated on the maps. This lack of registration made it easier after 1948 for Israel to prevent Bedouin from returning to their Negev areas. In fact, only 11,000 of 75,000 Bedouin remained in the Negev after 1949 (Marx 2000:106–7).

The maps also create a certain illusion regarding settlement size. In Arab villages, where houses were close to one another, the map identifies the built-on area as a single cluster (contrasting it with the surrounding area by way of color). In contrast, the new preplanned Zionist rural settlements had farms adjacent to the homes, and thus the area defined as “built on” in the map encompassed the farms and stretched to include these larger adjacent tracts. As a result, Jewish settlements seem larger on the map, although the number of their inhabitants was often lower than that of Arab villages. As Monmonier (1991) points out, the larger the “object” is on the map, the more prominence it gains in the eyes of the viewer or administrator.

The maps obscure the fact that Palestine’s geographic features varied dramatically from one region to another. Each locality has its unique topography, soil, rainfall, and plantations, yet the same legend was used for all.²² This programmed the viewer to obtain a sense of the existence of a unified geo-body. For example, in the map depicting the semidesert area southeast of Bethlehem, the legend lists citrus and banana groves, even though there are no such plantations in this region. At the same time, this map does not introduce categories of seasonal plantations fit for semiarid areas, nor does it create a category for grazing land, although both are central means of livelihood in the region. Through the unifying and distorting lens of the legend, diversity is ignored and an impression of a single entity is imparted.

Fonts and language

The unifying effect of the map is also maintained in the usage of fonts. Most of these are regular and do not stand out as unique. At times they differ in size, making use of capital letters and occasionally adopting italic or bold. However, one irregular font is more noticeable, a font known as Old English. While some ruins are designated merely by a black square and the letter R., others use this special font. The effect of such an ornamental font is remarkable. It creates a parallel between old England and ancient Palestine, thus turning the ruins of the latter into part of the former's history. The following are examples of Old English font names on the map: Tall Mubarak or El Burj (for Dor). In the case of the Mediterranean fort of 'Atlit the caption is even longer. It appears as "Atlit, Crusader's Castle (*Ruins of*)."

Hence, as we see, a certain degree of Anglicization was achieved both by comparing Palestine to England and by using the Old English font. Yet its most apparent manifestation was in the fact that all the maps were in English. In 1938 Hillel Birger, the topographic trainer of the Hagannah, wrote to Frederick John Salmon, head of the British Department of Surveys, asking the department to publish the British topographical maps in the three official languages: English, Arabic, and Hebrew. Salmon wrote back, noting that

It would, of course, increase the value of our maps very considerably if editions could be prepared in the three official languages and there is no doubt the Jewish community, who devote [sic] much time to the study and exploration of the country, would derive great benefit from Hebrew editions. It has been, however, sufficiently difficult with the staff and funds at the disposal of the Department to deal adequately with the cartography of Palestine in one language only. The maps have so far been mostly used for Government Departments, while over 30,000 copies were issued to the Troops, but your suggestion for issuing a key in Hebrew is one which might extend the usefulness of our maps very considerably.²³

We should bear in mind that Birger's request did not stem from a naïve quest for cartographic knowledge. It was also part of the Zionist attempts to command better information in order to be prepared for an armed struggle (as we will discuss in Chapter 3).²⁴

It should be noted that the great majority of place names on the British maps remained the local ones. Local knowledge was indeed preserved here, in stark contrast to later Israeli policy, which aimed to Hebraize all names. In some cases the British did emphasize the English/Latin names: Caesarea (where Turkmen and Muslim Bosnians lived²⁵) was written only in Latin style. The city of Jaffa,

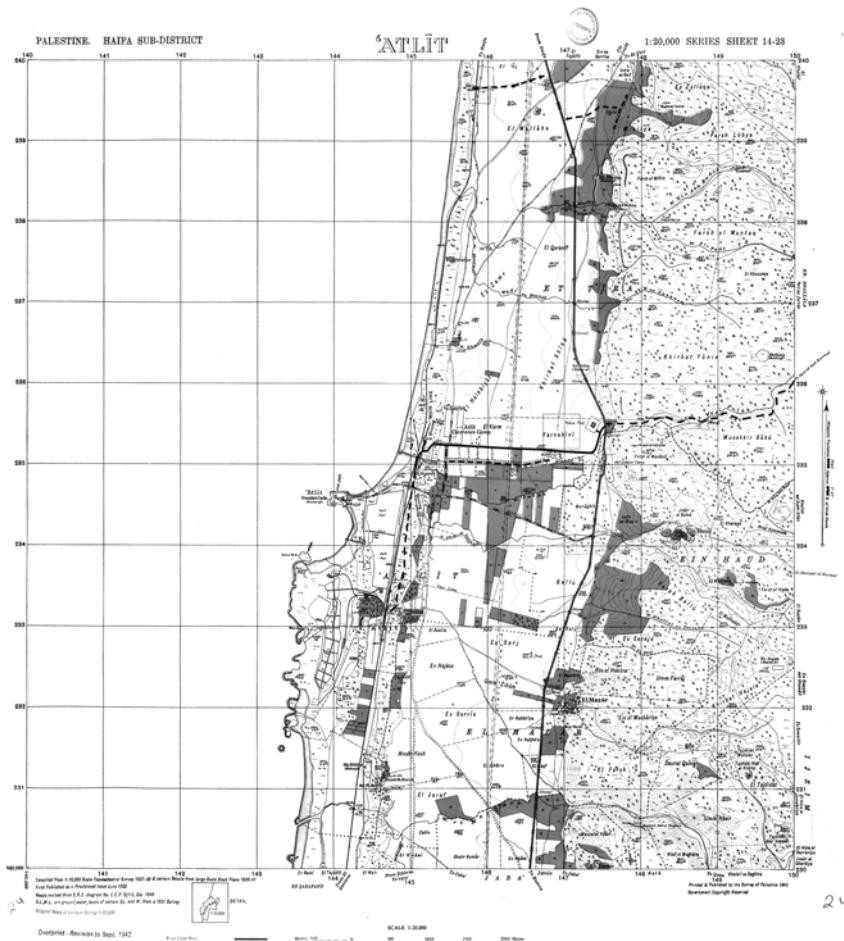


Fig. 2.2 Excerpt from the topocadastral 1:20,000 map, 'Atlit'

whose Arabic name is Yafa and Hebrew name is Yaffo, was written as Jaffa. The town of al-Lyd was written as Lydda, and Jerusalem did not appear with its Arabic name, al-Quds, or Hebrew, Yerushalayim. Some places received two names, mostly those associated with important archeological sites.²⁶ Very rarely, Arabic and Hebrew names appear side by side. Generally, places were defined as either Arabic or Jewish through their names. As we have seen earlier, maps are intolerant toward mixed identities.

The village surveys (1943–1947)

This brief survey of British cartography in the Mandatory period would not be complete without a glimpse at the British cartographic agenda on the eve of the Mandate's termination. The last cartographic project in which the authorities engaged was the "village surveys." The surveys were part of a long-term project to promote the development of Arab villages. The aim was to bring "progress" and "modernization" to the "backward" rural Arab population, as well as to tighten control over building tax revenues. The decision to carry out the surveys, twenty-five years after the commencement of the Mandate, reflects an awakening of what Scott termed high-modernist administrative principles and an alarm about the gap between Palestine's rural Arab community and the Jewish one. However, long before the surveys were completed, the Mandate in Palestine ended.

The Allied victory at El-Alamein in 1942 triggered the Mandate administration's concern. During World War II, as British forces poured into Palestine, new camps were erected and there was a soaring demand for agricultural products, leading to significant economic growth (Nadan 2006:338). Now the government feared that an economic crisis might follow the wartime prosperity. In a dispatch from mid-1943, Palestine's high commissioner's office wrote to London's Colonial Office that "as the day the war ends, I imagine, some 75% of Palestine manufacture will come to an abrupt standstill."²⁷ Such a crisis, it was suggested, might stimulate the return of ethnic tensions in Palestine.²⁸

In March 1943, when the war was still raging elsewhere, Palestine's high commissioner, Sir Harold MacMichael, published an official communiqué relating to what he defined as "post-war development and reconstruction."²⁹ This communiqué was accompanied by an explanatory talk delivered on Palestine's Broadcasting Service. Along with a long list of services that should now be enhanced – such as industrial development, water supply, education, housing, and health insurance – the high commissioner emphasized that postwar reconstruction "must promote the welfare of the rural population, on whose efforts the town-dweller depends, in so large a degree, for his subsistence."³⁰

MacMichael appointed Sir Douglas Harris, previously chairman of the War Supply Board, as special commissioner for postwar reconstruction. Harris explained the rationale behind what would today be termed affirmative action for the Arab rural population, and referred to a secret dispatch written by Sandford, the financial secretary:

Towards the end of Mr. Sandford's memorandum he alludes to the great investment of Jewish capital and the great Jewish agricultural, industrial and urban development, and observes that the lack of comparable facilities for Arabs must lead to an ever

increasing inequality of opportunity; and he states that the remedy is an orientation of policy with assistance from the Colonial Development and Welfare Vote with the direct objective of securing equality of opportunity to the two sections of the community. This remedy, he says, cannot be developed from purely Palestine resources, not only because they are inadequate but because it cannot be expected that such a policy should be financed from revenues drawn predominantly from Jewish sources.³¹

Although the above initiative was termed “postwar reconstruction” it had little to do with war and reconstruction. World War II brought very little destruction to Palestine. The administration seized the opportunity for a development initiative in the rural Arab sector, which would start with the village surveys. When Harris published his general plan in January 1945, he opened his discussion by clearly referring to the issue of “the more backward elements” and their “primitive state”:

It is desirable in framing post war measures to secure reasonable subsistence level [sic] for the more backward elements of the country. The Arab villages for the most part remain in their primitive state, though of recent years there has been considerable building of a better type of house than the more usual miserable and antiquated structures which are little better than stables for animals . . .

Very little has been done, in the 24 years of our administration, in Arab villages, the most backward element in the country, and, therefore, that which calls for our special attention.³²

Sir Harold MacMichael appealed to London for “a free grant” from the treasury through the secretary of state of the Colonial Office towards the “reconstruction plan.” It was viewed favorably, and he received the sum of £14,000 for the first two years (1943–5), with an option of renewing the grant for another three years.³³

Palestine’s Jewish leaders opposed the scheme from its inception. David Ben-Gurion, chairman of the Jewish Agency executive board, was swift in his negative response to the high commissioner’s public declaration of his support for this plan. He stated that the *yishuv*’s priorities for postwar reconstruction were to save the persecuted Jews of Europe and modify the white paper’s policy of banning further immigration. It seems that for him postwar reconstruction meant investing in the absorption of Jewish refugees rather than Arab villagers. The British were somewhat alarmed by Ben-Gurion’s response. Here is MacMichael’s comment on it when writing to Oliver Stanley, secretary of state for the colonies:

It is most regrettable that the Jewish community should thus be encouraged by political extremists to withhold their cooperation in the planning of post-war development in this country, and while it is as yet early to judge of the attitude of the Jewish community in general, Mr. Ben-Gurion’s thesis appears to have met with fairly wide acceptance.³⁴

Despite Jewish opposition, the plan proceeded. One of the immediate measures undertaken by the high commissioner was to ensure that the cartographic personnel who were sent to Palestine during the war (and were involved, among other jobs, in building the Tegart police stations), would stay in Palestine for the village surveys.³⁵

Actual work began in 1944, and was headed by the town planning advisor, H. Kendall, from the Department of Town Planning. An official memorandum described in detail the components of the proposed surveys, and took the village of Salfit in the Nablus district as an illustration and prime example. It was accompanied by three charts: a plane table survey of Salfit and its surroundings on a scale of 1:2,500; a detailed town planning scheme (on the same scale); and a chart of five model dwelling houses.³⁶ While it is clear that the British administration wished to introduce new standards of building and sanitation, some local traditions were nevertheless encouraged. Kendall wrote to the chief secretary that he hoped the memorandum would achieve “a renewal of interest in the construction of stone built houses with vaults in order to save controlled materials and to stress their numerous good points in traditional architecture.”³⁷

After the above preparations the surveys began, with each village sketched on two maps – one of its “built-on area” (at a scale varying from 1:625 to 1:2,000 depending on the village size) and another including village surroundings (with a slightly higher scale varying from 1:2,500 to 1:4,000).³⁸ The maps of the built-on area were meticulously detailed. They registered the materials of each building, distinguishing between stone, mud, wooden, and ruined. They also indicated many other features such as cisterns, threshing floors, olive presses, mills, schools, clinics, and even the traditional guest houses (*madafeh*). Other details referred to roads (including width at times), caves, and antiquities. Even model houses were sketched.

More than two hundred such maps were produced between 1945 and 1947, covering more than one hundred villages.³⁹ The pace of the survey accelerated from one year to the next, its implementation carried out by both the Department of Town Planning and the Department of Surveys, the latter bearing the heavier burden.⁴⁰ The villages, chosen within each district by the local commissioners, were from Tell al-Milh in the Beersheba District in the south to al-Khalsa in what is known as the “Galilee panhandle” in the northernmost district.

The British Colonial Office correspondence gives the impression that the Palestinian Arab population reacted favorably to the village development initiative.⁴¹ The British tended to include villages where local councils had already independently advanced development plans. For

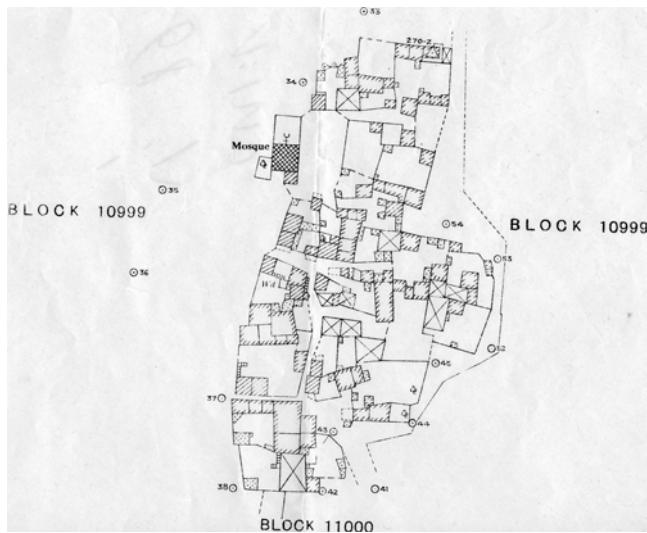


Fig. 2.3 Village of Sarafand, village surveys, 1946

example, the district commissioner of the Galilee (in May 1945) wrote a recommendation to the acting chief secretary in Jerusalem:

The Village Development Committee which I met at Khalsa is an extremely interesting development. It appears to be more or less democratically representative of most of the villages in the sub-district and not only takes a lively interest in local development but has accomplished quite a lot notably in arranging for the distribution of supplies to the villages at controlled prices, in lighting profiteering and in the establishment of the hostel for village boys in Safad. The chairman, Kamil Eff. Hussin [sic], outlined their aspirations in an address which he delivered to me. His original notes and the translation are attached. This body in my opinion fully deserves encouragement.⁴²

To this the district commissioner added: “An interesting point is that although the committee had the opportunity of addressing me on any matter which they wished to raise, there was not a whisper of politics.” In the letter written by Kamel al-Hussein himself, he noted the very same point: “The purpose of this committee is well-known; it is to raise the standard of the farmer from agricultural, healthy and social points of view – it does not interfere in political affairs.”⁴³ The British administration seemed to be encouraged by the villagers’ economic aspirations, while apparently keeping away from politics. However, its hope for a prosperous and continuously tranquil rule did not materialize.

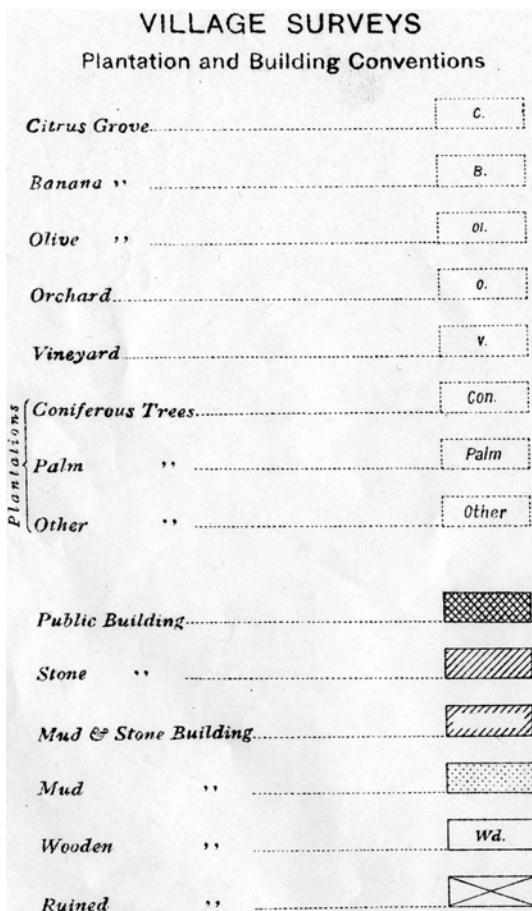


Fig. 2.4 Legend of village surveys maps, 1946

Instead, the Mandate came to a halt in the midst of the development initiative.

Ironically and tragically, some of the village surveys' maps served Jewish-Israeli armed attacks on these villages. For example, one of the intelligence files prepared by the Hagannah made use of one of these maps. This map may be found in a file on the village of Beit Mahsir, west of Jerusalem.⁴⁴ While the village surveys maps (at a scale of 1:1,250 and 1:2,500) of Beit Mahsir were produced by the British in 1946, the Hagannah intelligence file was compiled using these maps in March 1948.

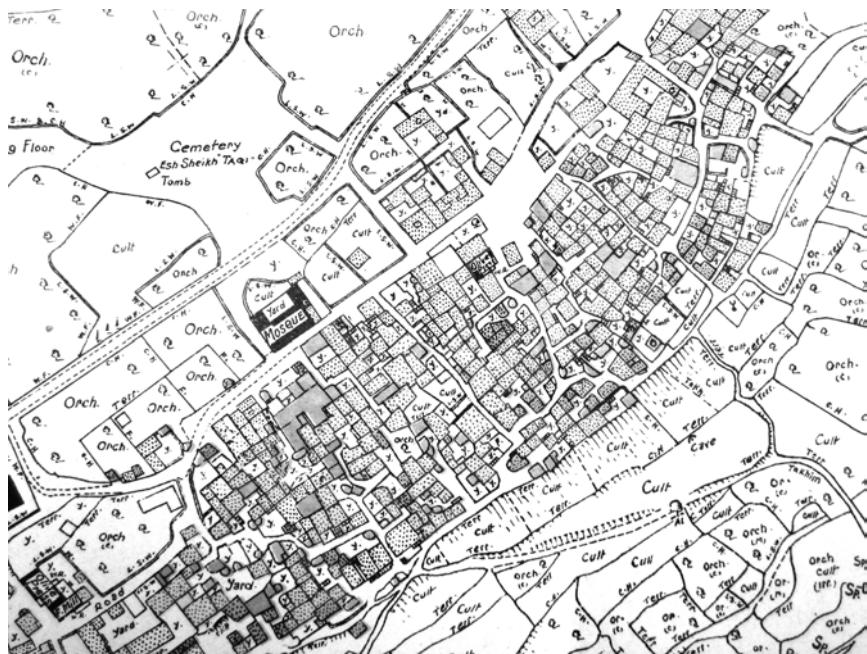


Fig. 2.5 Detail from 1:2,500 village surveys map of Salfit, 1945

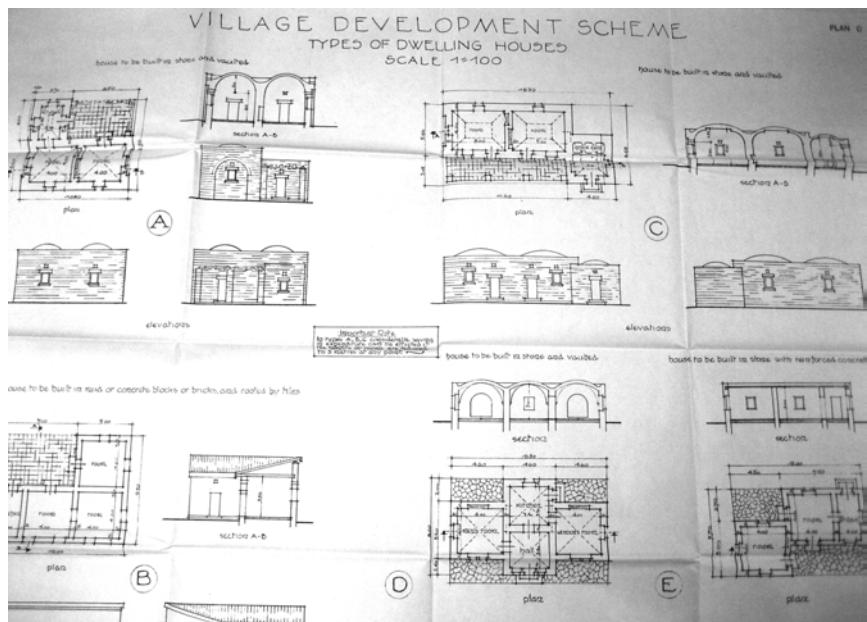


Fig. 2.6 British government Village Development Scheme, types of dwelling houses, 1945

The village of Beit Mahsir was captured and its inhabitants expelled by the Palmach Har'el Brigade in May 1948.⁴⁵

Concluding remarks

This chapter explores the ways in which a modified version of what Scott termed a high-modernist administrative rationale was applied in the British mapping of Mandatory Palestine. The considerable investment in cartography was considered a worthy pursuit because of its contribution toward efficient management based on classification, simplification, and legibility. Cartography also supported and improved military control, not only in times of erupting violence but also during “normal” periods of regular policing. For the state bureaucracy it established the places from which the central authorities could demand payment for services, and it clarified ethnic categorization that served nation building. British cartography went beyond putting the chosen administrative categories into words; it represented them as a picture on paper, which could be grasped and disseminated among different populations with relative ease.

What were the main characterizations of the British maps of Palestine? First, they drew on past imagery of the Holy Land and fed back into it. This preoccupation should be seen in relation to other parallel activities that have a bearing on landscape perception, such as archeological excavations (carried out extensively from the nineteenth century), painting (such as the pictures of David Roberts of Holy Places from the mid-nineteenth century), reviving ancient names (Caesarea, ‘Atlit), and establishing museums (such as the Rockefeller Museum for antiquities in Jerusalem in 1938). The State of Israel continued this line, only this time by emphasizing the Jewish past, to consolidate national sentiment and historical claims to the land.

A second strand that reverberated in the British maps was the usage of terms, sites, and perceptions borrowed from the British landscape. This practice made it easier to disregard local institutions and to give greater weight to large planted groves while underrepresenting other agricultural forms such as grazing and scattered plots.

The third trend was the unifying effect of applying the same categories to all maps of Palestine. This, of course, is a worldwide convention – all countries carry out series mapping.⁴⁶ Yet by unifying legends, one solidifies the basis of claims for the existence of one identifiable national geo-body. Once the international boundary is set, the features within the boundaries are standardized. At the same time, such mapping fixes what deserves to be registered and what does not. The maps emphasized some

populations (as in newly built Zionist settlements) while tending to disregard nomadic and marshland populations, thus distinguishing between who is part of the geo-body and who is not.

The sketching through map making of this geo-body was a contribution to both Israeli and Palestinian nation building. This was not a deliberately thought-out effort by the British Mandatory authorities to give an advantage to one side or another. Rather, as Scott has shown, states in the making have a similar rationale to that of established states. British administrators had another objective as well. They were well aware of the gap between what they defined as a “backward” society and a “modernized” one. Perceiving part of their colonial task as bringing progress to the “backward sectors,” they seized the opportunity of postwar planning after 1942 to bring development to the rural Arab population.

The maps drawn for this effort did not yield their intended outcome. Instead, some were used by the newly formed Israeli army in the 1948 war to obliterate the villages that were meant to benefit from development. This was not their original purpose. In effect, a double process followed the construction of Palestine under British rule. On the one hand, the Jewish community stepped into “the state project” where the British left off. Maps registered the new political reality of military victory and of catastrophic defeat. On the other hand, while many Arab-Palestinian names and settlements vanished, traces – ineradicable traces – remained and endured, awaiting rediscovery. In the chapters that follow, we slowly move away from the state’s synoptic vision to see how those who lived through the war and its consequences, from the bottom up, as it were, understood and in later years recalled the violent convulsion of 1948.

3 Cartographic Practices in Palestine British, Jewish, and Arab, 1938–1948

Maps, as argued in the previous chapter, influence one's way of grasping the landscape and one's imaginable social affiliations. Yet, beyond their more abstract role, they are also an important means for registering and transferring information, especially within a bureaucratized system. In this chapter I look into the practicalities of map use in Palestine during the late 1930s and the 1940s. The ways maps were used represent the divergence in social organization and bureaucratization between the Arab and Jewish communities on the eve of 1948.

The majority of Palestine's Arabs were rural, semiliterate, and did not identify with an umbrella national institution.¹ Many Arab bodies were involved in the evolving national struggle, but there was much suspicion and little cooperation between them (Khalaf 1991, 1997; Sela 1996; Budeiri 1997).² In contrast, the *yishuv* was literate, bureaucratized, and organized within a tight net of national networks (providing health services, education, agricultural expertise, funding agencies, and so on) (Horowitz and Lissak 1978). The differences in the scale and spectrum of institutionalization between the Arabs and the Jews had a decisive effect on the two sides' preparation for the war and on its outcomes (see Chapter 1, pp. 15–25). Although the British Mandate had its independent agenda, the unintended consequence was more of a convergence, even if temporary, with Zionist bureaucratized conduct than with the Arab community.

This chapter begins with the awakening concern with maps among members of the Jewish *yishuv*. It then touches on the British–Zionist alliance during World War II and the cartographic training for Jewish soldiers that accompanied it. By way of comparison, it dwells on the lack of map utilization among the Palestinian Arab population and their relatively sparse usage within the Arab armies that participated in 1948. The chapter follows a process whereby British topographic maps, as well as maps produced by the Jews, were often used for military purposes. This military lens was influential in 1948, and long after the British left.

A short methodological note is necessary. It was 2005 when I began my research into maps. The youngest people who had been involved

with maps prior to 1948 and were still alive were over eighty, and most of them were reaching their nineties. Fortunately, I was able to locate and interview four such figures in Israel: Gilia Katinka-Plotkin, Pinhas Yoeli, Asher Solel, and Zvi German. In addition, the Hagannah Archive had a wealth of transcribed interviews which were available to the public. A similar exploration of the Arab population was impossible, for three main reasons. First, in my research during the late 1990s it had already been evident that Palestinians in Israel were still hesitant to disclose military details of their roles in 1948. Second, in light of the shorter life expectancy of Palestinian men and the lack of a centralized institution that could have assisted in establishing contacts with such informants, it was virtually impossible to track down Palestinians who had been involved with maps in the 1940s. Third, Palestinian archives are few, small, and difficult to access. As a result, the information pertaining to Palestinian Arab usage of maps was collected indirectly, primarily through Arab material found in Israeli archives, through memoirs, and through the Jewish testimonies. By combining these sources, this chapter's prime objective is to demonstrate how the chronicle of map use exposes a determining factor in the outcome of 1948.

Zionist hiking

Hikes and tours were basic constituents of the Zionist ethos, and were popular from the 1920s. The aim of these excursions was to develop close familiarity with the landscape and to encourage a concrete bond to the features of the homeland. This could only be achieved by walking long distances, at times referred to metaphorically as “to plow the land lengthwise and crosswise” (*laharosh et-ha-aretz le'orkah u-lerohbah*). In *Sacred Landscape* Meron Benvenisti argued that for Zionism, hiking went well beyond the aims of research or esthetic experience. It was through hiking that the Zionists aspired to confirm “Jewish proprietorship over the redeemed land of the fathers” (2000:232). The Zionist hike was therefore constructed as “a return”; a search for the familiar names and places from the Jewish past.

In the years that preceded the Arab Revolt, Jewish hikers were often received warmly by Arab villagers.³ Nathan Shalem (1973), a geologist and a leading guide of these expeditions, wrote that Jewish groups would pass through Arab villages, inquire about local traditions, and, at times, be given food and somewhere to sleep by their inhabitants.⁴ Information gathered during these hikes was rarely transferred to the Hagannah (Salomon 2005:3).⁵ Despite this contact, or perhaps also in light of it, the Jewish-Zionist population developed an ambiguous approach to

the Arab population, comprising what Benvenisti (2000, [Chapter 2](#)) described as a set of contradictory images: The *fellahin* prompted both fascination and suspicion. They were considered noble savages, lazy peasants, and descendants of biblical times. Moreover, they were seen as if through a glass wall, as from a distance, and deemed invisible as subjects.

While the Zionists were exploring unknown Palestine (and, at times, roaming as far as Jordan and Lebanon), the *fellahin* were well acquainted with the features of landscape – they knew them from the daily practice of working the land, fetching water, wood, and wild herbs, moving by foot from one village to the other, and so forth. However, this familiarity was often restricted to their own locality, extending to a radius of 10–20 kilometers or the nearest commercial town. For the *fellahin*, other regions often remained terra incognita.

Initial Hagannah steps

Following the Arab Revolt, which broke out in 1936, the Hagannah changed its policy from being solely defensive, and became more offensive. It replaced a static defense mode with semioffensive night patrols and ambushes within a growing radius from its bases.⁶ In the summer of 1938, Orde Charles Wingate, a pro-Zionist British intelligence officer, initiated the establishment of Special Night Squads (SNS) to protect the Kirkuk–Haifa oil line. With the blessing of the British army he recruited Jewish “guards” and organized activities that utilized intelligence information, including maps, combined with long, off-trail infantry night patrols. His activities incorporated attacks on nearby villages, assumed to be the bases of those who damaged the oil line. His training methods had a crucial influence on the development of the Hagannah (Slutsky *et al.* 1965, vol. II:2:912–38).⁷

In parallel, the Arab Revolt and the shift away from a defensive policy led the Hagannah to initiate a systematic compilation of intelligence reports on Arab villages. Part of the project was to collect basic topographic knowledge in order to carry out patrols and draw maps. In 1938 Hillel Birger was appointed as the Hagannah’s chief guide for topography. It was Birger who in 1938 appealed to Frederick John Salmon, head of the Mandate’s Department of Surveys, to publish topographic maps in all three languages (see [Chapter 2](#), p. 34). Birger, born in Lodz in 1902, arrived in Palestine in 1935, after having studied land engineering and geodesy.⁸ In 1940, along with another member of the Hagannah, he published a guide to military patrols and excursions (*siyyurim u-masa’ot*), listing the landscape features that were to be noted and registered.⁹ Those included paths leading to “our settlements and those of our neighbors [meaning Arabs],” suitability for

different vehicles, potential sites for ambushes, and the location of bridges. Birger also established a technical department for the Hagannah, which specialized in the production of maps.¹⁰

Pinhas Yoeli was a gifted student in Birger's two-week topography course in 1938. Yoeli was born in Bayreuth in 1920, and immigrated to Palestine in 1936 with a group of young people fleeing Nazi Germany. He may have been an outstanding student because, as he himself testified, "most of the things that Hillel Birger taught us, we knew, because in Bayreuth we had a Jewish Scout Group where we learnt all these things."¹¹ Yoeli was chosen to become a topographic guide to the Hagannah's newly created field companies, whose acronym was *fosh* (pl. *foshim*). Regarding this experience he said: "I was sent around from one *foshim* unit to another, teaching map reading, how to decipher the way you can approach a certain area between two hills, unseen, by reading a topographic map ... and orientation at night according to the stars."¹² Yoeli's teachings indicate that by the end of the 1930s map literacy was already considered a major military asset, and efforts were made to spread this knowledge.

Another turning point in the augmentation of the Jewish military force and its command of topography and mapping was reached in 1941. The British army was facing a growing threat from the Germans, who were now in control of Greece and Cyrenaica, and feared a Nazi invasion of Palestine, either from the south through Egypt or from the north through the Caucasus. They were now more willing than before to cooperate with the Hagannah, which in turn was eager to acquire their training (Gelber 2001:416).¹³

In May 1941 the Hagannah created a new force, the Palmach (acronym for *plugot makhatz* or "shock troops"), with the aim of having a country-wide recruited force under a single command. As part of the "Palestine Scheme" the British agreed to train 150 Palmach fighters in sabotage and scouting (*habalah ve-sayarut*) in the early months of 1942.¹⁴ The Palmach forces collected information to update maps, prepared sketches, and wrote accounts on the locations of police stations, the headmen of Arab villages (*makhātīr*, sing. *mukhtār*), cisterns, and flour mills.¹⁵

Let us reiterate the two main points regarding the Hagannah. First, in the late 1930s it took on an offensive-oriented strategy, including the budding initiative to collect intelligence on the Arabs, with cartography as a byproduct. Second, in light of the circumstances of World War II the British army had an interest in training Hagannah soldiers. Thus, as Hebrew soldiers were exposed to the large and experienced British army, they expanded their military horizons. It was roughly then that pioneering operational patrols and a technical department became integral to Hagannah activity. Before turning to explore the Hagannah

initiatives following World War II, I briefly consider some developments within the British army during the war.

British mapping during World War II

Inevitably, World War II generated the extensive production of military topographic maps. Dov Gavish (2005:241–8) described how necessity led to the incorporation of Palestine’s Department of Surveys into military mapping tasks, whereby civilian topographic maps were transformed to the scale and needs of the army. The civilian maps, especially those produced under the supervision of Col. Frederick John Salmon (1933–8),¹⁶ were originally abundant in colors and hues. Salmon, as noted in the previous chapter, chose to emphasize what he saw as the prime characteristic of Palestine’s landscape: The distinction between the fertile areas and the barren ones, what he defined as the difference between the “desert and the sown.” With the military cartographic adjustments of World War II, esthetics and interpretations of features were no longer tolerated. Many of the signs and colors were erased. A new grid system was added, a gazetteer of place names was compiled, and there was special emphasis on whether roads were passable for military vehicles.

Such a process, argued Gavish (2005:206) – the militarization of the topographic maps – was predictable since they were molded in the shadow of ongoing conflict. The first complete topographical series of Mandate maps was published during the Arab Revolt (1936–9) and the second series was issued during World War II. Thus, according to Gavish, the topographic map of Palestine, which could have been a “national monument,” became a “military monument.” It was these militarized topographic maps that the Hagannah and the Palmach adopted and used for their own purposes in the 1940s, and especially in 1948. These were also the maps that as of 1948 formed the basis for the Israeli Department of Surveys.

World War II led to extensive enrollment of soldiers into the British army. In Palestine 30,000 Jewish soldiers and roughly 9,000 Arabs enrolled (Gelber 2001:424–42; Kimmerling and Migdal 2003:142; Sela 2003:300). In 1942 the Jewish Agency suggested that the British engineering corps enlist trained civilian surveyors in Palestine. The British responded positively. The company members were all Jewish while the officers were British. Asher Solel, who was born in Baku and immigrated to Palestine as a boy, joined this unit at its inception.¹⁷ In 1942 he had just completed a degree at Israel’s Institute of Technology (known as the Technion and located in Haifa) and had some work experience as a surveyor. From the summer of 1942 until the spring of 1943 his unit was stationed in a camp south of Cairo, dedicating its time to

cartographic training: surveying, draftsmanship, and mapping based on aerial photographs. In April 1943 Solel's unit was sent to the banks of the Euphrates River, east of Aleppo, to map the area newly captured by Britain and the Free French army.¹⁸ The aim was to produce topographic maps at a scale of 1:50,000, based on previous French maps of a 1:200,000 scale.

When I asked Solel about the relationship that had developed between the British officers and Jewish ranks, he replied that it was "very good. We learnt a profession from them . . . They were experienced, senior in the profession, and we learnt from them field-surveying and systematic drafting."¹⁹ After more than two years of mapping in the Euphrates areas Solel's unit was sent to Tunis to improve existing maps and add trigonometry points that would aid the navigation of the planes bringing British soldiers back from Burma. Finally, Solel's last year of service, 1946, was spent mapping Italy. Upon his return he continued his work as a civilian surveyor and later, in 1948, joined the Israel Defense Force engineering corps. After stepping on a mine between Gaza and Rafah in 1948 and a long recovery from a severe wound, Solel returned to Israel's army engineering corps, and later joined army intelligence. For a period he was also head of the Israel Defense Force mapping unit. This unit was adjacent to the civilian Survey of Israel, and the head of the military arm was also the vice head of the civilian arm (Szancer 2001).²⁰

It is evident that the experience Solel and other Jewish soldiers gained with the British preceded and informed their service in the Jewish fighting forces both before and during 1948 as well as in Israel's military and civilian mapping institutions after 1948.

Meir Pail, who joined the Palmach in 1943, later to become an army general, a military historian, and a member of the Knesset, commented on the knowledge and skills acquired by the Jews during service in the British army.²¹ Pail, who was considered an expert on patrolling and topography, noted that "the British were much better than we were [the Palmach and Hagannah] in mapping. Our guys who came back from the British army taught us how to use a stereoscope." The stereoscope, a device enabling a view of two-dimensional pictures as three-dimensional ones, was used to decipher aerial photographs.²² The Hagannah was fast to adopt from the British the method of mapping based on aerial photographs.

As we see, two salient developments evolved in the field of mapping in Palestine during World War II. First, civilian topographic maps were adjusted for the use of armed forces and took on a more functional military form. These were the topographic maps that formed the basis of the Survey of Israel, established in 1948. Second, a nucleus of British-trained Palestinian Jewish cartographers was created, and their

knowledge was to serve the Hagannah, which was quick to incorporate and develop the cartographic skills that they had brought along.

Post–World War II Hagannah cartography

In the mid-1940s the Hagannah began preparing what were termed “village files” (*tikei kfarim*). These were the first steps toward the creation of organized military intelligence that would be used for the purpose of planning operations. Zvi German (born in 1917), who was a Hagannah member from 1936, was appointed as a planning officer in the central region in 1944.²³ During our interview in his home, he explained to me the motivation to embark on the village files:

It was then decided to prepare for the next war in the country. No one spoke of regular armies but rather of local forces. It was necessary to know the area, to know the villages, to know what is in the villages. And village files were prepared. It was a constant preoccupation. Every [training] course would send some guys for sketching, for patrols in and around villages. There were also some aerial photographs made through the Aviron Company; some photographing. Maps were enlarged. Cross sections (*hatakhim*) [were made]. Village files were prepared. From the end of '44 till the beginning of '48, it kept on all the time.

Roughly thirty such elaborate files have survived in archives. However, it is probable that many more were created from 1944 until 1948 (including during 1948) (Salomon 2010). The heart of these files was a set of maps whose number and types varied from one village file to another. German noted that a talented young man, Yisrael Spector, was working with him as a full-time draftsman. When needed, they would prepare the scales by altering the original British maps.

GERMAN: Of course, in the drill files, there was sometimes a need to enlarge a map. . . . I think we had few [British] maps at a scale of 1:5,000. But I remember we would enlarge them ourselves, for the drill files. Have you ever seen an example of a drill based on a map of 1:20,000 or its enlargement?

BEN-ZE'EV: No, I haven't.

GERMAN: I'll show you one. There are examples in the Book of the History of the Hagannah. You'll be able to see an example.

BEN-ZE'EV: How would you enlarge the maps?

GERMAN: In a totally primitive manner. By drawing squares and enlarging the elevation lines.

And so the British maps formed a solid basis that could be manipulated according to the military needs of the Hagannah. Let us consider the Hagannah file pertaining to the Arab village of Yazur.²⁴ The opening map was defined as a road map and was an enlarged version of the British 1:20,000 scale maps of the area. It was made up of four different

maps, cut and then rearranged, so that the village would be at the heart. Sequential numbers, dedicated to specific landscape features, were added to the map. Later on in the file each feature was elaborated. A second map was defined as a “visibility map,” indicating which paths can be seen from the village itself and its neighboring villages. A third map was of the inner village, at a scale of 1:5,000, showing the main paths. Finally, at the end of the file, a map of the village and its surroundings at a scale of 1:20,000 was appended, again pointing to important features. The nature of the village files suggests, as German himself noted, that the anticipated future confrontation was assumed to be similar to the 1936–9 revolt, but on a larger scale.

In parallel, as of the mid-1940s the Hagannah also improvised flights in which aerial photographs were taken for the purpose of mapping. Glilia Katinka-Plotkin, born in the Galilee in 1917, was involved in these flights.²⁵ Glilia’s partner, Gershon Plotkin (later a leading theater director), a self-trained cartographer, had worked with the Hagannah department of maps. Glilia followed Gershon, in the technicalities needed during flights as well as in drawing maps. Sketching maps was to become her profession and source of income for many years. The following is her description of five or six flights in which she participated in the mid-1940s:

KATINKA-PLOTKIN: There was a pilot called Pinye [Ben Porath] . . . Gershon was the photographer. I was the camouflage with the baby. The baby’s “milk bottle” was a large opaque container with a camera inside. We would leave from a British airport with the camera and fly over [Arab] villages. The baby would sit on a chair in the plane, one of us would look and the other would take pictures. You had to have two people. Everything was so primitive. Usually I would allow him [Gershon] to look because one had to identify places from above. I would say: “I’m not sure – is this a road or a river?” It is difficult to identify from way above.

BEN-ZE’EV: How high?

KATINKA-PLOTKIN: I don’t know. But [it was] from a height that you could photograph.

BEN-ZE’EV: And whose was the plane?

KATINKA-PLOTKIN: The Hagannah’s. And as we had to take off from a British airport, our excuse was that the baby had asthma and the doctor said that if he will fly high, the air will do him good. We would be asked – “Where will you be flying?” They [the British] would ask Gershon. And he would reply: “It doesn’t matter, wherever the pilot takes us. All we need is height.” So the British would ask Pinye and he wouldn’t know what to say. Sometimes he said: “I’ll fly above Nahalal” [a Jewish rural settlement in the Jezreel Valley].

One time the British officer took Gershon aside and said to him: “I suggest you take another pilot. Your pilot doesn’t know where he’s going. He just flies like that.” But in fact we flew above Arab villages.

BEN-ZE’EV: Would they [the Hagannah] tell you to which villages you should fly?

KATINKA-PLOTKIN: Gershon would come and say: “Today we’re going [to so and so].” He was the contact person.²⁶

Gilia Katinka-Plotkin and Gershon Plotkin were involved in the production of maps from the initial stage of aerial photographing to the final sketched product. Their “office” was in a basement, beneath their apartment block. Katinka-Plotkin:

In this house [where the interview was held], you would go downstairs and it would say on the door “Engineer Me’ir Batz.” Rabinowitz was his name then. His son is now the announcer of the weather forecast. We named the office after his father’s name. He would work there as an engineer. And we would make maps, downstairs, in the basement. We had a secret hiding place in the wall [known as *slik*, to hide the maps].²⁷

Despite impressive attempts to create independent maps with makeshift equipment, the great majority of maps that served the Hagannah and the Palmach were British ones. While some could be purchased, some were stolen and copied. Some copying was done by Katinka-Plotkin, Plotkin, and Yoeli (mentioned earlier) in engineer Batz’s basement office. However, Hillel Birger was not quite satisfied with some of the copying work, as is evident from his interview, which was conducted for the Hagannah Archive in March 1985. Birger:

There was a technical department whose role was to plan fortifications and sketch maps. [Our] maps were bad copies of the Mandate’s Department of Survey’s originals. Those who set high above [the Hagannah officers] thought that this is a big operation. One time Shaul Avigur [a leading Hagannah member who established its intelligence arm] praised these maps. But I was skeptical and once wrote my criticism: I discovered that while making a copy, someone forgot an entire village. In addition, the copier/sketcher did not know what T. F. stands for, so the threshing floors did not appear in any of the villages. It is an important detail in a village and it did not appear at all. I think it was then that I abandoned this method. Especially since you could buy maps and draw on them.²⁸

Zvi German noted that during World War II one could not purchase maps at all. Therefore, when the ban was over in 1945, he (along with many others) hastened to Blumshtein’s shop in Tel Aviv and bought a set of 1:100,000 topographic maps, which he showed me after the interview. At the Hagannah and IDF archives there are hundreds of maps: original British ones, hand-copied ones, and what is known as “sun-copies.”²⁹

The Hagannah needed British maps that were not on sale, and had a wide range of methods to acquire them. Pinhas Yoeli became the head of the technical department of the Hagannah’s intelligence arm (*sherut yedi’ot*) and later the Hagannah map and photographing service (*sherut mapot ve-tzilumim*). In the following passage from my interview with

Yoeli, he begins by explaining the Hagannah's eagerness to obtain topographic maps for military purposes in the mid-1940s, and then gives an example of how it was done.³⁰

YOELI: The assumption was that after the world war, it [Arab–Jewish clashes] would begin again and we must prepare ourselves towards that. My task was to prepare the technical material for a possible confrontation with the Arab armies.

BEN-ZE'EV: Armies, or local?

YOELI: Armies.

BEN-ZE'EV: It was already in vision?

YOELI: Yes because there were ... contingents from Iraq for instance already ... the aim of these ... was to prepare the material necessary for the attack of potential strongholds, of an attack against the Jews. These [potential strongholds] were all villages along the roads ... and the Tegart police stations ... Tegart was a British architect who designed every office in these British police stations ... for instance, the plans for these police stations, various types, about three or four types, were at the Public [Works? Unclear on the tape] Department at the Russian Compound in Jerusalem and there were also some Jews working there. So one or two of them, members of the Hagannah, stayed there after work, and let me in at night. And I was working all night long in order to copy the plans of the Mandate's police stations ... and actually there were attacks on police stations; it was necessary.

Yoeli differs from Zvi German in his understanding of the Hagannah plans. While German argued that the Hagannah was preparing for a confrontation with local forces, Yoeli said that an invasion by the Arab armies was expected. From the range and depth of preparations, it seems that the Hagannah both foresaw the future and molded it. It probably weighed different scenarios, which did not necessarily invalidate the others. One of them was the taking over of British strongholds such as the Tegart police stations, another a possible engagement with Arab armies, and a third fighting local forces.

Yoeli's method of copying maps inside British offices was one of many. Another method is described in an interview with David HaCohen, one of the *yishuv* leaders and a director in Solel Boneh, the largest Jewish construction company. Solel Boneh obtained many of the Mandate building contracts, including those for the Tegart police stations. Thus, HaCohen transferred the plans of the police stations to the Hagannah.³¹

Finally, on the eve of the 1948 war, the Hagannah was intent on occupying the Tel Aviv building of the British Department of Surveys. Earlier, they had learnt that some maps of the future Arab state (as delineated by the UN commission) might be removed from the building,

and decided to act to prevent such a transfer. Yoeli, who later became a professor of cartography, told me how many years after the Mandate terminated, he met one of the British officers who had been stationed in Palestine in 1948.³² The ex-officer was curious about the fate of these missing British maps:

There was an international conference of the International Topographic Association ... It was 10 years ago ... And I was in a reception there, in the bar, and one of the hosts approached me, [and] said "You are professor Yoeli?! I've got to ask you a question: I was commanding officer of a British Survey Company and we got an order very shortly before the end of the Mandate to go to Tel Aviv into [what would become] the Survey of Israel and to take out all the films and the maps and all the field registrations of the time etc. [which pertained to what should become the Arab State] and transfer them to Nablus ..." So he said: "And we came to Tel Aviv, and went into the Survey Department. Nothing was there. Do you know what happened to this material?" I said: "I do, because our secret 'Shin Bet' – our 'Mossad,' was informed of this order of yours, that you should take this all to Nablus, and some days before your date, we took all the material, the Hagannah took all the material out of this 'Beit Hamedidot' [the surveys building] and distributed it among the families of Hagannah members in the town. And after you left," I said to him, "it was collected again and brought back into the Department. It's there now ... including the Arab area, and that's it. And now I invite you to a glass of beer."

The plan to occupy the Department of Surveys had worked, and the Survey of Israel (Merkaz Mipui Yisrael) is still located in its original British building today (2010). In a thesis on the survey's history, its head archivist, Carmela Szancer (2001:5), wrote:

The governmental Department of Surveys has been continuously active for the last eighty years, seventy of them in the same location. The set of rules at the basis of this department was passed in the 1920s and has not undergone any significant changes to this date. The only significant change in this department was with the end of the British Mandate rule in this country and its *transfer* to the government of the State of Israel [my italics].

This chronicle is constructed by Szancer as if the maps, along with their building, were elegantly transferred from one hand to the other. Indeed, although the British administration did not intend to transfer the department to Jewish hands, the Jewish *yishuv* "inherited" it fully in 1948. Yet had the British managed to pass maps to the Arabs, take them back to England, or destroy them so that they would not fall into "local" hands (as was done to some of the documents), the Hagannah would still be in possession of many maps as well as the skill and equipment to produce more. This was not the situation on the Arab side.

Distribution of maps within the Arab constituents

Usage of topographic maps among the Arabs of Palestine seems to have been sparse.³³ The British Department of Surveys employed Arabs, and it is clear that some possessed the knowledge of reading as well as producing maps. However, there was no centralized organization (parallel to the Jewish Hagannah) that encouraged the collection and production of maps. Solel, who worked as a civilian surveyor in Palestine, noted that most of the Arab employees in the Department of Surveys were field surveyors. The Nazareth branch was exceptional in its majority of Arab employees.

Even when Palestinian Arabs prepared for fighting and purchased arms, villagers who fought mainly in their vicinity were not in need of maps, since they knew the local topography well. Zvi German, who was a battalion commander at the outbreak of the 1948 war, and later became a brigade commander, said with regard to Arab booty:

I can tell you that in all the [Arab] villages [that we captured] and from my experience, we would find weapons but I cannot recall any maps. I even remember that when we had a battle in Ramat HaKovesh, among those killed was a Syrian officer who came from Syria to command the local gangs [*sic*]. And we found his documents and everything else that was on him. But there was no map.

During my own interviews with Palestinian refugees, topographic maps were neither shown nor discussed. While pre-1948 documents such as land deeds, diaries, *laisser passer*, or birth certificates had become treasured tokens, “sites of memory” in Pierre Nora’s terms (1989), maps were absent from these collections. The only maps that have become mementos were those drawn by refugees retrospectively, reconstructing their villages as they used to be (Slyomovics 1998:7–9; Davis 2007).

However, the more organized forces on the Arab side, such as Army of the Sacred Jihad (Jaish al-Jihad al-Muqaddas) headed by Abdel Qader al-Husseini, did need maps, as they operated within a relatively large area. Issa Khalil Muhsein (1986:232), Abdel Qader’s biographer, noted that maps of Palestine covered the walls of Abdel Qader’s headquarters in Bir-Zeit. Maps on the walls do not just indicate practical needs; they are also a way to represent oneself as a modern military commander. This image is exemplified through a pair of photographs, capturing Abdel Qader al-Husseini and his men examining a map.³⁴ Both photographs are staged. In one, Abdel Qader and three other men are kneeling and looking at a map. Above them, three armed guards are standing, with another guard standing behind and another lying on the ground and pointing a rifle at a distant point.³⁵

The second photograph has Abdel Qader and Fakhr al-Din sitting on a high rock, armed, and examining a map. Behind them are two armed men gazing at the camera. This photograph is accompanied by a caption that translates as follows: “Issuing the orders, showing the plan to every leader on the map. In the picture the leader Fakhr al-Din, commander of the northern region, receiving instructions on the map (*Isdar al-awamer, tawdih alkhuṭa likul za‘im ‘ala al-kharīta. Fi sura, az-Za‘im Fakher al-Din, qaed al-mintaqa al-shimaliyya, yatalaqa al-ta‘alimat ‘ala al-kharīta*).³⁶ It is evident from these pictures that maps mattered to Abdel Qader, not only for orientation but also as a symbol of a modernized warfare.

Maps were also used by the Arab Liberation Army (Jaish al-Inqadh al-Arabi), headed by Fawzi al-Qawuqji.³⁷ Samir Souqi, the United Press correspondent in Damascus, who met and interviewed Qawuqji in February 1948, published the following in the Egyptian newspaper *al-Ahram*:

In his house there is a special room entered only by trusted people: the room of his aide-de-camp, Mahmoud Al-Rifa'i, a graduate of the Potsdam Military Academy. While we were talking, Taha Al-Hashimi Pasha, whom military experts say is one of the greatest military leaders in the Arab world, entered. Al-Qawuqji asked to be excused and took him to another room. I noticed that Al-Hashimi was carrying several large maps of Palestine.³⁸

There are other indications that al-Qawuqji’s forces used maps, such as a cable from Major-General Safwat, quoted in al-Qawuqji’s memoirs as follows: “The Jaffa garrison is still asking for reinforcement and aid and detailed maps” (al-Qawuqji 1972, part I:56). Indeed, any army that was mobilized throughout the country had to have maps.

The Egyptian forces, which entered Palestine in May 1948, also used maps. One should bear in mind that they had fought side by side with the British in World War II and trained as intelligence officers within the British army. A chart explaining the structure of the Egyptian army was drawn for a 1950s Israeli intelligence report.³⁹ It notes that part of the army “services” included maps and photographs.⁴⁰ The same report includes an Israeli interrogation of a Sudanese army major, commander of a company, who noted that each battalion had intelligence whose role was to supply information, maps, and field guides.⁴¹ In the report there is a collection of Egyptian army photographs taken south of Jerusalem. Among them are three photographs showing what seems like officers standing in a group around a map and discussing it.⁴² The staging of the photographs is similar to that of Abdel Qader al-Husseini’s map photographs.



Fig. 3.1 Abdel Qader al-Husseini and Fakhr ad-Din, in foreground
(Source: The Hagannah Archive)

A set of topographic maps at a scale of 1:100,000 and covering almost the entire area of Palestine was taken as booty by the Jews in 1948 from one of the Arab armies. These maps are British Mandate maps compiled during the 1930s and revised in 1942 and 1945. The maps have additional sketches of what look like regional boundaries. Moreover, highlighted in green circles are indications of Jewish settlements. Some information was added in Arabic such as “bay guard stations,” “old military facilities,” “Palestinian forces military camps,” “electric cables,” and a set of running numbers (whose explanation, it is noted at the edge of the map, is kept on a separate table).⁴³



Fig. 3.2 Abdel Qader al-Husseini and other men looking at a map
(Source: The Hagannah Archive)

Altogether, two salient points arise from the evidence on the Arab use of maps. The first is that among the local fighting forces maps were most likely not in use in 1948. The second is that maps were indeed used by the larger organized forces. Yet their production, use, and circulation among the Arabs can in no way be compared to that of the Hagannah. For over a decade the Hagannah prepared a very large body of cartographic knowledge, accompanied by intelligence information, with emphasis on specific villages and locales. These preparations shed light on the bureaucratized nature of the Jewish *yishuv* and its meticulous preparation for a military conflict.

Summary

What are the issues that surface when one examines the field of cartography during the Mandate's last decade? Shortly after the clashes of 1936–9 the Hagannah policy changed, to an active military strategy rather than a defensive one. Part of this change led to a systematic study of the Arab areas for military purposes, placing an emphasis on the collection and production of maps. In 1938, as a result of the Arab Revolt and World War II, British and Hagannah military interests converged.

Although the British did not intend to do so, the resulting military cooperation led to the upgrading of the military skills of the Zionist community in Palestine.

When the British were less eager to cooperate and share their data, the Hagannah found other ways to obtain cartographic information. It mobilized the Jews who worked for the British, both within government offices (such as in the Department of Surveys or the Public Works Department) and as contractors (such as the director of the Solel Boneh building company). On the eve of the British departure, outright theft was used. All through this period the Hagannah worked toward owning and archiving British maps, sketching additional information on them, enlarging them, and cutting them, thus creating new maps that would fit its needs. In this sense, the *yishuv* and the Hagannah worked within a bureaucratic logic, similar to that of the British government. Moreover, self-production of maps was also common, especially in the years that followed World War II. Maps were drawn based on patrols and observations, as well as through aerial photographs.

Nothing similar was taking place among the Arabs of Palestine. The rural Arab population knew its physical surroundings better than anyone else, but this local knowledge was not documented. It was used for stationing men to protect the villages, for finding routes of retreat or places of refuge, but it had no applicability for larger areas, in a war that covered an entire country. No single body was set up to collect this knowledge, write it down, and coordinate between localities. Those who did use written forms of cartographic knowledge were the more structured forces (such as that of Abdel Qader al-Husseini) and the Arab armies. These armies were influenced by European bureaucratized warfare and prepared cartographic knowledge in advance. In this sense, these forces resembled the Hagannah, except that the latter prepared scrupulously in advance.

The legacy of the Mandate cartographic projects lasted long after the British left. Gavish argued that “the British endowed the population of Palestine with the topographic maps of primarily military implications and significance” (2005:224). This militarization of maps reflected the context in which they were produced. Yet what needs to be spelled out in parallel is that this process was reciprocal. From the moment such maps were produced and circulated, they also molded a reality. Thus, the outline and layout of these maps accentuated principles of control and command by military means. This formative doctrine was one of the components ingrained in the maps of the Survey of Israel in the decades that were to follow.

Part II

Palestinian-Arab Memories in the Making

4 1948 from a Local Point of View

The Palestinian Village of Ijzim

This chapter dwells on the memories of Arab-Palestinian villagers who were uprooted in 1948, juxtaposing them with Israeli army documents written at the time. The oral accounts of the Palestinian refugees describe 1948 as a set of events whose ultimate catastrophic outcome was realized only years later. The series of events that would later be called al-Nakba was at first perceived as a set of local incidents. In the case of the village of Ijzim, on which I focus here, they included occasional clashes on the Haifa–Tel Aviv road, reciprocal kidnapping (Jews by Arabs and Arabs by Jews), and short encounters with soldiers defined as “foreign” – Palestinians from other regions or Iraqis who joined the fighting in May 1948. In these oral testimonies, each event comes across as relatively isolated, hardly ever referred to as being part of “the war.” When the villagers describe how in July 1948 they were forced to flee due to heavy Israeli attacks, they note that at the time their escape was understood as a temporary evacuation until the storm would subside.

The dominant Jewish-Israeli version differs considerably: 1948 is perceived as a civil conflict followed by a full-fledged war culminating in an Israeli victory. However, when one analyzes the documents that were produced by the Jewish fighting forces during the events, one discovers that they often support and complement the Palestinian villagers’ narratives. Compiled together, these army documents form a set of diverse accounts. Written at the height of the 1948 events, these early documents do not constitute a coherent story of a war, nor do they construct it as part of the Israeli national narrative of revival and independence. The construction of a central Zionist national narrative that reduced the multifaceted nature of 1948 came later, and was formed and polished in the years that followed.

This chapter focuses on the local perspective on 1948, before separate and chaotic events collapsed into a simplified, coherent narrative of “a war.” When observing these events through the local lens, one discovers that terms that seemed clear on the macrocosmic level become ambiguous. This includes not only the meaning of “war” but also terms such as “expelled” or “fled,” “negotiations,” and “collaborators.” Because the

sources are rich – both the refugee oral accounts and the army documents – this chapter focuses on the events in a single village, Ijzim, occasionally straying to mention events in nearby villages. The time span considered is from early until late 1948.

Beyond pointing to the similarities between 1948 army documents and the villagers' oral accounts, this chapter dwells on the characteristics of each source. The army documents, like any army documents, maintain the bones without the flesh, mostly avoiding details such as motivations or emotions. The Palestinians, if mentioned, are mostly leaders, while the documents overlook the "common people"; the village tends to be clustered into one whole. In contrast, the Palestinian oral accounts refer to a wider variety of villagers, considering their motivations and roles and setting them within the internal village social dynamics. Beyond these testimonies' role in the restoration of a local history, they "shift the focus inwards, to meaning and subject-response: no longer simply what happened but what did it mean?" (Hynes 1999:208).

In other words, while one aim here is to reconstruct a picture of 1948 in Ijzim, as understood by the villagers and the Jewish fighting forces, the secondary aim is to pay attention to the ex-villagers' memory work. The Palestinian local narration of 1948 becomes a site of reenacting verbally a way of life that no longer exists. It is a continuous attempt to give sense to the events of 1948. It is also an act of mourning, mostly shared with family members, one's peer group, and ex-villagers. Gradually, as the old people pass away, it shifts from being a language of loss and mourning to an act of commemoration, one which in turn contributes to a Palestinian national narrative in the making.

The sources

The two major sources for the material presented here are oral descriptions of the war given me between 1996 and 1998 by villagers who became refugees (whether from Ijzim, known as the Jizmawis, or from neighboring villages) and documents found at the Israel Defense Force Archive (IDFA).¹ The IDFA material comprises officers' reports of attacks and battles, intelligence evaluations, informers' reports, confiscated Arab documents, prisoners' interrogations,² and a UN committee inquiry that included the questioning of the villagers after they had reached the Iraqi lines. Complementary sources include oral testimonies of Israeli soldiers who participated in the fighting in Ijzim and the surrounding area, British documents, and newspaper reports.

What is common to the two main sources – the villagers' accounts and the army documents – is that they derive from people who directly

witnessed these events, and are therefore predominantly first-hand accounts. Needless to say, the distinction between archival sources and the villagers' oral accounts is that the latter are reflections told after fifty years of "remembering." The statement that oral accounts are a reflection does not necessarily suggest that they are unreliable or distorted accounts (Thompson 1978; Samuel and Thompson [eds.] 1990). On the contrary, my argument is that, when critically handled, these memories are indispensable to an understanding of what happened in these villages. The exiled villagers have preserved unique episodes that befell them during the chaotic period of 1948 without much evidence of their sifting among traces for self-promoting or politically useful ones. The oral accounts recall certain actors and explain their motivations. We are told how and why the Jizmawi bus driver took revenge on the Jews, or how the Jizmawi lawyer tried to arbitrate between the village and the Jews. Moreover, the internal village dynamics – interfamilial and interclass tension, male-female division of labor, or the disintegration of the usual social fabric due to the ongoing clashes – become relevant factors in the overall picture of the "war" period. Rather than treating memories as suspect, they should be utilized as templates that project issues that were, and still are, relevant for the villagers (see Wachtel 1986, following Halbwachs).

In contrast to the oral narration, the army documents sketch specific details, often referred to as "hard data," such as the location, date, and timing of each clash. As the Jewish side became more determined to capture the village, there is a proliferation of documents on the means that were used. Hence, the combination of the two dissimilar sources – army documents and oral accounts – provides a fairly coherent story, laden with nuances, of the 1948 events.

Ijzim and its locality

Ijzim was a relatively large and prosperous village located on the slopes of Mount Carmel, 3 kilometers east of the Haifa–Jaffa road. In 1948, following a Jewish attack, its 3,000 inhabitants fled and were never permitted to return. Historically, it is the hometown of the influential al-Madi family who ruled the Haifa coastal region as intermediaries for the Ottomans during the first half of the nineteenth century (Manna' 1986; al-Bash 1998; Yazbak 1998). The al-Madis remained in key political positions through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and owned exceptionally large plots of land. Some family members were sent abroad for higher education, mainly to Beirut and Damascus. Prominent members of the family resided simultaneously in the nearby city of Haifa and in the village. Both in terms of land ownership and in terms of population, Ijzim was the

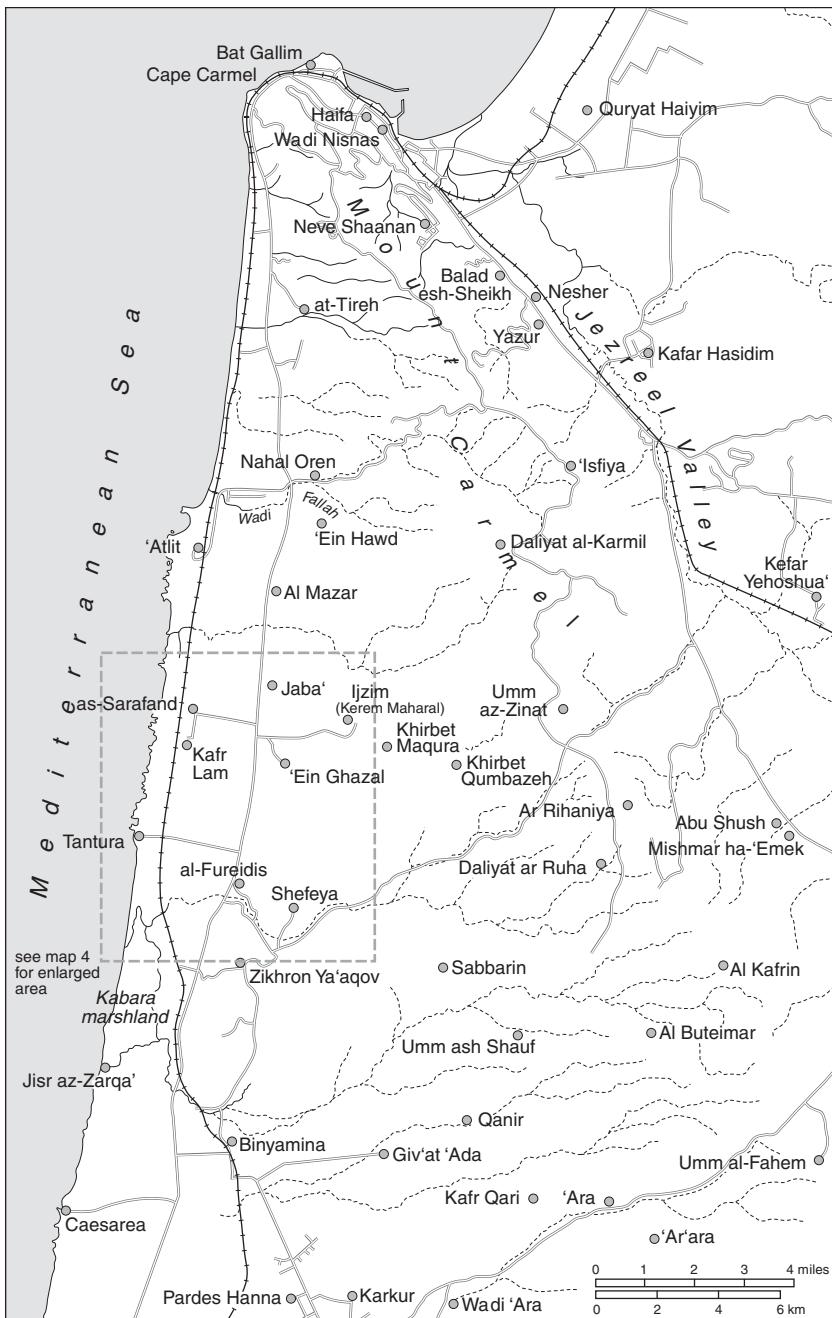
second-largest village in the Haifa district (second only to Tirat Haifa).³ In addition to the village's historical prominence and its particular social composition, Ijzim was chosen as a case study on account of the abundance of documents concerning it kept at the IDFA.

The population of the coastal plain of Mount Carmel, stretching from Caesarea in the south to Haifa in the north, was growing rapidly during the late Ottoman Empire and the Mandate period. The British government invested in the region, carrying out projects such as paving the coastal road at the foot of the Carmel Ridge (completed in the mid-1930s), establishing 'Atlit's salt industry and Haifa's deep port, and erecting army camps, police stations, and prisons. All of those provided working opportunities for the local population. Haifa, 25 kilometers north of Ijzim, was the district's urban center, numbering roughly 140,000 inhabitants at the eve of 1948 (Y. Weiss 2007:20). Economic prosperity came hand in hand with close security control, especially after the 1936–9 Arab Revolt, when the British banned any possession of arms and implemented this policy especially within the Arab sector.

The Jewish army captured Haifa on 21–22 April 1948, following the British withdrawal from parts of the city to camps, which they would leave permanently a few months later. The majority of Haifa's Arabs, numbering roughly 65,000, fled in waves: while half the population escaped before 21 April, the remainder fled when the city fell to the Jews, landing first in Acre, on the northern tip of the Haifa Bay, and later continuing to Lebanon. Only 3,000–6,000 Arabs remained in the city following its conquest (Y. Weiss 2007:20–30). The escalating violence in the city between the two groups and the massacre of Arabs by Jews in the village of Deir Yassin ten days earlier contributed to this mass exodus.

Many of the villages of the Carmel district held out for three months after the fall of Haifa. Ijzim and its two neighboring villages, Jaba' and 'Ein Ghazal, with 1,140 and 2,170 inhabitants respectively,⁴ fought together and were the last Carmel villages to fall, on 26 July. The continuous resistance and steadfastness of the three villages, nicknamed by the Jews "the little triangle," are mentioned in Israeli books on the war.⁵ In a curious irony, we find Palestinian reports quoting the Jewish sources that describe the steadfastness of these villages. For instance, *All That Remains* (W. Khalidi [ed.] 1992:164) cites *Toldot milhemet ha-komemiyut*.

Many Arab villages in the area of Mount Carmel were emptied of their inhabitants. Two Muslim villages, al-Fureidis and Jisr az-Zarqa' (originally 'Arab al-Ghawarneh) remained intact, as well as the two Druze villages, Daliyat al-Karmil and 'Isfiya (which had previous ties with Jewish dignitaries). In some cases, mainly in the small villages such as Kafr Lam and as-Sarafand, the inhabitants fled out of fear before they



Map of Carmel area prior to 1948



Map of Ijzim's surroundings prior to 1948

were attacked; while in others, such as Ijzim, they did not leave until they realized that they had lost the battle.⁶

Early incidents

Abu Ashraf, born in 1927, was very familiar with the war, as he had been actively involved in it, being of fighting age in 1948.⁷

ABU ASHRAF: I'll tell you about the war of Kerem Maharal [the name of the Jewish settlement that was established on the site of Ijzim]. The war of Kerem

Maharal began bit by bit. It began on the main road. People would go, people would pass to Haifa. Haifa was not gone yet [that is, had not yet fallen into Jewish hands]. The war's first incident – there was a Jewish jeep on the road. And there was a bus from Ijzim to Haifa [an Arab bus]. In it were a nurse and a teacher named Tawfiq ... [Abu Ashraf is trying to recall Tawfiq's family name]

UMM ASHRAF [HIS WIFE]: Tawfiq al-'Aref.⁸

ABU ASHRAF [CORRECTING HIS WIFE]: Tawfiq al-Murad, Tawfiq al-Murad.

That jeep was shooting at the bus. It killed that girl [the nurse] and that man, who was educated.

BEN-ZE'EV: Why were they shooting at the bus?

ABU ASHRAF: It was the beginning of the war The bus arrived back at the village in the evening. They said: "This nurse was killed and the man from the al-Madi family." On the next day, this man who owned the bus went [to Haifa]. His name is Sa'id al-Madani. From Ijzim. He went by bus and they saw the jeep on the road. He said to the people on the bus: "Hold on tight" and he ran over that jeep. Killed the people. But the English were still here. They hadn't left yet. And it began – the Jews were shooting buses, and people [the Arabs] were shooting at the Jews.

Abu Ashraf described these two consecutive events on the main road as the first significant war incidents in the area. The Ijzim bus, which collided with the Jewish car, was a memorable event also for Jamil, originally of the village of 'Ein Hawd, 10 kilometers north of Ijzim. Jamil was a boy of ten-and-a-half at the time of this road incident and, as he studied in the village of 'Ein Ghazal, he often rode the bus that connected Ijzim and Haifa, driven by Sa'id al-Madani. The following was his version of the incident in which Sa'id al-Madani ran over the Jewish vehicle:⁹

The early months Once the driver Sa'id al-Madani, I think he used to live in Baghdad ... Perhaps he died. Perhaps he is still alive. Until three or four years ago he was still living. He was the driver of the bus that belonged to Ijzim and he was from Ijzim and he saw a small taxi. Inside it were three or four engineers, political men, I don't know. And he told the people in the bus – just seize your desk tightly. As we say in the airplane – fasten your seat belt. And he used the brakes over the taxi to go down and kill the people there. After that, of course, a trial was held by the English in Haifa and people from at-Tireh surrounded the court to prevent violence After this, and that is funny really, instead of glass windows for his bus, they put in steel windows. Imagine.

It is possible that an event described in the Jewish newspaper *Ha'aretz* on 3 February 1948 relates to the abovementioned road "accident." *Ha'aretz* reported that two Jewish men were killed and one was injured when an Arab bus collided with their small car on the Haifa–Tel Aviv road. One man was a hydraulic engineer; the second was the head of the Hebrew Masonry Committee in the Organization for Home Produce, and the

injured man was a member of the clerks' union.¹⁰ Not surprisingly, the Jewish newspaper named the Jews involved whereas the Jizmawis named the Palestinians. Only the Palestinian nurse on the bus, a woman, remains anonymous.

Whereas Abu Ashraf and Jamil limit themselves to telling the story as part of a somewhat discontinuous historical chronicle, Shafiq added a theory that framed this event within the escalation of the conflict in the Ijzim area. Shafiq, born in 1930 in Ijzim and after 1948 a resident of Haifa, thought that the people of Ijzim would never have chosen to get involved in the fighting since "they were simple farmers who did not own weapons and did not know how to use them." Shafiq, a member of the al-Madi family, reflected on the social classes within the village and related the events at a certain distance from "the simple farmers." Both he and another member of his family were trying to figure out, as they narrated the historical events, what had happened to the village leadership. They deplored the fact that before 1948 the leadership did not invest enough resources in education and in the preservation of the family's property. Under these circumstances, they noted, came the events of 1948. In Shafiq's opinion, two Jewish acts of provocation triggered the lethal "war." One was the kidnapping of seven men who were working in the fields near the main road, and the second was the shooting of Sa'id al-Madani's bus.

Certain aspects are highlighted in the oral narratives on Sa'id al-Madani. Jamil noted that until not long ago al-Madani was still living in Baghdad. Jamil knew this because the refugees of the south Haifa district kept in touch. Furthermore, the story of al-Madani's action had been circulated decades after the war; his act and its significance for the district's villagers did not end in 1948. The narration is part of a commemorative act in which people are transformed into local heroes. In retrospect, these events are perceived as landmarks and framed within the national struggle.

Kidnapping and negotiations

In the spring of 1948 the Israeli army was consolidated, and the clashes along the road intensified. We also find that the army documented the events described by the villagers. Somewhat surprisingly, the two sources tend to complement each other. An Arab informer reported the following to the IDF:

On Thursday, three Arabs from Ijzim were captured by the Jews in the fields of 'Ein Ghazal near the road to Ijzim. One's name is [the name is censored] and the other [the name is censored]. They left the third.

Two weeks ago six Arabs were captured in the fields of Jaba'. Two were released and four have not returned yet.¹¹

There were continuous negotiations and exchanges of prisoners throughout the war. One of the last roadblock events, well remembered by the villagers as well as being thoroughly documented in the army archives, took place on 6 July, three weeks before the village fell. This is the description of the incident as it appears in the army archive:

At 11:15 there was a fierce attack on the [Jewish] transportation on the 'Atlit-Zikhron Road. The attack was with heavy arms and machine guns and came from both sides of the road near Jaba'. The driver of the armored car, which was accompanying sixteen cars, was lightly wounded and two other passengers from the cars were also wounded. All were transferred to a hospital.

At 11:15 a gunnery car arrived on the scene from Tel Aviv with a taxi. While they were near Jaba', three armed Arabs were shooting at them. They replied with small arms. At that time a big convoy arrived from Haifa. It was stopped by heavy fire. A fuel carrier started to burn and blocked the road. The rest of the cars managed to escape to a safe place. It is assumed that some unarmed people jumped off the cars during the attack and hid in the fields of Jaba'.

At 13:15 an armored car was sent by us from 'Atlit to Jaba' and attacked the posts that face the road. There is an effort to find the people who may still be in the fields.¹²

During this assault a few Jews were taken captive. One of them was Perets Velvel Etkes, who is mentioned both in the IDFA documents and in the villagers' oral accounts. Etkes was one of many prisoners, but he became one of the more famous – perhaps because of his post as an engineer in the British Public Works Department in Haifa. Etkes's kidnapping crossed Amin's thoughts while he was telling me about the many cars and trucks that were captured on the road and were brought to the village.¹³

AMIN: I remember one time when the fighters on the road brought a car loaded with poultry.... One time they brought maize. And I remember one time they caught someone named Etkes. He was driving, I think, a motorcycle, and they attacked him and he escaped into the cornfield near Jaba' and they chased him and caught him as a prisoner, that is, he was taken to Ijzim.

Abu Na'im, born in Ijzim in 1936, also remembered Etkes.¹⁴ We met twice at his home, which still resembles the homesteads of the past. In the space adjacent to the house Abu Na'im has a hen-coop, some sheep, and goats.

ABU NA'IM: There was one man named Etkes who was kidnapped. He passed on the coastal road with a car, I think in the area of 'Ein Carmel-Zerufa [the current Hebrew names], I am not sure ... They stopped his car and brought him. His wife was injured. I remember her, a fat woman. She was wounded in

her hand. They made her a bandage from a piece of cloth and brought her. What's this? [I thought to myself]. I saw this woman in this situation, [and felt] uneasy. Two people holding her and she ... her husband, they tied his eyes. So what do they want to do with her? She will die in their hands. And then people were quick, someone mounted a horse and ran to Dalia [Daliyat al-Karmil].¹⁵ He brought people [Druze], they placed her on a second horse and took her. And he [the husband] stayed at Maqura. The headquarters was in Maqura. Where did he stay? With Walid. And who was his guard? My uncle, Murshid ... and I remember, he was the guard and they were in good relations. And I saw how they released him, through negotiations in 'Isfiyyeh.

Walid was a lawyer. Originally from Ijzim, he studied in Damascus and, upon his return, opened an office in Haifa. He owned a large plot of land adjacent to Ijzim from the east, which he turned into a fruitful orchard known as al-Bayyara, located near the spring of Maqura. In 1937, during the Arab Revolt, an attempt to murder him led him to leave for Beirut and return two years later, to discover that the rebels had destroyed his home and trees. He rebuilt his farm, spending weekdays in Haifa practicing law and the weekends in Ijzim. Through his profession he established social ties with British officials as well as with influential Jews. These contacts enable him to serve as a mediator during the war, trying to achieve an agreement between Ijzim and the Hagannah. On the day that Etkes was captured, Walid, who was keeping the captive in his Maqura home near Ijzim, wrote the following letter to a Jewish acquaintance:

To Mr. Dov Ben Alter Ha'adom, Abu Yusuf hello,

I have received your letter today through a man from 'Ein Ghazal regarding the engineer Etkes. Salomon, the lawyer from Haifa, also applied in this matter. Also, Mr. Hayyat of Haifa came and met the elders of Jaba' and promised to release five of the people the Jews captured in 'Atlit. Perhaps by tomorrow the exchange will be over and engineer Etkes will be released. He is in my home, healthy and well and honored as usual with the Arabs.¹⁶

Shafiq, Walid's son, remembered the prisoners vividly:¹⁷

One day, people came to my father and told him that one of the Jews had surrendered and they had shot him. My father said to them that this is no good – whoever surrenders should be placed in captivity. A few days later they brought him prisoners – a truck driver, who later worked as a guard at the income tax office on ha-Namal Street ... He was an elderly man. I do not know if he is still alive ... And a taxi driver who later worked in a clothes warehouse on Herzl Street ... And Etkes and his wife. His wife was injured in her hand and we happened to have guests from Dalia. As we didn't have a doctor, my father said – "What shall I do?" and asked the guests to take her. And they took her, you know, through the mountains ...

The three remained in the house and my mother would make food for them every day.

You know, the Jenin Triangle was under Iraqi army control and they sent Iraqi soldiers to take the prisoners. My father refused. He said to them, "You cannot take them. These are our prisoners. We are going to exchange them for our prisoners that the Jews took. We do not want to give away the prisoners, or else our prisoners will remain there." So they left and did not take them. No one guarded the three prisoners. I used to visit the room where they stayed every day. The driver, I remember, from ha-Namal Street, said to me "Let me escape" and I said to him: "There are too many people for you to be able to escape. They'll catch you and kill you. You cannot." To make the story short, there was an exchange later ... and with the assistance of some Druze, Mrs. Etkes sent a gift to my mother, stockings and perfume and I don't remember what else was in this suitcase.

When Etkes returned from his imprisonment he was questioned by the IDF, and supplied information about the situation in Ijzim, including a description of the Iraqis who had come to take him. The following is an extract from the report that was written by Etkes's interrogator:

On Thursday night, an Iraqi unit with an officer showed up on the estate. The people were well armed and one had a machine gun. They looked very tired as if they had come from afar. Then he [Etkes] discovered they came from 'Arrabeh [a village southwest of Jenin] where the Iraqi headquarters is at the moment. The officer spoke fluent English but Etkes is sure he is not an Englishman.¹⁸ He looks like an Iraqi. The officer questioned him briefly and then said he was about to take him to 'Arrabeh for a thorough interrogation. But after consulting with Walid, he changed his mind and said Etkes would be released if we were to release Ijzim's prisoners. The unit stayed for a short while and then continued to Jaba'.¹⁹

Kopershtock was the name of the truck driver who was imprisoned at Walid's house and who was mentioned by Shafiq. From his imprisonment he sent letters to Ya'aqov Salomon, a Jewish lawyer who was a Hagannah liaison officer in Haifa and a participant in the negotiations with Ijzim. Salomon knew Walid long before the incident, as they were both lawyers in Haifa. The following letter was found in Ya'aqov Salomon's archive in a small envelope that contained other notes from that period:²⁰

15/7/48. Dear Mr. Salomon. I have received your letter and I cannot comprehend why it is taking so long when my head and body are not well ... and I need medical treatment ... and I have nothing here. "Muhammad Effendi" [probably referring to Walid] is willing to set me free if you give him one Arab. You should know that the situation here is very tense and I am liable to pay with my life any minute. Our airplanes dropped many bombs ... and there were many casualties ... They already wanted to set me up [get rid of him], only Muhammad Effendi wouldn't let them. You cannot imagine how critical my situation is. I now write to you clearly and I ask for a clear reply. Then I will know what to do, as I will have no other choice but to escape and risk my life in one hundred percent. I am lost and I find it

difficult to carry on. They are watching me with seventy eyes. Please take everything into consideration. I thank you in advance. Zvi Kupershstock.²¹

On 8 July, while Kupershstock and Etkes were still in Ijzim, there was a Jewish infantry assault on the village, described as a reprisal for the Arab road attack two days earlier. The Jewish soldiers failed to reach the village and were fiercely attacked by the village fighters; their position was surrounded from three directions and they hastily retreated, leaving behind two dead men and taking back with them nine wounded. The Israeli officer who documented the event concluded by saying, among other observations, that “the enemy was quick to get oriented and attack, well commanded with an offensive spirit and tendency to assault.”²² On 10 July Etkes was released, and on 16 July Kupershstock was released as well.²³

Relations with “external” forces

Whereas the local picture reflected both in the documents and the oral accounts is reasonably coherent, there are some discrepancies between the “local world,” as described by the villagers and the army documents, and the public and popular images of 1948 that evolved through the years.

One of the ongoing debates regarding 1948 surrounds the role of the “external forces” – the Arab Alliance Forces (Iraqi, Jordanian, Syrian, and Egyptian) – and the Palestinian mobilized forces such as those organized by Abdel Qader al-Husseini of Jerusalem or Muhammad al-Saffuri of Saffuriyya. The villagers noted that they were reluctant to allow the foreign forces to settle within the village. In an IDFA intelligence report, dated 12 March 1948 (before the major war escalation), we are told that an informer, nicknamed “the lawyer,” says that “Muhammad al-Saffuri’s band left the village of Ijzim and is now in a house near Walid’s orchard. They also moved their ammunition and arms. Outside the house people stand guard with Canary [possibly Canadian] rifles.”²⁴ “The lawyer,” who is most likely Walid himself, as he was the only lawyer in Ijzim at the time, gave more information to the Jews a few days later: a reinforcement of thirty men in addition to al-Saffuri’s men had been sent to Ijzim with a Turkish officer. They said that they had been sent by Abdel Qader al-Husseini, the leader of the fighting forces in the Jerusalem District. The officer and al-Saffuri were in conflict since the Turk was subordinate to al-Saffuri but thought that al-Saffuri knew nothing of military matters. The Turk drew sketches of the areas of the nearby Jewish settlements and with his men dug pits for mines between the Arab village of al-Fureidis and the Jewish settlement of Zikhron Ya‘aqov.²⁵ From both sources we

learn that forces from outside came and went, stayed near the village, and seem to have had problems in communicating among themselves and with the villagers.

Following the fall of Haifa to Jewish forces, the district's villagers were isolated. They could no longer enter Haifa, and during the months of May, June, and July they used Druze intermediaries to transport and sell their agricultural products in the city.²⁶ Another route out of the siege led to the Iraqi forces based in Jenin, 20 kilometers south of Ijzim. The Iraqis entered Palestine with the other Arab Alliance forces on 15 May 1948. Although in some cases these foreign forces were fully engaged in combat, in others their presence seemed more symbolic. In Ijzim, as we shall see, the foreign forces played a minor role, especially when they were most needed.

Even though the official Iraqi rhetoric was strongly pro-Palestinian, the actual Iraqi involvement in the war was limited. Many of the Iraqi officers, and specifically General Jabouri in his memoirs, complained about the lack of orders (*maku awamer* in Iraqi colloquial Arabic) and lack of a clear policy (Tripp 2001).²⁷ As a result of these shortcomings, Iraqi officers at certain localities took personal initiatives. We find correspondence between the local Iraqi and local Israeli officers to settle a dispute concerning the usage of a certain plot of land on the borderline between the Jewish and Iraqi forces, in a place between Ijzim and Jenin. The Iraqi officer sent a letter to the Jewish officer on behalf of the local Arab farmers, who were shot while trying to access their land. He noted that Jews had begun to harvest the Arab crops, and that such a deed has no "military spirit." In order to solve the problem he called for a meeting, to which the two parties should come unarmed.²⁸ This meeting indeed took place. Such local initiatives testify to the general disorderly state of affairs.

However, the Iraqis did provide some assistance to the local Palestinian fighters. We know from the IDFA records that there was a flow of arms and products between the "little triangle" and the area occupied by the Iraqi forces, especially when the little triangle was under siege.²⁹ Abu Ashraf said: "At night time we would go from Ijzim to 'Ara [20 kilometers south of Ijzim]. The Iraqi Army was stationed there. We would go and bring bullets on camels. At night. Past the Jews. I also went a few times." The documents show that the Jewish army knew of the open route through the mountains:

An informer reports Ijzim's fighters have good contacts with the villages of 'Ara and Umm az-Zinat [a village roughly 8 kilometers east of Ijzim]. 'Ara is held by the Iraqis and they have a big force there. Iraqi soldiers visit Ijzim. Last week Ijzim's leaders visited 'Ara and the Iraqi commander notified them that when the truce is over, there will be a general attack on Haifa from the direction of Mishmar

ha-'Emeq by the regular forces, with air and sea forces. He notified them not to allow Arabs into Haifa and to tell the Arabs of Haifa to keep away from it due to the danger.³⁰

The circumstances under which Palestinian villagers left their villages are at the heart of public discussion of the conflict. In the case of the Carmel district, although some inhabitants were evacuated in the early months of fighting, the men of fighting age were encouraged – and even forced – to stay. In at-Tireh, 20 kilometers north of Ijzim, many of the women and children were evacuated by the Jordanian Legion in an organized manner. This protection of the family, and especially the women, was linked to the central role of honor (*sharaf*) in Arab society. A man's honor depends on the prevention of any harm, and especially sexual harm, being inflicted on his female kin. The men therefore felt it necessary to keep the women and girls away from any potential danger, while they remained to fight (see more on this in [Chapter 5](#)). However, in retrospect, some villagers considered the disintegration of families during the war a detrimental factor. In an interview Abu Wisam, once a prominent figure in at-Tireh and the district, mentioned the evacuation of the women and children.³¹ His comment provoked a remark (or was it an accusation?) from Abu Majdi, who was sitting with us and was a child in at-Tireh in 1948:

I have one question to ask, Abu Wisam. The reason that the women and children were sent away and the men remained – what was the planned policy? . . . Was it the politics of the forces from outside or from within? *Ya'ani*, when my mother and my wife left, what was left for me to do?

This comment sparked a debate among the men in the room. The underlying assumption was that the village was much more vulnerable when the circumstances of war did not permit the preservation of the usual social order. Generally, the social fabric of the village was portrayed as rural and traditional, where gender roles were clearly delineated (such as in the village ethnography by Abu-Rashed [1993](#)). The evacuation of the women and children in April 1948 entailed new domestic arrangements – who would cook for the men? Who would do the laundry? Moreover, it was not only the practicalities that posed difficulties; it was the image of the village as a functioning unit that was shattered, even before it fell into Jewish hands.

The presence of the Iraqi army was a new factor intervening in the social order. That may explain the villagers' reluctance to allow the Iraqis to base themselves in the village or to fight on their behalf. However, when the situation became graver (especially from the middle of July), the

Jizmawis called on the Iraqis to join the fighting; and yet this assistance failed to arrive, as Abu Na‘im described:³²

ABU NA‘IM: We used to consult with the Iraqi army. “So what do you think?” we would say. “Carry on” [they would reply]. “We will come next week. Next week.”

BEN-ZE’EV: So they actually forced the men to stay and fight?

ABU NA‘IM: Yes, and they cheated them. They said – “look, do it … carry on fighting, hold on, next week we shall come.” And once there was a battle, in the place where a tower stands today in the mountains of Geva Carmel [Jaba‘], so they called [the men of Ijzim], they had communication, the first communication, [they called] the Iraqi army – “send us reinforcements.” They [the Iraqis] said they’ll send airplanes. Airplanes indeed came, but bombed them.

Abu Na‘im meant that they expected Iraqi planes and discovered that the planes were those of the Jewish forces. They thought the airplanes had come to assist them and therefore they came out to guide and applaud the pilots, thereby enabling the Israeli planes to target the villagers. He was hinting at the fact that the Jews tricked the villagers – the Jews made them think the airplanes were Iraqi and then bombed them. Shafiq described a similar act of deception. An airplane would approach the village but then fly toward the sea and drop a bomb there, as if targeting the Jewish settlement. Then the plane would fly to the mountains to the east and drop a bomb there. When the people of the village came out to hail the Arab plane, a bomb would be dropped on them.

The Jews possibly knew when the villagers were expecting the Iraqi planes because the IDF was monitoring radio transmissions between the Arab ground fighters in Ijzim and the Iraqi forces in Jenin. This may have enabled the Jews to trace the fighters accurately, and may explain Abu Na‘im’s abovementioned story of the bombing in Jaba‘. The following is an intercepted radio transmission between the desperate “little-triangle” fighters and the Iraqi headquarters, dated 21 July, three days before the final attack on the village that led to its fall:

10:40 To Hasan [of Ijzim] (2)

From Madar [assumed by the IDF to be the village representative in Jenin] (1)

1 [Madar]- The Red Cross will reach you today. You must defend as strongly as you can until the Red Cross Committee comes.

2 [Hasan]- When will the committee arrive?

1 [Madar]- It will arrive today. It is on its way to you.

2 [Hasan]- The attack is still fierce.

1 [Madar]- We will inform *ra’s* Khalil. If you wish, you can speak to him.

2 [Hasan]- Let him speak to me.
 1 [Madar]- I'll go and call him.

I have just been making inquiries about you. The committee will arrive in an hour. Stay in your trenches.

2 [Hasan]- [unclear transmission]
 1 [Madar]- Just one hour. The representatives will reach you
 2 - [unclear transmission]
 1 [Madar]- I could not sleep all night. We hear every bomb that falls on you. We have sent a radio warning to the Jews.
 2 [Hasan]- [unclear transmission]
 1 [someone in Jenin]- I am now speaking to you from Jenin. I went there in order to speak on your behalf.
 2 [someone in Ijzim]- *Inshalla* [with God's help] they will look upon it favorably.
 1 [someone in Jenin]- The committee will reach you before the *munadel*
 [fighters]³³ reach you. Musa is in the headquarters in Nablus and takes care of your matters.
 2 [someone in Ijzim]- We have been exposed [to Jewish forces?].³⁴

The villagers still talk of the Iraqi failure to come to their assistance. Their accusations against this foreign military force come from their own experience; it is not just a general accusation against the Arab armies who promised help and failed to supply it. In retrospect, the villagers lament the fact that they might have organized themselves better if they had known how limited was the assistance the Iraqis were willing to offer.

The fall of the village

Among the villages of Mount Carmel, a massacre was known to have taken place in May in the neighboring village of Tantura.³⁵ The story of the massacre traveled fast in the area, and intensified the Jizmawi fear of falling into Jewish hands. By July Ijzim's men were extremely worried, and predominantly trying to defend the village from a series of attacks. Following the road incident on 6 July, an IDF "retaliation attack" took place on 8 July, but the soldiers failed to reach the villages.³⁶ Airplanes were extensively used by the IDF during the last two weeks. The airplanes were not fighters or bombers, but cargo and liaison planes (such as Dakotas and Pipers), from which bombs were dropped by hand. These air raids were something completely new to the villagers, noted Abu Na'im:³⁷

The Jews began to bomb with airplanes. I remember the first time there was a bomb. They were Pipers. It was dusk hour. The first to be killed by the first bomb was my aunt's husband, my mom's sister. And we thought that if you escaped under a tree the plane would not see us.

The air bombings lasted for two weeks. On 12 July at 21:00 planes dropped 420 kilograms of explosives plus incendiary bombs on Ijzim. On 17 July Ijzim was bombed again, and twice on 19 July.³⁸ On 20 July the air-raids preceded an infantry raid: "From 19:15 till 20:10 [20 July] three flying fortresses and one Dakota bombed 'Ein Ghazal, Ijzim and Jaba' ... all together four tons ... the attack of the military police began at 23:00."³⁹ This raid failed to capture the village, and another one was organized a couple of days later, on 24 July at night, this time with a larger force.⁴⁰ The village fell to this attack, which was preceded by an air raid as well.⁴¹ On the night of 25 July Ijzim was bombed again. The instructions to the pilot were as follows: "Enemy forces are concentrated on the hill dome half way between Ijzim and Jaba' and in the village of Ijzim ... Bomb the hilltop between Jaba' and Ijzim with 800 kg. and incendiary bombs between 01:00–02:00 and 08:00 with the same load."⁴² The hilltop was probably empty when it was bombed on the next day as well.⁴³

The second truce between the Arab and Jewish forces had begun on 19 July, but as we see the Jews did not respect the agreement in the case of Ijzim–Jaba'–'Ein Ghazal. The final Jewish attack on Ijzim, under the guise of a police operation, began on the Saturday night (24 July) and continued for two days and nights. On the second evening and night, between 25 and 26 July, the Arab fighters yielded and decided to retreat in a southeasterly direction, to 'Ara and 'Ar'ara, where the Iraqi army was encamped. Abu Da'ud summed up Ijzim's last week:⁴⁴

For seven, eight days [there was bombing and fighting] night and day. That began on the main road. The army, the Hagannah, soldiers, people from Ijzim, 'Ein Ghazal, and Jaba'. One would shoot the other. Then, they [the Arab fighters] were left without arms, they had no bullets. They were about to run away. Walid was among the leaders, officers, and 'Abdallah Zeidan, my uncle, my father's cousin. One [Walid] says let's give up, the other ['Abdallah Zeidan] says no, and one says yes. They fled during Ramadan, in the afternoon, only men, going towards Bat Shlomo.

On another occasion Abu Da'ud tried to justify the flight, noting that one would give up the entire city of Haifa to save one's son's life. Count Bernadotte, the UN mediator, was in Haifa during these crucial days. On 25 July at midday the fighters begged the Iraqis by radio to call him to their rescue, although they also said of Bernadotte in the same radio transmission: "What can we do? They can violate the truce because Count Bernadotte is on their side."⁴⁵ Bernadotte did not interfere, and on the next day Ijzim fell; the transmitter was now being used only for arranging vehicles to be sent to evacuate the women and children.⁴⁶

When the Jewish/Israeli army entered Ijzim, it was practically empty. Six hundred women and children were in nearby Khirbet Qumbazeh,⁴⁷ either waiting for their caravan to leave for Wadi ‘Ara or, as some were too young, old, sick, or injured to walk another 15 kilometers to ‘Ara, they were being prepared to go to Daliyat al-Karmil and ‘Isfiya, only 5 kilometers away.

The hilly escape route to ‘Ara was not safe. When the IDF realized that the villagers were retreating through this route, ambushes were arranged along it, near Wadi Mileh and Qanir,⁴⁸ and roughly sixty people were killed on their way to ‘Ara.⁴⁹ Hajid Had Saleh (the name is probably misspelled in the UN document), an elder of Ijzim, and ‘Ali Mohammed Hanuti, a sheikh of Ijzim, were questioned on 30 July 1948 by UN investigators regarding the circumstances of the fall of the village and the flight. In their joint statement they described what followed the last attack on 25 July:

After these heavy attacks, women and children started for al-Maqura. During the move, women and children were attacked by plane machine gun fire but I could not estimate the casualties because everyone scattered. The men left the village and went back through the mountains to Jenin. The women and children were in the charge of Walid. Most women and children went to ‘Isfiyyeh, Daliyat al-Karmil, ‘Ar‘ara and ‘Ara. The people returned.⁵⁰ Jews stole cattle, sheep and machine-gunned the flocks and people. They stole money from the women. You can still find dead in the mountains. Nobody was allowed to take baggage.⁵¹

Abu Na‘im recalled the day of retreat:⁵²

The people in the front lines were afraid of being caught and killed. They began [escaping]. We were in Maqura – my family. People started passing by. “What happened?” [we asked]. They said – “We cannot hold on.” They just threw down their rifles [saying] – “We have no ammunition, we have no food, we cannot carry on.” Then he came, Walid, and said “Let’s talk, wait a couple of hours.” People did not wait and everyone began . . . one fled, everyone started to flee.

Walid was probably one of the few men to suspect that whoever left would not be able to come back. He chose to stay on his farm in Maqura, yet some years later he was compelled to sell the property to none other than Ya‘aqov Salomon, the Jewish lawyer from Haifa.⁵³

The aftermath

Ma‘oz, a Jewish-Israeli army officer stationed outside the village when it was captured, remembered the scene when he approached the village after

its depopulation. He described the following when we met at his home in Haifa.⁵⁴

There were villages that we would walk into and the houses were barren and poor. Shacks . . . But in this village there were stone houses, streets, two-story houses. You could tell the population here had a different standard of living. It also explained to us why they insisted on staying there. They were surrounded and should have left much earlier.

Reflecting on the villagers' withdrawal, Ma'oz noted:

They sensed something was evolving from all kinds of directions. They did one of the cleverest things they could have done, they simply decided to leave the three villages. I do not know today whether they were given the chance or simply no one paid attention. They walked through one of the valleys, crossed Wadi Milek [Mileh in Arabic] and off to the direction of Umm al-Fahem.

Some elderly people and some women and children were found in the vicinity of the three villages and were transferred by the Jewish forces to the Iraqi lines. Roughly forty bodies were found in two concentrations, behind Ijzim's mosque and near 'Ein Ghazal's school. It was clear that there had not been enough time to bury the dead, and the corpses were covered with a thin layer of earth.⁵⁵

The Arab states filed a complaint to the UN central truce supervision board concerning the Israeli violation of the truce when attacking Ijzim, Jaba', and 'Ein Ghazal. A UN committee investigated the case and found most of the refugees in the Jenin area, in August 1948. From this report we hear that in the case of Ijzim, thirty-two people were reported killed, twenty-five were reported missing, and 4,153 were located.⁵⁶ The villagers who sought refuge at Daliyat al-Karmil were transferred to the Arab lines by the IDF in six buses on 17 August 1948, after they were made to sign a document stating that they were going of their own free will.⁵⁷ Those who evaded the first transfer were "collected" and placed near the border on 23 August⁵⁸ and again, in an operation named "Tie," on 6 October.⁵⁹

The correspondence between the Custodian of Arab Property, the body established by the Jewish state to supervise Palestinian land and goods, and the army testifies that individual soldiers as well as organized army units were the first to plunder Arab possessions. For example, a tractor was taken by the Alexandroni unit just a couple of hours after the army entered the three villages.⁶⁰ Later, Jewish neighbors from the area gathered to "collect" what they could. An IDF report described the following: "In the villages Ijzim and 'Ein Ghazal Jews were seen coming with carts from 'Atlit and the nearby surroundings and looting Arab property."⁶¹

In the autumn of 1948 a few Jizmawi families were permitted to come back from Daliyat al-Karmil and live in Ijzim. They were prevented from returning to their own homes, so they settled in other Jizmawi houses, and most of them had to work on Walid's farm, which was still active in Maqura.⁶² The Israeli minister of minority affairs, Bekhor Shitrit, a personal friend of Walid,⁶³ wrote a letter to General Avner, the head of the military government (*ha-mimshal ha-tzva'i*), to advocate protecting these families and allowing them to remain in Ijzim.⁶⁴ This letter, like other letters found in this file, testifies to the diverging attitudes between the minister and army policy (directed by another ministry).⁶⁵

The Jizmawi families who stayed in Ijzim "shared" it with soldiers and new Jewish immigrants from Czechoslovakia. Abu Na'im described how in the spring of 1949 the army decided to expel the Arab families from the village houses:

ABU NA'IM: One morning the army surrounded our dispersed neighborhood.

They said – "You must move to your *khirbeh* [Maqura]. You have nothing to look for here." We said to the soldiers [whom they personally knew]: "What's this?" They said – "We are sorry, we are just following orders. We know we have eaten with you and sat with you" ...

It wasn't like today, when an officer says something the whole world clamors. He gave the order to get out.

BEN-ZE'EV: And you had no one to turn to in this matter?

ABU NA'IM: No one to turn to. We didn't even know there was police. We didn't know how to reach the police. The world was a closed state – no one knew what was happening in his surroundings.

Such "minor" expulsions occurred throughout 1949, and even later. One reason for these expulsions was to clear areas from any Arab presence and to transform the Arab village sites into Jewish settlements. Along similar lines was the aim to hand Arab property over to existing Jewish settlements. H. Cohen (2000) wrote that 5–10 percent of the Arab inhabitants of the Galilee were still *in situ* at the end of the war and were forced to "move out" only after the war. Morris (1997) described other acts of uprooting: for instance, Ghabsiyya's inhabitants were permitted to return to their village in 1949 and cultivate some of the land, but were expelled again in March 1950.

Although none of Ijzim's inhabitants managed to stay in the village itself, a few remained in its vicinity, at Khirbet Maqura and farther away. Some held on until the 1970s, when they were eventually made to move out. The only one to remain after the 1970s in Maqura was Abu Mazen ('Ali al-Yunis al-Madi), who went through years of lawsuits concerning ownership of his land. He has died, and his children still live in Maqura (2010). The great majority of refugees ended up far from the

village: in Iraq (to which they were taken by the Iraqi crown prince shortly after they arrived in Jenin as refugees in the summer of 1948), Syria, Jordan, and the West Bank.

Concluding remarks

As the story of Ijzim unfolds – Sa‘id al-Madani’s act of revenge, prisoners kidnapped and exchanged, the limited Iraqi assistance, the fall of the village, and the dispersal of its inhabitants – the villagers’ oral accounts and the army documents often complement each other, and sometimes converge. Unlike Kurosawa’s *Rashomon*, the testimonies of the witnesses do not tell a totally different story. Knowing that the army documents were written shortly after the events (within a few hours or days), for internal use (usually being classified as “secret”), it may perhaps be expected that they carry relatively little imprint of the intervention and reconstruction of official state representations. It is more perplexing that the villagers’ narratives are not highly inventive. We should bear in mind that these autobiographical accounts are records of a dramatic (and traumatic) period and that the incidents have left an imprint on those who have lived through them. Many of these events have been reexamined repeatedly after their occurrence, discussed in family settings, and circulated among the dispersed community.

At the same time, the oral sources and the written accounts differ in their “spirit.” The army documents lack a description of distinct people and their characteristics, especially those of “the enemy.” This is due not only to the specific interests of the Israeli army but to the nature and needs of military documentation in general. In contrast, the oral narrative revolves around certain people. There are memorable men such as the bus driver Sa‘id al-Madani or the man who was killed on al-Madani’s bus, Tawfiq al-Murad. These men, through years of story circulation, have become symbols for the dispersed community. In other stories each family has its own protagonist, as when Abu Da‘ud recalls his father’s cousin, ‘Abdallah Zeidan, who rejected the option of surrender. Unlike the army documents, the oral accounts are characterized by an ability to inject life, volume, and an internal logic to the story. In fact, the logic of certain chaotic episodes may continue to unfold long after their occurrence.

The oral accounts are further animated by the naming of places, the inclusion of dialogue (though reconstructed and as such not totally faithful to the original), and exposure of people’s emotions, aims, and calculations. In the discussion regarding the evacuation of at-Tireh’s women and children, we learn of the devastating emotional effect on the men when they were left without their families. After all, it was not only

strategic conditions such as the fall of Haifa that determined the outcome of the war. Rather, it was also the villagers' subjective interpretation of the meaning of such events. The fighters' motivation was impaired when the village's social fabric unraveled. In retrospect, the disintegration of the village, intensified through the months of sporadic fighting, was identified as a major element contributing to its fall.

Looking retrospectively also reveals the gap in viewpoint that divided the rural Arab-Palestinian population from the Jewish one. For the peasants, 1948 was likened to a natural disaster. When Abu Na'im reflected on the fatal hasty escape from Ijzim, he described people thinking of the experience as that of rain or flood:

The feeling was bad but we deceived ourselves, thinking we would be back next week. We did not feel as bad as we should have because we thought we would be back in a week or two. What happened? People imagined this was temporary, as if it was an outcome of rain or flood. We will move for a week and then the flood will be over. This was the feeling that led to this catastrophe.

This image of uprooting as a natural disaster reverberated in later literature. The poet Mu'in Bsisu wrote of the Nakba: "And after the flood, nothing was left of this people or this land but the rope and the peg" (*lam yatrak al-sil ghayer al-habal wa'l-watad min dhalika al-sha'ab aw min dhalika al-balad*).⁶⁶ The localized peasant perspective drew on the available past human experience, and that must have been at the heart of the decision to leave. In contrast, for the army, as for the Jewish soldiers, war was a step toward building a state, and the army records were for the use of the state, and its official archive. Those had a broader horizon than the localized one. Thus, the two sources, the oral rural and the army documents, describe the same space very differently: the Arab space is the village and its surroundings; the Hagannah space is the land as part of the state. This gap of perspective and in aspiration had a crucial effect on the final outcome: after floods, the waters recede; but after war, the conquerors do not necessarily withdraw.

5 Rural Palestinian Women

Witnessing and the Domestic Sphere

This chapter returns to the Palestinian rural setting once more, as in [Chapter 4](#), only this time through a gendered lens, looking into the memories of the women of the Nakba generation. These women, as witnesses to the period, tell us something about the transition from an explicit national project to the messy local and familial stories of exile, of deprivation, and especially of loss. They defy a simplistic chronological and coherent narrative, they respond to the context, they bind past and present, and they give testimony not only by way of speech but by way of reenactment.¹ These feminine narratives have always existed alongside the national story, but the latter always overwhelmed the former. When we draw near to the ground level, the level at which family life is lived, we can go some way toward defying the simplicity of the telescopic national view that still dominates how the rupture of 1948 is recalled and understood.

Let us first look into the usual positioning of Palestinian women's narratives. There is a relatively narrow base of evidence on these women, especially from the first years of exile, and certainly not in any written form. During the revolutionary period of the 1970s women did become more prominent in the public realm, through their participation in the Palestinian organizations and the military apparatus. Class background mattered here: while the camp women gave practical support to the fighters,² women from an educated background were more involved in administration and research ([Peteet 1991](#)).³ Thus, while Palestinian women involved themselves in the national project, they did so according to its norms, focusing on ideology, leadership, and state politics, with little attention to the details of common lives. Rosemary Sayigh, who wrote extensively on this period,⁴ noted that "for nationalists of this period, national history stood over and excluded the local, the gendered and the personal" ([1998b:42](#)).

From the late 1980s academic studies responded to the dominant nationalist agenda by seeking to reveal the local, gendered, and personal Palestinian histories. Memories of Palestinian women, and particularly

those living in Lebanon's refugee camps, became the focus of these studies (Sayigh and Peteet 1986; Peteet 1991; Sayigh 1998a and 2002), and this body of work has constantly expanded (Gorkin and Othman 1996; Slyomovics 1998; Fleischmann 2003; Naguib 2003; M. Rosenfeld 2004; Sayigh 2007). Yet the rural women of the Nakba generation are illiterate, and it is outsiders, both in terms of social class and nationality, who collect and publish their life stories.

This chapter provides a small addition to this corpus of work, by looking into three distinct phenomena. The first is the "negotiation" that takes place between a (still) dominant Palestinian national narrative and the narratives told by women. The second is the effect of the context of transmission on the construction of women's narratives. The third is the role of these women as hushed witnesses. The first topic considers the presence of what can be termed a "metanarrative," consisting of what are often understood to be the basic components of Palestinian history of exile. This metanarrative is a chronological sequel leading from the pre-1948 "Golden Age" of Palestine, often compared to paradise, through the startling disaster of the Nakba and the mass expulsion and dispossession, leading to years of suffering, continuous forced migrations, and a life of poverty in the camps. Like any nationalized tale, it is a reductionist one. When we examine the ways in which women of the Nakba generation tell their own stories of loss, we discover that while some personal versions may comply with it (at the same time adding flesh to the bones), other versions may contradict it and stray into other eras and issues.

The extent of conformity often depends on the context of transmission, which is the second issue discussed in this chapter. Palestinian women tend to favor the family as a site of memory sharing. It is with their families that the women of the Nakba generation feel at ease. In contrast, the setting of an interview with a stranger, particularly the first interview, is understood as more hostile. This is accentuated by the fact that these women do not perceive of themselves as memory agents. This self-perception has been influenced by the norms governing the traditional (albeit varied) patriarchic Palestinian family. The wider implication of this finding is that there is labor division in the transmission of memory, and that women rarely contribute in public to the construction of the Nakba narrative. As a result, their narratives find little resonance in the metanarrative. At the same time, women are agents of transmission for their children. The stories told at home mold these children's perceptions of the past.

These women can be defined as undervalued witnesses. On the one hand, they were "there," in Palestine, and can testify to a way of life

longed for by an entire nation. On the other, they do not enjoy a public position that appreciates their perception and interpretation. Moreover, being illiterate, they are unable to write down their own memoirs. When they do share their oral accounts, these take the form of nonchronological (somewhat involuntary) fragments, triggered by cues encountered in everyday life. These women tell their fragmented tales at home, and are also able to transmit by way of silence – through the objects they use, through habits, or the food they cook and serve. Hence, though the women's narratives are random, and find little public space, they contribute another form of testimony to 1948.

Palestinian families and transmission

Families are central in Arab societies. The extended family is a major socializing agent, a basis for establishing social relations as well as institutions such as political parties. The traditional Arab Muslim family is described as patriarchal, where men control the women, the older members control the younger ones, and the male head of the family oversees the administration and economy of the household (Joseph 1993:459–60). Other characteristics are that it is patrilineal, defined by male ancestry; patrilocal, whereby a young couple is expected to reside with the man's parents; and favoring endogamy, in other words there is preference toward marriage within the lineage, and especially with cousins from the male side. Dwelling tends to be with the extended family (parents, married sons and their families, and single sons and daughters). The above are, of course, generalizations, and each generation, each locale, each family, may stray from this pattern here and there.

Nevertheless, both despite and in light of the mass uprooting, many of these traits are quite evident among Palestinian families. Within these patrilineal, patriarchal, and patrilocal patterns, women are the anchor of the family's daily life – they are mostly at home, responsible for cooking and feeding, raising the children and caring for the elderly. Now in the dusk of their lives, the women of the Nakba generation reflected in their interviews on the events of 1948 as well as on the process of their recollection as it took place within the family setting.

When Maurice Halbwachs sketched what he defined as “les cadres sociaux de la mémoire,” the social groups that construct the individual's memories, the family was inevitably a basic one.⁵ He argued that although families resemble their social milieu, each family develops its distinct logic and tradition, which draw on particular experiences and ensure the family cohesion and continuity (1992:83). This implies that

when Palestinian women shared their recollections within the family setting, it was this setting that gave them their form; memories had to fit into prior familial knowledge and experience and consolidate it. In that sense, the recollections of rural Palestinian women were molded into a family setting and made sense to those who shared the family logic.

We should bear in mind that much of what happens within the family is intricately linked to practice, and involves the body. Family members often talk while preparing food, sharing a meal, clearing the leftovers, tending the garden, putting the children to bed. In other words, family transmission is bound to bodily gestures. Paul Connerton (1989:72) defined memories that surface through such actions as incorporative (in contrast to memories transmitted by way of inscription). Hence, if the memories of Palestinian rural women are constructed within the family setting and are incorporated into its daily habits, they may not make sense outside of this setting. One can say that these are inward-oriented memories rather than outward-oriented ones.

The women, on their part, are hesitant about sharing memories outside of the family setting. The home becomes the sphere available to women to speak of their past. It is there that they hope their logic and worldview will be comprehended. However, even at home there are limitations on what is transmittable and what is less so. Often the children, now adults themselves, feel that they find no resonance in their parents' stories (Ben-Ze'ev 2005). They note that each generational unit went through different experiences and developed its own logic, especially in light of the 1948 exile and the different upbringing.⁶ The women of the Nakba generation are well aware of their children's sense of distance.

While there are tensions surrounding remembrance and transmission between members of different generations, there are also other limitations imposed on speech. Women were, and still are, not encouraged to speak of embarrassing matters pertaining to 1948. One such matter was the bond between sexual assault and honor. According to cultural codes, a man's honor depends on the preservation of the virginity of his unmarried female kin and the sexual exclusivity of the married women (L. Abu-Lughod 1986; Hasso 2000). Indeed, many Palestinians are said to have evacuated their homes in 1948 before the Jewish soldiers arrived, for fear of sexual assaults. If such assaults did happen, they could not be openly discussed (Humphries and Khalili 2007). Women were expected to keep quiet about such topics. To some extent it was also a self-imposed silence, but sometimes women were actively hushed.

Methodology and oral history

My fieldwork among the Palestinian refugees of the three villages – Tirat Haifa, Ijzim, and ‘Ein Hawd (which took place between 1996 and 1998) – was based on social networks and the snowball method. Often, Palestinian families living in Israel referred me to kin living in the West Bank and in Jordan.⁷ I often came accompanied by a family member or a friend. As we entered a home for a first time, we were referred to the elderly men, as they were perceived as knowledgeable in history. When women were present during interviews and discussions, the men dominated. If women spoke, it would be with short sentences and comments. Often, men would give answers to questions addressed to women. At times, when women finally got to tell their story, they would be mocked (see pp. 97–98).

Regrettably, when I embarked on my research, I did not try to elicit the women’s memories as a separate topic. As a result, I only rarely had a chance to talk with women in private. Therefore, I rely here on the large number of studies that have focused on the memories of Palestinian women. Many of these studies relate to the difficulties of access and articulation. Ellen Fleischmann, who collected oral histories of Palestinian women active during the Mandate period, argued that “oral history is not merely a choice of methodology, but rather, in many cases, a decision of whether or not to record their history at all” (1996:351). Indeed, oral history occupies a prominent place in the study of Palestinian women. By declaring that one is collecting oral history, one gains legitimacy to hear the women. If history is preserved for the men and the educated, oral history is perceived as a lighter matter.

Oral history is essential, as Fleischmann notes, because there are no written records of rural Palestinian women. During the Mandate period only a portion of the rural population attended state schools, and their provision was limited (Shepherd 1999). By 1946 only 7.5 percent of Arab village girls attended elementary schools, in contrast roughly 32–54 percent of village boys (Tibawi 1956:228). As a result, the great majority of the women of the Nakba generation are illiterate – roughly 93 percent of the Muslim women and 35 percent of the Christian ones (Ayalon 2004:16). Unlike their more literate male counterparts these women could not publish memoirs, village ethnographies, or write personal diaries or even letters. Therefore, it is not surprising that others recorded the life stories and memories of these women.

Oral history worldwide is understood to be a unique source.⁸ In Jan Vansina’s classic study (1985) oral traditions are a conduit toward the reconstruction of the past within oral societies. Many African societies

“regained” their histories via this method. Oral history is also a pathway to the unrecorded histories of the less privileged segments of societies (Riordon 2004; Bilgen-Reinart 2007). In our case, the collection of oral histories provides a way to give a voice to the women of the Nakba generation in their declining years. In that sense, the narratives of these women are part of a long tradition of salvage anthropology, which has aimed at preserving vanishing cultures.⁹ These women tell us something about a world that was, and is, in danger of disappearing.

We need to be cautious about claiming that through oral history we uncover dormant histories that so far have been marginalized or silenced. The difficulties in doing so are daunting. We should beware of treating the evidence of experience as a fixed entity. These women’s narratives are representations of ongoing processes, whereby they negotiate their own perceptions of the past vis-à-vis those of their husbands, their children, or official institutions. These narratives do not evolve in a vacuum, and are constantly altered within a changing reality.

Having collected oral narratives among Palestinians at Shatila refugee camp in Lebanon, Dianna Allan argued that the narratives were shaped so as to conform to a “nationalist master narrative” (2007:258).¹⁰ Her interviewees tended to reproduce what she termed “official interviews” that had a paradigmatic pattern of narration. The narratives emphasized the common trajectory of collective dispossession, struggle, and aspired return (2007:260). Even when interviewees did not fully adhere to a master narrative, they were still likely to voice parts of it; it echoed in their speech.

At the same time, Allan also observed what many anthropologists encounter: that a changing context of narration can alter the content. The “master narrative” tended to be voiced in public gatherings, to passing researchers, NGO representatives, or diplomats. In the company of family and friends there was less of an inclination to elaborate both on the time of the village prior to 1948 and on the Nakba. When these periods did surface, their narration was of a fragmented nature, often triggered by an external stimulus such as a passing comment, or a smell or taste (Allan 2007:260; Ben-Ze’ev 2004).¹¹

During my own fieldwork in Irbid, Jordan, I discussed the setting of recollections with a group of Palestinian men, gathered in the home of a friend. Firas, born in Irbid’s refugee camp in 1956 to a family from Tirat Haifa, explained that his parents’ generation, and especially his mother, are not willing to tell a story merely for the sake of storytelling. Her stories about the past, about life in Tirat Haifa, would be spurred by triggers occasioned by daily life. As an outcome, it was primarily the family members in her company who were exposed to

such “immediate remembrance.” These remembrances are not part of an orderly tale, but are fragmented anecdotes.

Yet at the same time some women were considered by their families and communities to be talented storytellers, primarily of a semilegendary genre, which differed from what was perceived as history (*ta’rikh*) (Slyomovics 1998:207; Sayigh 2007:137). Thus, when women did feel comfortable about speaking up, they told anecdotes, fragments of stories, tales, and as a result were less inclined to be caught up in a prescribed national pattern of the Nakba story. They had more freedom to express personal experiences. These experiences often reflected the feminine world of birth and child rearing, events associated with daily chores such as fetching spring water or wood or visits to saints’ shrines.

Paradise lost

The magical aura of the pre-1948 village is one of the recurrent themes of the Palestinian master narrative. Because of the disaster and dispossession that followed, the preceding age is constructed as the golden age, the age of innocence, when man and nature were united. Politician and historian ‘Aref al-‘Aref published a seminal book shortly after the Nakba, naming it *Nakbat bayt al-maqdas wa’l-firdus al-mafqud* (Palestine’s disaster and paradise lost). The term Lost Paradise was well received as well as discussed and rejected in memoirs,¹² articles,¹³ films,¹⁴ and fiction.¹⁵ Narratives of Palestine are laden with references to the village’s abundance, the high quality of its vegetables and fruit, and the good eyesight and longevity of the elderly.

This pastoral scene made sense, and could reverberate in the narratives of those refugees originating from the countryside. Halima’s narrative, for instance, was dominated by descriptions of village prosperity. I met Halima, originally from the village of ‘Ein Hawd and residing in Jenin’s refugee camp, shortly after she had returned from the *hajj* – the pilgrimage to Mecca, one of the five pillars of Islam.¹⁶ The palms of her hands were painted with henna, she was dressed in white, and I was offered dates and unsweetened coffee (known as *sade*, meaning bitter), all customs associated with the *hajj*. It was my second visit to Jenin, and as I drew close to the town I was struck by the spring beauty of the fertile valley. The town of Jenin was perched on the slope of an extended hill. Halima’s son, whom I had met before, waited for me at the entrance to town, sparing me the difficulty of finding my way through the narrow alleyways of the refugee camp. When one entered Jenin’s refugee camp, the spacious and verdant atmosphere of the valley was transformed into the crowded and packed surroundings of

a different world. Five years later, during the Second Intifada, Jenin's refugee camp would be partially destroyed by Israeli forces, and the camp would become a symbol of Palestinian resistance.¹⁷ However, when I was visiting in 1997 people were a little hopeful, and were looking forward to a Palestinian state that they believed would slowly materialize.

Halima was born in 1928 in 'Ein Hawd, on the western slopes of Mount Carmel. She fled 'Ein Hawd with her family in 1948 to the village of al-Yamoun near Jenin, where members of her extended family, the Abu al-Heijas, had settled earlier.¹⁸ Due to the war's upheaval her father ended up in Syria, and his family lost contact with him for some years. When her father was rediscovered her mother and siblings moved to Syria, while she spent the next twenty years with her husband's family in al-Yamoun. She then moved to Jenin's refugee camp in the late 1960s.

Halima was not enthusiastic about talking with me. My impression was that she gave her consent to be interviewed because a relative had asked her to do so. Her answers were not only short but were tightly bound to the dominant Palestinian narrative of loss and dispossession. In the narrative performed in front of me – a foreigner and enemy – 'Ein Hawd was paradise lost. This formula certainly could fit into her own biography, since her life was shattered in 1948. She perceived it in terms of before (1948) and after, and the two strongly contrasted with one another. Village life, in Halima's narrative, was characterized by health and wealth, in stark contrast to what came later. Thus, when we were discussing births during the days of the village, she said:

People would rely on God ('alā bāb allāh). There were no accidents. I wish to tell you that every year, when they [British officials] would come to our village to collect the statistics of the living and the dead, they would not find one dead [person].

Halima returned to the theme of birth again, noting that in the days of the village there was no suffering, and today women have trouble becoming pregnant. When I asked her why, she replied: "We were stronger because we had olive oil from our own olives. And when an animal was eaten, we fed them on wheat. And the chickens, we would feed them on wheat. Not like today, when you slaughter a cow you find it was fed on mixed fodder (*robēh*)."¹⁹ At the end of the interview, when I was about to turn off the tape, Halima became more talkative and her monologues grew longer. She wished to add details and to frame her interview so that its beginning and end would fit together. At the start of

the interview she began by characterizing her family: "They follow religion, a deep rooted family ('a'ila 'ariqa), good-hearted (*mis'adin*), patriots (*wataniyin*), who worked, cultivated, ate, and drank from their land." At the end of the interview she returned to the theme of attachment to the land, and elaborated:

HALIMA: Our village is good. On the mountain, it is pleasant to go strolling (*kullha siyahah*). It was wealthy; the wealthiest village. The olives, we would make oil from them. We would pour it [?] and carry it in the days of *kawanin* [the months of October/November].²⁰ We had oil. We had vegetables. All kinds of plums. All kinds of pomegranates. All kinds of grapes. All kinds of olives.

NIHAD (HALIMA'S SON): We were very rich.

HALIMA: The apples were like this [showing us their size with her hands] and the pomegranates . . . the pomegranates, because there were so many, we would make jam (*tatlî*) from them. It was like honey. Oh, the richness in which we lived. The figs were like that [showing us once more]. Each lemon was big. If you went in under the trees, you could not be seen. The figs, they were long, they were long. When we exported figs, it was 50–60 boxes. 100–200 boxes of grapes. 200 boxes of beans and broad beans (*fool*) in big sacks. We were *fellahin* [farmers], *fellahin* we were, and blessed was our village, very blessed (*rîzq*). Our village was rich and happy (*mis'adeh*). You would eat olives like that. Each black olive was like a dried fig (*qutayn*) while it was still on the tree (*tahet imo*) . . .

Listen, in these dwellings, we had a silk tree. Its leaves were that thick [and again, she shows us how thick]. And every "fruit" was so [showing]. If you opened the "fruit," silk came out of it. When the "fruit" was ripe, it turned yellow. Then one would open it . . .

When my father went to the forest (*wa'er*), he would take a knife with him and he would produce a tank of honey.²¹ When he returned it was full. This honey was from bees that collected [honeydew] from the flowers; it was not sugar honey.

The grapes were that long [showing us] and scented.

The good things in our village exist no longer. And my family was a family of farmers. Everyone would sow and plow and our village was very rich. It was greatly blessed. Our village was rich. We had land not only in the plain (*sahel*) but also in the hilly forest (*wa'er*), as far as the boundary of Dalia . . . Our village was very rich (*baladna ghaniyyeh bishakel*).

All of the houses were of stone. Castles. All were of stone.

One can hear the echo of a metanarrative in Halima's description of the long-lost golden age. The village of 'Ein Hawd becomes the site of a bucolic paradise. Her lively descriptions encourage the listener to imagine the sensation of standing under a tree, hidden by its foliage. This impression is intensified by way of contrasting it with the loss and despair brought about by the Nakba.

However, even though Halima's disaster is framed by the collective Nakba, it has a clear personal overtone. In her interview, Halima also spoke of the birth of her first child, a daughter, during the early months of the war, when the women and children were hiding in the forest east of 'Ein Hawd, while the men guarded the village. Yet on 16 July Israel's nascent army conquered 'Ein Hawd, and Halima fled with her kinsmen. Her daughter, who fell sick while they were still hiding near the village, died shortly afterward. Halima returned to this death on three different occasions, mentioning it in brief and speaking of it in a soft voice. Loss, for Halima, was the death of her daughter, the disintegration of her own family, the continuous uprooting, and the vulnerable life in a refugee camp. Hence, even when a master narrative is evident, Halima's own narrative has its own dense texture.

The theme of paradise, abundance, and loss resonated in other interviews with women of Halima's generation, such as that with Salwa. Salwa was born in Tirat Haifa in 1929 and remained in Israel after 1948 along with a small number of families, while the majority of refugees from her village ended up in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan.²² When we met in September 1996, some of her family members were living in the neighborhood of Wadi Nisnas in the city of Haifa, while others dwelt in an isolated hamlet of dilapidated houses located in the mouth of a valley outside Haifa.²³ This was land owned by the family prior to 1948. In 1948 Salwa's father, along with his brothers, decided to move out of the village to their agricultural land, where they felt it was safer. Her father, she explained, had previously served in the Turkish army. He had already experienced the hardship of being far away and barely able to return alive. Therefore in 1948 he decided not to leave, despite the pressure to do so.²⁴

Salwa was the prime interviewee on the occasion of our first meeting, but there were other family members present: her elderly mother (aged eighty-six), a son-in-law, a daughter-in-law, a granddaughter, and a relative from Irbid (Jordan). The recurrent topics of the national meta-narrative came up: she noted that at-Tireh's land extended from the mountains to the sea, and that all land was registered in Turkish records as belonging to the villagers. This declaration was her way of making a legal claim to prove land ownership. This mattered not only to contrast contemporary poverty with past wealth but also as a message to the relatives from Jordan – everyone lost land, including those who managed to stay in Palestine/Israel.²⁵ Before 1948, she noted, her family had owned fifteen Dutch cows which gave milk like water; women were ten times stronger back in the days of the village; her grandfather had a spring ('Ain Umm al-Farraj) and adjacent to it was a public fountain

(*sabil*) for the passers by. The water was clean and cold and wonderful, as if drawn out of a refrigerator, and even better.²⁶ These were Arcadian descriptions, but they related to a world Salwa had actually known.

Beyond the hegemonic narrative

As is evident from the accounts of Halima and Salwa, the theme of paradise lost was more readily offered to outsiders. However, in Salwa's case some of the stories were addressed to others who were present. Interviews within large gatherings were a setting that revealed less familiar ground, primarily due to disagreements between those present. This was exemplified in an interview I conducted in Irbid's refugee camp in March 1998.²⁷ Two elderly men (in their seventies) of Ijzim were the main interviewees, yet a large crowd of people – family and friends – crammed into a single room to hear and watch. At first the two men and the son of one were the main speakers. After a while, two of the older women present, distant kin, intervened. These interventions made the event much livelier. They spoke of the names of land plots around Ijzim (Wadi al-Nahel, Durat al-Qamar, Shana), and the act of naming evoked an aura of magic for those who remembered the places (more on this in Chapter 6). They also related to the wild plants. The women, who felt we had shifted to familiar ground, called out the names – *khubeize* (mallow), *'aqub* (tumble thistle), *maramiyyeh* (sage), *za'atar* (thyme). Similar interjections from the women came when we talked of fetching water from the spring; they were confident to speak of the women's realm.

At times some women took the freedom to diverge from the historical narrative and comment on the present. As we were talking of the available water sources around Ijzim (Limwelha, Maqura, and Biyarat Mahmoud al-Madi) one of the women added the name of the main source – 'Ain al-Balad (literally meaning the village spring) – and then added, "the spring that the Jews filled with dump [after 1948]." I couldn't help thinking that this comment was aimed at me. Health matters were always a favorite topic and, in accordance with the master narrative, the women declared that there was no illness back then, while today everything is polluted. Then one of the women made the following comment: "Those days were the nicest (*akhla*). It was nicest in the time of Palestine, better. But you came and drained it (*shafatu*)."²⁸ While I was usually given courteous hospitality, this was an occasion to publicly reprimand me as an Israeli, although with a twist of humor. Here was a type of speech that went beyond the chronicle; it was a performance as well as a comparison juxtaposing then and now.



Fig. 5.1 View of Irbid's refugee camp, 1 March 1998

Thus, while there are dominant themes that comprise part of the women's narratives, there is also some creative space left for the narrators. Women injected the common themes with their own personal experiences and strayed from the historical chronology by way of commentary. No less important was the context – a new audience triggered a more conservative content. An audience like me, a Jew from Palestine, invited a sardonic commentary. When a closer acquaintance was formed, the recurrent themes were more readily abandoned. Altogether, women seemed to prefer the flow of conversation over an interview that placed them in the spotlight and imposed certain restrictions.

The influence of prior acquaintance was evident in my interview with Umm Samir. Umm Samir, originally of Ijzim, lived in a village in Israel, in a compound of houses, with her husband, some of her children, and her grandchildren, alongside her husband's older brother and his extended family. I visited members of her extended family a couple of times before coming for the purpose of hearing her. My meeting with Umm Samir turned into a large gathering – many family members joined in.²⁸ This was a good chance to encounter different kinds of narrative that ran along gender lines. The family's patriarch, Umm Samir's brother-in-law, was always the first to respond to my questions. Only rarely were Umm Samir and her sister in law Umm



Fig. 5.2 Umm Samir and her sister-in-law, 30 August 1996

Salim given the liberty to talk. However, there were agreed feminine arenas of expertise, such as child bearing and rearing, the preparation of food, knowledge of water sources and stories, relating to graves of holy saints (*maqāmāt*). When we came to discussing one locally famous spring southeast of Ijzim, Maqura, said to be named after a woman bearing this name, Umm Samir elaborated on the practices carried out by a blessed woman at the spring.

UMM SAMIR: Because God loved her dearly, she would do so with her leg [Umm Samir demonstrates]. She would place one leg on top of the other and turn in the air. And ask God to fulfill her wishes.

UMM SAMIR'S SON: Have you seen this?

UMM SAMIR: I did not see it, but my uncle would tell us this, believe me.

UMM SAMIR'S SON: This is *hikāyāt* [fiction tales].

Despite the disbelief, Umm Samir continued: “Perhaps her name was ‘Aisha. She was the wife of Haj ‘Abdallah.” For Umm Samir the woman was real, as were her miracles. Her special channel to the holy was admired and deserved to be told long after the events and despite her son’s mockery. In that sense, she realized that she was telling a story that would make sense to only a few in the audience. To a certain degree she reconstructed the past for herself, and not for the purpose of transmission. Giving witness here was adhering to her worldview even when

it was neither an acceptable historical narrative for her kin nor part of the master narrative.

I now wish to turn to a third form of narration. If the first type of the women's narratives adhered to the nationalized form, and the second type was anecdotal in character, the third is the most remote from the master narrative. It is a form that speaks in the first person singular and is about significant moments for the self. It is this kind of individualized narrative that tends to remain outside of public memory. Some of the stories that came up during interviews concerned the self, one's life stages, and the life cycle as coming to a close. One such example is a certain episode told to me by Amina, aged sixty, in her home in Irbid's refugee camp, the second time we met, in the spring of 1997.²⁹ Amina's son was sitting with us through most of the interview, as was a friend of mine, a young Palestinian man living in Irbid.

As we were approaching the end of the interview, I asked Amina whether she had gone back to visit 'Ein Hawd since 1948, when she was a girl of ten. She said she went twice, once in the 1970s and the second time in 1995, when they stayed with her husband's family in the new village of 'Ein Hawd. Unaware of the significance and meaning of this last visit, I thanked her for the interview, and was about to turn off the tape when she started to speak again.

AMINA: They took us to the sea.

BEN-ZE'EV: To Haifa?

AMINA: 'Atlit [the beach closest to 'Ein Hawd]. Yes, I sat on the seashore (*jamb ash-shatt*) and a wave approached ... me and overcame me, and retreated, and I still sat there. And the waves approached me and broke over me and I was still sitting. And they [the relatives] were shouting at me, and I still sat there.

BEN-ZE'EV: Did you go swimming?

AMINA: No, I was just sitting. I did not swim. I was just hoping to go and watch the sea.

BEN-ZE'EV: When you were small, would you go to the sea?

AMINA: No, I never went. I was afraid when I was small. They would go but I would not and it stayed in my thought that I should go to the sea and see it until three years ago when the day came and my brothers-in-law went and took us. We went in the morning, and they said the sea is not quiet (*bkhabet*) and not good. So we went to a park in 'Atlit and we ate lunch there and in the afternoon, after we had eaten, we went down to the beach. We were sitting on the beach for a while, and with us were my son and his children ... We went and we sat and my son and his cousin pulled their pants up and went to the sea, and I started shouting at them to return, so that they would not drown in the sea; so that they [the brothers-in-law] would not say that they brought them and the son drowned. I shouted at them to return. And when I managed to make them come back, my leg sank in the sea and I fell. They

said to me: “Stand up, stand up,” but I wouldn’t and I remained sitting on the sea, and the wave approached me and retreated. My brother-in-law and his daughter came to pull me up so I grabbed them and made them sit down as well till they became wet and soaked with water. Then, we left.

BEN-ZE’EV: You were like a child.

AMINA: Yes. This was my life’s hope to go and see the sea.

Amina does more than use her eyesight and watch ‘Ein Hawd’s sea, the sea of her childhood. She sinks herself into it, even if initially involuntarily, mobilizing all of her senses, and she imposes the same total experience on her relatives who come to her rescue. Her story of a temporary return and fulfillment of a long-awaited event, bathing, is remote from the national discourse that stresses the permanent return – *al-‘Awda*, – as part of the liberation of Palestine. Had the interview been cut a little shorter, perhaps Amina would not have come to speak of it at all. Her experience, a bodily sensation, is not easy to explain to others. Amina was recalling an episode she doubted would be of significance to others. Nevertheless, despite the small audience – or possibly because of it – she delivered her subtle message and described what remembering Palestine meant for her.

Discussion: the subtle witness

Being a witness, according to the *Oxford Dictionary*, has meanings often associated with the legal realm. Witnesses are those who have knowledge, understanding, or wisdom; we know that they experienced an event but we do not necessarily utilize their knowledge of it. Witnesses are also those who hold an official or semiofficial role. They are those “who give evidence in relation to matters of fact under inquiry.” To be a witness according to the latter definition, there ought to be public interest, and one should be installed as a witness and be willing to give testimony. A third meaning of witness is associated with the religious: A witness is the “one who testifies for the Christian faith, especially by death.”

What kind of witnesses are Amina and her fellow generation of women? Do they influence the remembrance of Palestine sixty years on? As we have seen, there is little public space for the narration of these women. They are not perceived – by men or women – as experts on the past; they operate within patriarchal family norms; they often censor themselves; and when they choose to share recollections, they do it mostly within the family setting. These women can hardly qualify as public or legal witnesses.

Yet there is a type of witnessing, defined by Avishai Margalit (2002) as the moral witness, with which these women share some traits. The

moral witness is someone who has experienced evil first hand, has the courage to speak up, and hopes that there is someone out there who would listen. The moral witness is essential for the preservation of painful memory as experienced “from within.” Jay Winter (2006) qualified Margalit’s model by arguing that a moral witness operates within a changing context and in accordance with it; much of what the witness has to say is in response to other versions of the same event. Moral witnesses are stirred into speaking by immoral witnesses: those whom they see as lying about the past. In the case of my own encounters with the Palestinian refugees in general, and with the women in particular, it was evident that the immoral witnesses were the Zionists. For Palestinians, the Zionists distorted the entire meaning of 1948. As I was understood as a Zionist emissary, in one way or the other, the encounter called for a witness who would set the record straight.

These women were acquainted with different narratives of the Nakba – official versions, local ones, men’s versions – but they also had their own truths, which drew on everyday experiences, on their intimate knowledge of foodstuffs, plants, springs, or holy saints’ shrines. Unlike the self-assurance characterizing the moral witnesses, they were rarely in a public position to speak up. Their way of bestowing the truth was curbed and indirect. They tended to evoke recollections in the company of family members, and only when the occasion triggered such recall. Their fragmented testimonies were oral and ingrained into daily activities such as the food they served and the language they used. They were testimonies that incorporated the past into the present. To borrow a term from another context, these women were living memorials (Shamgar-Handelman 1986).

Living memorials are not frozen in time, but rather move along life stages. While the voice of the witness tends to be sanctified as an ultimate truth, the narratives of these women were fluid – they changed over time, were negotiated against other versions, and were maneuvered according to the setting. We can easily doubt that the British never collected the names of the dead in ‘Ein Hawd, as Halima noted. Nor can we assume that all of the land of at-Tireh was registered from the Turkish period, as we know that a bureaucratized land registration was carried out only in the British period. However, from these declarations we can deduce something about the women’s perceptions and of their audience. While much of the literature on memory is preoccupied with reliability, in this chapter once more we uncover another partial truth. What is essential about the moral witness’s testimony is that it is another subjective truth, imbedded in personal experience, narratives of which change over time.

6 Underground Memories

Collecting Traces of the Palestinian Past

This chapter is about Palestinian cultural practices of collecting traces of the past. These practices are of many kinds. Some displaced Palestinians return to their villages to sweep away the detritus covering the objects and structures in which they formerly lived. A second form of collection is retrieval of soil, fragments, or other objects for placement in the homes these people built after their expulsion from their native villages. At times such objects are displayed in their new homes in an effort to transport into the present the meaning of their former lives. Bits of soil can be used to invest current practices with the magical properties of the lost village. Naming, too, has its role in this search for vanished time. The erasure of Arabic names and their replacement by Hebrew names can be reversed. The act of naming always has magical properties attached to it, and the words used by refugees to capture the texture of their former lives always include place names.

How different is this cultural practice of collection from the narratives that emerge in state institutions such as museums, archeological sites, and other political projects associated with the Hebraization of Arab place names? Instead of “collecting like a state,” to paraphrase James Scott (1998), these Palestinian refugees seek the material culture of métis. Métis is practical, experiential, and local knowledge. It is the wisdom of those whose everyday life is at the center of knowledge and practice, as compared to the outsiders who operate according to universal assumptions and laws. Palestinian preservation of objects and names associated with métis knowledge, perhaps best called “métis fragments,” is a way to counter the dissolution of this knowledge and to retain a vital link between their past and their future. Hence, the collecting practice of displaced people forms a subversive art, an art of resistance to domination, similar to the one described by James Scott in his earlier book *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* (1990). Scott opens his discussion with an Ethiopian proverb that summarizes this form of dissent: “When the great lord passes the wise peasant bows deeply and silently farts.” The art of subversive commemoration has profound implications for those who have lost direct contact with villages their families had inhabited for centuries.

Landscapes and memories

Landscapes are not merely a natural environment “out there,” relics of a primordial, prehuman, age. Landscapes, for those who engage with them, are combinations of the natural and the cultural, and the two are inseparable (Tuan 1977; Cosgrove 1989). Henry David Thoreau, eager to discover an untouched wilderness, was also well aware of the limits of this goal, noting: “It is in vain to dream of a wilderness distant from ourselves. There is none such. It is the bog in our brains and bowels, the primitive vigor of Nature in us that inspires that dream.”¹ Simon Schama quoted this passage when seeking to refute purist environmentalism and shatter the romantic veneration of woods and waterways. He argued that if one, metaphorically, scratches the surface, what seemed at first glance like an arcadia holds shady human pasts. And, as we shall see, such prodding of the landscape is neither the monopoly of state nor of academics; laymen do it with no less passion.

The multifaceted nature of landscapes was discussed nearly a century ago by the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877–1945). Halbwachs (1941) queried the ways specific pasts are entrenched in the terrain and are “extracted” from it. Among his works is a study of pilgrims to the Holy Land, who evoked different images and sites relating to Jesus according to the scriptures with which they were acquainted. Through holy revelations – firsthand witnessing on the hallowed grounds – the pilgrims who roamed the land established sanctified identifications – figments of their imagination. In these acts, a chosen past was made present upon the landscape. Such a “discovery” of a landscape, according to Halbwachs, was a social act, an outcome of individuals’ bonds within specific social groups. His argument was that each group constructed and fed on specific components within the landscape. While Christian pilgrims “discovered” their holy land a thousand years after Christ, Palestinian pilgrims recreate their childhood and adolescence at the site of their villages.

Taking this conceptualization a step further, Henri Lefebvre argued that each landscape “holds” endless potential interpretations: “How many maps, in the descriptive or geographical sense, might be needed to deal exhaustively with a given space, to code and decode all its meanings and contents? It is doubtful whether a finite number can ever be given in answer to this sort of question” (Lefebvre [1974] 1991:85). Postpositivist geographers and cartographers, influenced by such approaches, argued that spaces are necessarily sites of competition between alternating depictions (Monmonier 1991; Wood 1992a, 1992b; Yaeger [ed.] 1996; Harley 2001; A. Smith 2003).

Yet apart from acting as a map, space is also a structure, or an “armor” (in Halbwachsian terms), offering a sense of endurance, defiance, and persistence. Halbwachs wrote that a “group not only transforms the space into which it has been inserted, but also yields and adapts to its physical surroundings. It becomes enclosed within the framework it has built” (Halbwachs 1950:132), and does so through métis (Scott 1998). This observation sets a limit to the Lefebvrian argument that spatial decoding is infinite; spatial decoding is diverse, yet once it is formed it operates within contours relating to a particular group of people. Once there is periodic pilgrimage to the demolished site of a Palestinian village, and once the central remains are socially specified (through an emphasis on particular points such as a large sycamore tree or the surviving mosque), narratives concerning these remains dominate subsequent forms of village remembrance. Memories become bound to available features, objects, and relics, and a set of rites develops around them.

For the uprooted Palestinian villagers the village land is not merely symbolic. It used to be their livelihood, and uprooting meant the loss of a peasant way of life, converting a farmer into a landless manual worker, someone without the standing or status appropriate to a landowner. The return visits bring to life their agriculture and herding background.² The words that are used for the land are *al-ard* (the land), *at-turāb* (the soil), or simply the place name, often pertaining to very specific plots and features. It is more unusual to encounter the usage of abstract terms such as *al-ard al-muqadasa* (the holy land) or *al-watan* (the homeland). Halbwachs (1992:65) noted with regard to peasant life that “It is . . . quite natural that the family and the soil remain closely linked to each other in common thought.” When Palestinian villagers remember through the landscape, they perform the rites within their own specific landscapes: their locale, their village, the ground where their home used to stand, the tree from which they used to eat. These rites bear the character of a pilgrimage.

Now that I have set the terms of the analysis to come, let us consider the practice of return as pilgrimage. The following sections discuss three specific domains in which such practices flourish. There is the domain of sifting through the remains of a village – a kind of personal archeology; there is the way people recover personal objects or soil and bring them home; and there is the practice of reconstructing the essence of village life through the power of names and naming.

Return as pilgrimage

A pilgrimage, noted Victor Turner (1974), is a journey to a sacred place in the periphery, temporarily transformed in the eye of the pilgrim into a

center. The pilgrim, disengaging from daily tasks, goes through a rite of passage. The key to its intermediate stage is a state of liminality, when the pilgrim is at a threshold, leaving where he/she used to be, and knowing that upon his/her return he/she will be different. Pilgrimage is linked to the dead and to graves. It has been questioned whether Turner's generalizations can be applied universally (Eade and Sallnow [eds.] 1991), yet some of his observations regarding pilgrimage find resonance in Palestinians' return visits to their villages.

The Palestinian return visit is not merely a trip or an outing. Rather, it is understood as a journey by its participants; it ought to be difficult, which is what distinguishes it from mere tourism. On the one hand, it is a journey to a periphery, because the village is no longer inhabited (by Palestinians); yet on the other, it is an imaginary center – the place of birth and origin. Palestinian pilgrimage is mostly to a rural landscape, yet it also occurs in cities and towns (such as West Jerusalem, 'Akka [Acre], Haifa, Yaffa [Jaffa], Lyd [Lydda], or Ramle). The rediscovered site, especially in the rural setting, is often a landscape once tamed that has grown wild. And, as Turner noted (1974:215), when one grows closer to the demolished village, the route becomes increasingly sacred.³

The practices and mini-rituals carried out at the village further resemble a pilgrimage: They breach the usual sense of order, causing emotional turmoil: sadness and mourning, but also excitement and elation. They consist of specific bodily practices and performances. The refugees, mostly in the company of family members, roam through the ruins, uncover the remains of walls, fences, and outdoor ovens, pray a solitary prayer, sit jointly on the ground to share a meal, collect and eat the local plants, and attend to the decaying graves. Moreover, they take this embodied experience back home by collecting earth (especially those who reside far away) and exhibiting it, picking wild herbs, mushrooms, and fruit, often preparing dishes with those items and distributing them among family and friends.⁴ At times, the visit is recorded in photographs or as a video film that is shown back home, a screening that tends to attract a wide audience and trigger lament and disagreements.

In his fiction masterwork *Bab al-Shams*, based on an extensive acquaintance with the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, Elias Khoury dedicates many pages to a Palestinian return visit carried out by Umm Hassan, an old woman originally from the Galilee village of al-Kweikat.⁵ The storyteller tells us that during the visit she was filmed by her brother's son:

He made the camera roam over the house and around the land and the olive orchard. But it's a beautiful tape, made up of lots of snapshots joined together. I'd rather he'd done a panorama, but never mind, we can imagine the scene as we



Fig. 6.1 Abu Jum‘ah and daughter picking *za‘arour*, October 1997

watch. We’ve become a video nation. Should I be watching the tape every night and weeping and dying, or should I be filming you and turning you into a video that can go the round of the houses? (Khoury 2005:102–3)

When the family setting is photographed, Bourdieu (1990:19) argued, the photographer participates in the celebratory function to immortalize the family’s high points. Yet here the high point seems to be the lowest, a family setting in close-up, emptied of its dwellers.

The return visit is dominated by a sense of cyclical time – it is a pilgrimage to find the familiar. Therefore, the English grammatical prefix form “re” is appropriate to describe the practices: a re-turn, re-visit, re-embodiment, re-enactment, and re-insistence (that, if united, informs resistance). Because the pilgrimage is cyclical, there is also a cumulative effect. While there are memories from different times prior to 1948, there are also memories of previous return visits that are incorporated. Although there are cyclical returns, the village may alter dramatically from one visit to the other.

Most of the pre-1948 Arab physical landscape went through intense transformation under the rapid modernization and development schemes of the State of Israel. What used to be a Palestinian village may now be ruined houses, piles of masonry stones covered by wild plants or the

Jewish National Fund forests. Moreover, the landscape is everchanging, when Jewish neighborhoods, roads, and factories are literally built on top of the Arab sites.⁶ During return visits the Palestinian refugees attempt to re-cover the hidden Arab landscape. Laila 'Allush, a Palestinian born in Israel in 1948, relates to this in a poem published in 1992 entitled "The path of affection," describing how she manages to see the "old land" – the pre-1948 one – despite the vast changes:

This Land is still the old land
despite pawned trees on the hillsides
despite green clouds and fertilized plants
and water sprinklers spinning so efficiently
On the startling road seized from the throat of new accounts
the trees were smiling at me with Arab affection
In the land I felt an apology for my father's wounds
and on all the bridges,
the shape of my Arab face
echoed there in the tall poplar trees,
in the winding rings of smoke.
Everything in Arabic still, despite the change of language
despite the huge trucks, and foreign tractors.
Each poplar and the orange grove of my ancestors
laughed to me, my God, with Arab affection.⁷

'Allush mentions her father in the poem. His generation, referred to among Palestinians as the Nakba generation (*jil al-Nakba*), is synonymous with the tragedy of the Nakba and its severest wounds. The memory of their pre-1948 world is imparted to their children along with the pain. For the Nakba generation, the old obliterated home remains the significant home. When I visited Ijzim with Wassim and his daughter Taghrid on 30 October 1997, Wassim (born in 1929) noted that he would rather live in a tent in Ijzim than in a castle elsewhere.⁸ Taghrid, his twenty-eight-year-old daughter, said that she would not do it. But she too was attached to the ruins, and knew much about Ijzim through her father. As a girl, her father often took her to Ijzim, telling her the local jokes, the folklore tales, and describing some of the historical events that took place there.

Taghrid's childhood and her coming of age were molded through her father's world and their return visits. However, other members of her generation kept away. The importance and weight of the return visit was made clear when Jamal, the son of an at-Tireh refugee, described to me in July 1998 during a visit to Irbid, Jordan, why he abstained from visiting at-Tireh with his father.⁹ After the 1967 war Jamal's father, Abu 'Aref, the owner of a butchery and bar in the center of Irbid, renewed his contacts with family members who had remained in Haifa, and visited them as

often as he could.¹⁰ As at-Tireh is close to Haifa, he visited it whenever possible. On one of his visits to Palestine he was joined by his son Jamal, then an English teacher in the southern Jordanian town of Ma'an. When Abu 'Aref declared one morning that he was going to walk to the ruins of his village, Jamal decided to stay behind, describing the event as follows:¹¹

I spent one night in Wadi Siah [on the northern edge of at-Tireh's ruins, where some of the family members still live in a small hamlet] and in the morning my dad and my sister said that they are going to visit at-Tireh. And I said – “Well, you want to go, go, but I have to go somewhere else.” I didn’t go there maybe because I didn’t want to feel too much related to it.

... [My dad] was crying there, [saying]: “We used to go from here riding a donkey and bring some things from the fields and go back and come back.” I said, “Well, I’m not going.” I just told them “Go” and they did that. I didn’t want to see my father in pain.

It was clear to Jamal that an outing to at-Tireh was not a light-hearted day trip. This was not tourism, but pilgrimage to a site his family mourned. Although it was not the first time that Abu 'Aref returned to see his village remains, it was still bound to have an emotional bearing, a heavy weight, which Jamal wanted to avoid.

For Abu 'Aref and his son Jamal, the return visit was a rare occasion – traveling from Jordan was expensive and difficult. For Wassim and his daughter Taghrid it had become part of the mundane, as the family had lived in nearby Haifa since 1948. Refugees like Wassim, defined as the “internally displaced,” were uprooted in 1948 yet remained within the boundaries of Israel.¹² Since their current places of residence are often located near their villages of origin, they could – and did – go on return visits on a regular basis. In contrast, most Palestinian refugees live outside of Israel, either in the Occupied Territories or in other Arab states. After 1967 and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank many came for visits, both from the Occupied Territories and Jordan, as well as fewer from other Arab states (after having obtained temporary travel documents to Israel). For this group the visits were relatively rare and exceptionally memorable. In the last two decades very few of these Palestinians have managed to visit their demolished villages, as free movement into Israel for men and women from the West Bank came to an end in the 1990s (following the Oslo Agreements), and especially after the outbreak of the Second Intifada in October 2000. Another relatively large category of Palestinian refugees is those who have been naturalized in states outside the Middle East, especially in Europe and the Americas. Access to the village varies considerably between these groups, yet pilgrimages are salient to all. Setting off to visit the old village site is a search for some reconciliation, where the old home and family relations are temporarily

reimagined. For short, ephemeral moments, the encounter with the “old” landscape seems to erase the time that has passed.¹³

The activities that take place at the village site can be divided into two types. One is a relatively passive interaction, whereby merely being at the site evokes memories. But very often this is accompanied by another, more active, reaching-out interaction with the landscape. The features of the old village are something to engage with; they are there to recover and transform. Before delving into the active exploration of the village, let us describe the relatively passive interaction first.

One spring morning I joined Haj ‘Abdallah, his wife, daughter (in her twenties), and granddaughter (two years old) on a visit to their village of origin, ‘Ein Hawd.¹⁴ Having been born in 1942, ‘Abdallah had scant memories of pre-1948 village life. On the way he recounted his recent *hajj* to Mecca, quoted Qur’anic verses, described Jabal ‘Arafat, part of the *hajj* trail, and discussed Abraham’s sacrifice of Ishmael. Inadvertently, he was creating a parallel between the *hajj* and the journey to ‘Ein Hawd. When we had arrived, we walked through the village houses, which are still intact, having been turned into a Jewish artists’ village (Slyomovics 1998). We passed near ‘Abdallah’s family home, their meeting place and guest house (*madafeh*), the village olive press, and other houses, some identified by ‘Abdallah according to their pre-1948 owners. Near an old stone fence ‘Abdallah recalled one of his early memories: how during a game his cousin was bitten by a snake.

After much strolling, we sat down under some pines at the edge of the village, to eat lunch. Later, ‘Abdallah pulled out his small velvet prayer mat, distanced himself, and prayed. After the prayer, still sitting under the pines that overlooked the old cemetery, he narrated the story of his grandmother’s burial in ‘Ein Hawd’s cemetery, despite the fact that she died after the depopulation of the village. The family was given an official permit to bury her in ‘Ein Hawd. Seeing the Arab funeral, one of the new Jewish inhabitants called the police. A policeman came, but since the burial document was valid he could not halt the rite. For ‘Abdallah it was a minor act of resistance. He also described how he and his family would often come to the same cemetery to the grave of his father. On one such occasion they discovered that someone had smashed the gravestone. These stories both revived the past and sharpened the sense of loss.

The village, which for the pilgrims had become imbued with this sacred aura, is cloaked in meaning through religious traditions, primarily within Islam.¹⁵ The *hajj* – the pilgrimage to Mecca – is one of the five pillars of Islam. Every Muslim is expected to perform it in his/her lifetime, if possible. As a parallel was created between the pilgrimage to the village and the *hajj*, it is not surprising that ‘Abdallah recounted his *hajj* stories on

the way to visit ‘Ein Hawd. Palestinian researcher Randa Farah (2003) described how a woman refugee from the village of Saris (west of Jerusalem), who lived in Jordan, decided to go on pilgrimage to Mecca and Saris together.

Another type of Muslim pilgrimage is the *ziyāra* (pl. *ziyārāt*). Popular throughout the Muslim world, including Palestine, the *ziyāra* is a pilgrimage to a holy place, tomb, or shrine. As many demolished Palestinian villages have holy shrines in their vicinity, the rite of return and the *ziyāra* often converge.¹⁶ The pilgrimage is marked by prayers to the saint to aid individuals or families in their material or spiritual lives. It is likely that both the *hajj* and the *ziyāra* influence the inclination to construct the return visit as pilgrimage. While the *hajj* is obligatory according to mainstream Islam, the *ziyāra* is associated with popular religion. The two enable different experiences of the sacred, one emanating from formal religion and the other from its folk manifestations. The voyage to the demolished village borrows from both.

In search of traces of the past

While so far we have dealt with the phenomenon of pilgrimage, the next three subsections will dwell on specific forms of rediscovering and collecting traces of the past. The practice among Palestinians of collecting remains of the past during these pilgrimages takes only a few hours, repeated at irregular intervals, though in some cases these practices may last a lifetime. They are also restricted in space, as one usually explores the confines of one’s previous home, neighborhood, or village. Such an uncovering of the landscape is primarily concerned with accessible traces of the family’s former habitation. These actions are subversive, since this landscape now “belongs” to the Jews; it has supposedly been Judaized.¹⁷

Simon Schama’s work helps us understand how these visits are practiced and experienced. Schama traveled to northeastern Poland, following the advice of a much-praised teacher who “had always insisted on directly experiencing ‘a sense of place,’ of using ‘the archive of the feet’” (1995:24). As Schama explored the wooded Polish landscape he found himself searching for historical traces of his mother’s family, whose members, almost a century earlier, had been loggers in the region. Schama wondered: “And just where, *exactly*, was this place, this house, this world of stubby yellow cigarettes, fortifying pulls from grimy vodka bottles, Hassidic songs bellowed through the piney *Poylishe velder?*” (1995:27, italics in original). Hungering “for some familiar name,” as Schama put it, he set off to the town of Punsk, a name mentioned in his mother’s tales.

After visiting the homes that had once housed Jews, he continued to the cemetery.

The cemetery was hardly discernible, its graves covered by a thicket of dandelions. Deciding to dig below them, Schama discovered tombstones engraved with Hebrew letters, and noted: “Digging down a few inches brought another [tombstone] up from the netherworld. I could have spent a day with a shovel and shears and exposed an entire world, the subterranean universe of the Jews of Punsk” (1995:36). Schama was moved by what he considered to be the discovery and exposure of a hidden Jewish cemetery associated with his own past. But had he been born in Punsk, and had he come to tend his father’s grave, this revelation would have been even more charged. It would have been very similar to the Palestinians’ search for their past.

The Palestinian longing is nostalgic, part of a worldwide phenomenon of yearning for a different time, a lost childhood, a slower rhythm, a rebellion against modernity (Boym 2001). It is similar to the nostalgia of the British soldiers for their Palestine (see Chapter 9). Yet in contrast, Palestinian refugee nostalgia stems from a dramatic and very palpable loss – the world of hundred of thousands was stolen in an instant. Despite these unique circumstances, Boym’s ruminations over the role of nostalgia are relevant, including her typology between a reflective and a restorative one. Restorative nostalgia attempts to recreate the true past with a single plot, and is often useful for national and religious projects. In contrast, reflective nostalgia places an emphasis on the longing – the *algia*, rather than the *nostos* – the return home. Those who experience nostalgia as reflective are aware of the ambivalence of longing and belonging and of inherent contradictions. Reflective nostalgia inhabits different places and times concurrently, and is fond of details, not symbols.

Like all typologies, Boym’s two nostalgias simplify a more complex reality. However, they are good for thought and for weighing which of the two is more evident. Occasionally, a (semi)restorative nostalgia was voiced by Palestinian interviewees. For example, a group of young men at Jenin refugee camp imagined that upon their return to the village of ‘Ein Hawd, nowadays a Jewish artists’ village, they will make it into a high-tech village. However, much of the talk was indeed reflective – or contrapuntal, to use Edward Said’s terms (1984). That meant that the village was a place to contemplate, look back to, compare, and, most of all, it was a place of mourning; a place where one faces the loss.

For the Palestinians who return to their villages, an agricultural terrace, a stone wall, a cistern and the water it still holds, or even the earth itself, acquire an aura. It is demonstrated through ‘Awad ‘Allo’s attempt to show the remains of his home in the village of at-Tireh to an Israeli television

crew. Let us pause for a moment to consider what this encounter between ‘Awad and the television crew tells us about the nature of the pilgrimage. In the film we see ‘Awad ‘Allo, born in 1929 and a resident of Haifa (Israel) since 1948, walking in the springtime through tall grass, formerly his family’s neighborhood location. Although one cannot see a single trace of a house, ‘Awad searches for remnants, saying:¹⁸

All these houses, from this side as well as from that side, belonged to the family of ‘Allo. Here my grandmother’s house used to stand. She was one hundred and five when the Jews came and conquered the village . . .

What do I think? I am crying. Even if you can not see the tears, I am crying in my heart. What do I think? I see at-Tireh. Where is at-Tireh? Apart from the house, where are my parents? Where is the family? Where are my friends? What do I see!?”

This soliloquy is dramatized in the film, thereby providing a glimpse into the essence of the visit. In even more dramatic form, ‘Awad has followed in the footsteps of Schama, who performed his pilgrimage alone, unfilmed and unframed. ‘Awad is captured on film doing what Schama did. ‘Awad’s pilgrimage took on meanings which at the time, and without the intermediary medium of film, I could not appreciate. Walter Benjamin related to this effect, noting that the camera records and freezes what the human eye is unable to detect by detaching scenes from the flowing movement (discussed in Dant and Gilloch 2002:10).

Both Schama and ‘Awad traverse the pathway to worlds that have become extinct. Both imagine the rhythms of life in fields that remain untilled and uncared for. Both engage in an action tied up with bereavement, of grief for what once was. For ‘Awad the houses stand for their former inhabitants, and he is filmed searching for relics of a lost set of social relations. He transmits the sense that if he were to recover palpable remains, he could perhaps momentarily revive his past. The camera follows him as he searches for more signs of life. When he discovers his home’s flight of stairs, he calls out to the television crew to come and film. This unearthing, on this occasion almost a literal one, provokes a flow of memories, each spot triggering recollection of family details and village events.

‘Awad represents the group of “internal refugees,” Palestinians who were uprooted in 1948 yet remained within Israel’s borders and have maintained a close bond to the village landscape throughout their lives. Abu Jum‘ah belonged to the same category and was continuously drawn to his village of origin, at-Tireh, having settled in ‘Isfiya, 10 kilometers southeast of at-Tireh. Abu Jum‘ah, along with some of his family members, was one of my key informants, and therefore I shall discuss him at length in what follows. I met him many times, brought friends to meet

him, visited him while hospitalized, and twice in 1997 he took me to the ruins of his village, at-Tireh.¹⁹

Abu Jum‘ah was a boy of ten in 1948. Along with his mother, brothers, and sister, as well as his extended family and village folk, he fled at-Tireh just as it was conquered on 16 July 1948. He abstained from going into the details of how he fled from the village. When I asked, he did mention that he was barefoot and without his mother. When he reached the neighboring village of ‘Ein Hawd, where some of the refugees from at-Tireh found refuge in the mosque for a few hours, he heard his mother calling out his name. He said that he felt so confused and exhausted that he could hardly respond.

While all but two of the Muslim villages in the Carmel region were depopulated in 1948, the Druze villages stayed intact.²⁰ A few villagers from the conquered Muslim villages found refuge in them, but most of the civilian refugees were transferred by Israel to Jordan in organized operations (see [Chapter 4](#)). However, Abu Jum‘ah’s father decided not to leave. The reason he stated was that he had barely made it back from World War I, during which he was forced to serve as a soldier in the Ottoman army. And so Abu Jum‘ah’s father managed to stay with his flock, first in the Carmel Mountains, then at the nearby Druze village of ‘Isfiya, when a Druze friend protected him from expulsion. Abu Jum‘ah, along with his mother and siblings, ended up in Damascus. In 1951 his mother decided to take him along in what had come to be defined as illegal crossing (of the newly established border of Israel) to visit her husband in Palestine, now Israel.²¹ A few weeks later she felt obliged to return to her other children in Syria, but left Abu Jum‘ah with his father, a decision for which he would not forgive her. In the first years Abu Jum‘ah and his father lived a solitary life, with a meager income. Later he married Rasmiya, herself a refugee from the village of Abu Zreik, and they managed to buy a plot in ‘Isfiya. He took work in construction, and she gave birth to six children. Their life was characterized by social isolation as one of few Muslim refugee families in a Druze village. For years they were completely cut off from his brothers and mother in Syria, and from the entire extended family.²²

During one of my visits to Abu Jum‘ah’s home (October 1997) we were sitting on his porch overlooking the view of the Haifa bay from the height of Mount Carmel. He was describing how a few days earlier he was on his way home from Haifa, when he felt an urge to visit at-Tireh, and asked the driver to turn off and drop him there. As we were talking, he suggested that we do the same right now – drive down to at-Tireh, which we did. Abu Jum‘ah’s visits to at-Tireh presented a paradox: On the one hand, one could sense the excitement of being near to what he felt to be his

landscape. On the other, there was deep sorrow and a mood of mourning for vanished lives. Here is the shape of liminality – not a temporary one, but rather a continuous one, a liminal persona (Turner 1967:95); Abu Jum‘ah is literally in no-man’s land, betwixt and between, unable to go home again. Liminality is an uncomfortable state. The individual here leaves the stability of his current habitation and journeys into territory that was transformed in 1948. And not only in 1948. Periodic visits are equally destabilizing since they present different forms of disintegration and transformation of what was once a familiar landscape.²³

On another joint visit to at-Tireh we came down from ‘Isfiya through Wadi Fallah, on the southern boundary of what used to be at-Tireh’s southern plots of land.²⁴ The lower parts of this long valley were owned by Abu Jum‘ah’s *hamula* (extended family), the Abu Rasheds. We stopped to trace significant sites of the past – near the prehistoric cave that used to shelter flocks; near the ruins of an Abu Rashed’s home that stood at the cave’s entrance; at the nearby spring, nowadays tunneled into pipes; and at the site of the Abu Rashed shop that used to stand on the main road, today untraceable.

As we entered at-Tireh’s formerly built area – the village itself – Abu Jum‘ah suggested we first stop near Nimr Abu Rashed’s home, one of the last Arab houses still standing. Nimr’s house, now inhabited by Jews, remained a landmark for the Palestinian pilgrims; a site at which to pause and pose for the camera. Abu Jum‘ah drew my attention to a plaque that Nimr installed on the outer wall with an Arabic inscription stating that the house was completed in 1365 (according to the Muslim calendar).²⁵

Nimr, known as Abu ‘Issa and kin-related to Abu Jum‘ah, was until 1948 a wealthy wholesaler merchant, one of the richest men of at-Tireh. Standing near the house, reflecting on its features, Abu Jum‘ah described Nimr and his family, and was well aware of their contemporary whereabouts. He pointed out scratches on the stones, where the cars used to reverse into the storeroom to load the goods such as metal, oil, and cigarettes. Nimr owned two trucks, he added, driven by two of his sons, Musa and ‘Abed.²⁶ Surrounding Nimr’s house were his sons’ dwellings, Abu Jum‘ah continued, pointing to the direction of each. After 1948 Nimr’s sons scattered: ‘Issa found work in Kuwait; Muhammad died in Syria; while ‘Abed and Musa died in Irbid (Jordan); Ruhi, his youngest, was still alive in 1997; formerly a teacher in Algeria, he was now living in Syria. When Abu Jum‘ah spoke of ‘Issa, I asked whether he had come for a visit. “Had he come, he would die,” answered Abu Jum‘ah.

We stood outside the house for a long time, while a dog kept barking from inside. We knocked on the door. Abu Jum‘ah was eager to enter, but



Fig. 6.2 Abu Jum'ah and daughter at Nimr's house, October 1997



Fig. 6.3 Nimr's plaque, October 1997



Fig. 6.4 Abu Jum'ah and Umm Jum'ah at cemetery, April 1997

the inhabitants would not let us in.²⁷ As we approached another part of at-Tireh, Abu Jum'ah declared: "We are now standing on the cemetery." It was not obvious; the area was surrounded by rubble and prickly-pear cactus. Abu Jum'ah found his way to his father's grave, on which the year of death was engraved: 1966. He recited the *Fātiha*, the first *sura* of the Qur'an. Then, after he had uprooted some weeds around the grave, we walked through the remaining tombs while he and his wife recalled stories regarding those who were buried here. At one point Abu Jum'ah turned to me and said: "Umm Jed'on [mother of Gideon], I don't like coming here." Walking back to the car, he explained to me that it serves no purpose to write about him, about his family, and his village; the Jews will not listen to the Palestinian version. Then he summed up the visit and the moral: "There were people living here. There was a cemetery here. There was a large village, the largest [in the district]. There is the school we went to. And they put it all on trucks and said 'Yalla, go.'" Why did Abu Jum'ah tell me that this visit was of no use? His sadness reached a nadir in the cemetery. At this point he could speak out from feelings of despair to an Israeli who could now see how difficult it was for a Palestinian to try to recover traces of his village and past life. Bringing me with him encouraged hope and its evaporation at the same time.

This encounter has striking similarities to the visit Simon Schama took to the forest in Poland. Both men wander through a landscape of loss, and both mourn a way of life that has left behind traces of ordinary events. While these pilgrimages disclose painful memories of injustice and irreversible damage to an entire world of sociability, family life, and architecture, also evident is the affinity between very different individuals living in the shadow of very different violent convulsions in the twentieth century. In the case of Abu Jum‘ah, pilgrimage heightens his liminal state. We should recall the relatively short time between his past and present. Schama comes as a representative of a much later generation, and he comes only once and then returns to his new world. For Abu Jum‘ah the new world is never fully separated from the old one. He is indeed trapped in no-man’s land and cannot return home again. The search for traces of destroyed villages is a difficult matter; we should not assume that what they seek once really existed. Nostalgia may be for imaginary villages. What matters is not the past but the attempt to touch it through pilgrimage and through coming into contact with traces of one’s former life. Pilgrimage is about today and tomorrow.

Cemeteries as sites of memory

Mourning practices are also about the living. Although the refugees of at-Tireh who remained in Israel after 1948 were not permitted to return to their villages, they could, for a few decades, still bury their dead in their cemeteries (as in the case of ‘Abdallah’s grandmother and Abu Jum‘ah’s father). As a result, the cemeteries remained an active Palestinian site while the remainder of the village was prone to the general policy of erasure or neglect. Moreover, an official decision made by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in the 1960s ruled that it is forbidden to harm “holy places” – mosques, holy shrines, and cemeteries included. The decision was only partially implemented, yet some cemeteries survived and remained sites of pilgrimage and memorials.

Cemeteries are sites of mourning, not only for the dead but also for destroyed villages. Ironically, the dead were the only ones permitted to stay put and the only ones who managed to retain their ties to the landscape. Therefore the dead, the graves, and the cemeteries became sites of mediation between the living refugees and the landscape. In a remarkable scene from Ra‘anan Alexandrowicz’s film *The Inner Tour* (2000), documenting a group of Palestinians touring Israel, Abu Muhammad, an old man who found refuge in Jelazoun refugee camp, returns after many years to his village, ‘Anaba (formerly part of the Ramle district). In what seems like a wasteland, halfway between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, he asks the bus

driver to pull to the side of the road. He walks slowly toward the remains of his village, accompanied only by the cameraman and his daughter and granddaughter. Pointing at the remains of a house, he picks fresh fennel (*shomar*), slowly chewing on it, then pulls out a different thorn, removing its outer leaves and handing the inner ones to the cameraman. Finally, at the cemetery, now covered by wild plants, he bends to the ground and prays. When his daughter approaches him he says to her: “This is the grave of the old man, the grave of my father” (*hadha kubur likhtyar, kubur abui*). The scene encapsulates the terrible loss as well as the slight consolation experienced through this temporary return. A slide at the end of the film notes that three months later Abu Muhammad died, and on his deathbed described to his sons the crops that grow best in the soil of ‘Anaba.²⁸ Could there be a better instance than this of what the term “métis” means?

In his Irbid restaurant in the summer of 1998, Abu Yusri, originally of at-Tireh, offered these remarks:²⁹

Everything can be precious. Soil is all soil. I do not know the soil because I have not worked it. I do not know the value of soil because I did not sow nor plow. I only know that everyone yearns for his place of birth (*masqat ra’s-hu*). Many prominent and historical figures, before they die, they write a will asking to be buried in their place of birth. For example, lately, Nizar Qabbani wanted to die on the land where he was born, in Damascus, which is his city, his homeland (*watan-hu*). I was born in 1943 and now it is 1998. For fifty years I have not known my land.

Tourists collect souvenirs. Pilgrims collect relics. Burials are strictly regulated by Israel nowadays, and the refugees can no longer be buried at their village sites. Moreover, as new Jewish neighborhoods encroach on the remaining Palestinian cemeteries, they disappear further from the landscape. Palestinian refugees seek other ways of embodied remembrance. Therefore, beyond their investment at the village site, they also collect objects to take back home. These become revered mementos, at times treasured in private while at others displayed and turned into artifacts on display.

Collecting and material culture

Palestinian refugees collect, research, preserve, and display objects relating to their own lives. The objects are often bound to one’s locality, displaying pictures of one’s village and its vicinity, plants taken from its site and replanted in one’s garden or keys of the lost home hung on the wall. One special feature is reverence for the soil (*turāb*) of the village site; what for others is debris is symbolic and precious to the refugees.³⁰

During pilgrimage refugees collect earth in handkerchiefs and containers to take back, especially if they live far away. Hussein, whose permanent

place of residence is Irbid, Jordan, wished to commemorate his visit to his village of origin, at-Tireh.³¹ He placed two jars on the shelf at his little fruit-juice shop: One contained earth that he had collected at at-Tireh, and the other contained his shoe. On the latter he wrote in poetic literary Arabic that with this shoe he had trodden in Palestine, the land of his beloved village, and the precious earth that clung to the sole must not fall back to the ground.³² Hussein's visit to at-Tireh was made present and palpable to all his customers through the exhibition of the "authentic" earth and the real shoe. Yet at the same time, by compressing the visit into two artifacts and making them into icons, he turned the artifacts into symbols and the shop into a mini-museum (here, in Boym's terms, we encounter the shift from reflective to restorative nostalgia).

Yet sometimes the village soil acquires different symbolic charges. Sahera Dirbas, a daughter of refugees from at-Tireh who established their post-1948 home in Haifa, was asked by an acquaintance (in the early 1990s) whose parents are also from at-Tireh (and ended up in Syria) to collect some village soil for him.³³ Almost ten years later he wrote back to Sahera, telling her that his mother had asked in her will to be buried along with this soil. Upon her death in Syria, he placed this soil in her palms and below her head, thus recreating an imagined burial in the village soil.³⁴

Any object that would revive memories of the village is desirable, and finds its way into the Palestinian refugee home. Mostly in the living room, and facing the entrance, there is a corner of display. The main exhibits are photographs of relatives – the living and the dead hang side by side. This prominence ensures that the inhabitants of the house are constantly under the gaze of those photographed. For example, in Abu Mahmoud's home three pictures were hung on the living-room wall. Abu Mahmoud, originally of at-Tireh and since 1948 a refugee in Haifa, was sixteen when the village was captured. He was the only family member to remain within Israel, when along with a group of youths from his village he was made to work as a servant of the Israeli soldiers stationed at at-Tireh. One of the pictures on his wall depicted his younger brother, who was killed in 1948, aged fourteen. He had hidden along with other villagers in a cave west of at-Tireh. He was shot when they walked out of the cave after the village was captured by Jewish forces. While Abu Mahmoud's mother was placed on a bus with other villagers and expelled to the border, he was left behind with his wounded brother. Some days later his brother died, and it was months before he was able to sneak across the border to tell his mother, now in a West Bank refugee camp. The other pictures were of Abu Mahmoud's three brothers, who ended up in Syria and Jordan. The third was a picture of Abu Mahmoud's father. Similar pictures – of the living and the dead – were present in almost all refugee homes.³⁵

Accompanying the family pictures were artifacts associated with Arab or Palestinian culture – an embroidered map of Palestine, a fancy water pipe (known in Palestine as *arghile*), a traditional male overdress (termed ‘*abaya*), or the key to the old home. In Janet Hoskins’s term, some of these artifacts could be analyzed as “biographical objects” (1998), enabling their owners to “self-historicize” their lives. By reflecting on the role of the objects and by incorporating them into the present, the personal and local past came to life, primarily among those who attend the “home museum.” As Bourdieu (1990) persuasively argued, photography is socially bound and highly regulated, complying with implicit canons. Family history is defined by its photographs: the occasions chosen (both to shoot and to display); the people who are staged for a photograph (who is there and who is not, how they relate to one another); and the background that is chosen (a background worthy of consecration). Moreover, Bourdieu (1990:34) argued that one does not photograph the familiar; only tourists are sufficiently alienated from the surrounding to perceive the mundane as worthy of photographing. The Palestinian pilgrims are also sufficiently alienated that by the act of filming and displaying the outcome they perpetuate and reestablish the consecration of the village site.

The establishment of websites opened the way for refugees to exhibit (often prepatterned) images of the village and items retrieved from it for the benefit of a much wider audience. The process that had begun within homes has expanded on websites – photographs being the easiest to circulate. In the large and constantly growing website named Palestine Remembered, each Palestinian village has its subsection. The refugees can communicate through emails, leaving messages on the notice-board and posting pictures. Mouttaz Ammoura, having returned from a visit to at-Tireh, summarized his pilgrimage sensations on the website for his village folk:

Salaam: I'm from al-Tira, although I was born in Syria. Last year I visited my village & truly I can not describe my feeling. That is a visit which I will never forget. My sisters, brothers, & I are all writing to you. However, our minds and hearts are still in al-Tira. I do not know what to write because now I have more tears than words.

Now I live in Canada, but far-away from AL-TIRA. When I came back, I brought with me some sand, maramieh [sage], few stones, & water from Tirat Haifa. Yes, I brought all of that to remember al-Tira & to have it close to my heart back in Canada.

If you ask me about pictures, you will soon see a few on this site. However, my scanner is broken now. As soon as it's fixed, I will be uploading many Tira pictures to share with my brother *Inshaallah* [God willing].

By the way, I have taken some pictures of the elementary school, the house of Nimer Abu Rasheid, & lots more, you will find out soon.

Mouttaz Ammoura³⁶

Mouttaz's preoccupation with the sand, stones, *maramiyya*, and water, as well as with the pictures, is a way to reenact and bring to life a lost past. This past is ever present if one dares to touch it and see it. Such is the picture of the city now known as Kars (in the east of Turkey) as described by Orhan Pamuk in *Snow*, consisting of metaphorical layers that are in fact wholly visible. In one of the introductory chapters (given the mocking title "Our city is a peaceful place," although wretched and bursting with political tensions and violence), the protagonist, Ka, takes an early morning walk "below Atatürk Boulevard" to the poorest part of Kars, Kaleati:

The scenes he saw as he hurried under the ice-covered branches of the plane trees and the oleasters – the old, decrepit Russian buildings with stovepipes sticking out of every window, the thousand-year-old Armenian church towering over the wood depots and the electric generators, the pack of dogs barking at every passer-by from a five-hundred-year-old stone bridge as snow fell into the half-frozen black waters of the river below, the thin ribbons of smoke rising out of the tiny shanty houses of Kaleati sitting lifeless under their blanket of snow – made him feel so sad that tears came to his eyes. (Pamuk 2004:9–10)

In this Turkish context, within a landscape that went through political turmoil, the charged Armenian past constantly finds its way to the story, not only via the thousand-year-old church but elsewhere in the story through more recent Armenian homes. Like Mouttaz, Pamuk readily sees and exposes signs of the past. In both cases we encounter a set of practices linking space, architecture, and objects.

At times, the Palestinian home becomes the site of practices in which retrieved objects are brought back to life. During an interview in August 1996 that focused on women's narration of daily customs prior to 1948, some members of the Darawshe family recalled their village of origin, Ijzim. Having reached the topic of male gatherings and shared smoking, someone mentioned a certain mortar, known as *mihibāsh*, which was used for crushing coffee beans. The head of the family excused himself and came back some minutes later dressed in traditional clothes: '*abaya* ('*abā'a* in literary Arabic) – the traditional cloak-like wrap; the *kūfiya* – a cloth wrapped around the head; and the '*iqāl*' – a headband holding the *kūfiya* intact. Yet the main item in his performance was not the clothing, but rather the *mihibāsh* itself – a heavy mortar made of buckthorn wood and decorated with copper. He kneeled, placing the *mihibāsh* between his legs, and began pounding one of the traditional beats for grinding coffee,



Fig. 6.5 Abu Salim with *mihibāsh*, 30 August 1996

noting that each family had its unique beat. As this village tradition came to life, those present in the room grew jubilant.

Diasporic toponymy

The last “device” of re-collecting the past to be discussed here is the preservation of local names, what can be termed diasporic toponymy. This practice is a form of mental mapping and reconstruction of local knowledge, thus demonstrating one’s meticulous acquaintance with the detailed features of the village landscape. Local names are outcomes of

daily lives and practices, and often indicate a close knowledge of the landscape, which is especially important in diasporic communities. In the Palestinian context, some place names describe natural phenomena while others were relics of a past long forgotten. Paradoxically, very often those names, treasured by the refugees, were given by previous colonizers such as the Romans and the Crusaders. However, exile gave all place names, even those originally Hebrew or foreign, much significance. For instance, when talking of at-Tireh, villagers noted its possible link to the Arabic root of t-a-r – to fly – but generally agreed that its origin was foreign, probably Canaanite. Whether environmental or historical names, they had the potential to trigger a lively discussion and awaken dormant memories, their power stemming from their condensation. Keith Basso, who had studied the Western Apache Indians of Arizona, followed others in remarking that place names provide materials for “speaking and writing in potent shorthand, for communicating much while saying very little” (Basso 1988:103).

Place names for the elderly Palestinian refugees were like a secret language. If one wanted to elicit memories of the vernacular life in ‘Ein Hawd, one was to ask: “How was it to fetch water from ‘Ain al-Mashariyyeh?” A stream of stories would follow. To demonstrate an acquaintance with Ijzim’s vicinity, I would ask of the water of Bir al-Harames. Bir al-Harames was halfway between Ijzim and Umm az-Zinat. In his poignant novel *Children of Dew* ([1990] 2005) Muhammad al-As‘ad, who fled Umm az-Zinat at the age of four, collected fragmented memories of the village.³⁷ Al-As‘ad writes:

Bir al-Harames, often did I hear this name ... Appearing again and again on different tongues, especially when my mother would utter its name accompanied by a description of an event. A place accompanies every event described by the villagers ... Bir al-Harames would be mentioned in a soft and gentle voice, whose origin I cannot understand. I, who have never gone there. Yet I can imagine it and make it part of my memories. (al-As‘ad [1990] 2005:15)

To voice these place names was an incantation, keys into the world of the lost village.

At times, place names were used to signal exclusion, when Palestinians would recall names that indicated an outsider’s ignorance. When I was sitting in the Irbid home of the former headman (*mukhtār*) of at-Tireh (in November 1996) we came to the topic of land ownership. He chose to use the old local names of plots:³⁸

It’s about 386 *dūnum* that I would give up. Do you know al-Ajziyyeh? Where I have 18 *dūnum* in the region of Haifa and I would give it up and let go of Birket Kheir and give up Bustur and give up Tal Yiqra and I would give up Saffa and surrender

Abu 'Ali and give up Abu Shamiyyeh and give up 'Aqrab al-'Ein and I would give up Zalafeh, as long as I was granted a return to al-Tireh.

Place names stood for so much more: for property claims and documents, for an entire world of land ownership. Place names speak the mental map of the uprooted, defining their claim on the landscape. While the *mukhtār*'s map included places distant from the village, due to his wealth and his prominent role in the entire region, other villagers had more restricted mental maps, closer to home. In other words, even people of the same village constructed different landscapes. Yet while the objects and landscapes differed, the mechanisms of recall remained similar.

Summary and conclusion

For Palestinian refugees, memories of 1948 are embedded in places that for some are impossible to reach and for others are tantalizingly close to their new homes. In both cases there are cultural practices that bring them closer to the villages they have lost. Some of these practices are familiar to anyone with knowledge of religious pilgrimages. Others entail a retrieval of fragments of lived experience or the soil of the village itself. Still others are concentrated in the choice and expression of place names, familiarity with which displays the emotional and personal ties of these refugees to their native villages.

The special conditions under which Palestinian refugees live frame these practices. Many have never assimilated fully into their host communities. Millions of Palestinians retain their status as temporary residents. After sixty years the word "temporary" has lost its meaning. But since these people have a fragile status or no citizenship at all in their places of refuge, Palestine remains for them the home of their nation. This elemental fact distinguishes practices of remembrance among Palestinians from those of other diasporas.

While earlier in this book we dealt with Palestinian women and remembrance of 1948, this chapter has examined evidence pertaining to men – although many of these practices also can be used by women. In this chapter the focus is on the men, who were unable to fulfill their traditional roles: to protect their land, their women, their villages; theirs is a story of loss of empowerment. Remembering takes the place of political action. One may lead to the other, but there is no certainty for them that remembrance will do any good to them or to their families. In a sense, remembering is all they have, and through it they retain their power to tell the story of their lives set in the villages in which they were born and in which they no longer live. In Chapter 7 we move on to the memories and interpretations of those who have occupied their homes: the Israeli Palmach fighters.

Part III

Jewish-Israeli Memories in the Making

7 Palmach Fighters Stories and Silences

Israel's narrative of its foundational war, 1948, was inevitably mythologized. The mythologization of war, Samuel Hynes wrote, is neither a fabrication nor the creation of fiction. Rather, it is the simplification of a narrative, turning it into something imaginable and manageable (1997: xiii). Mythologized war is often reduced to being merely good or bad, a success or failure. In contrast, the narratives of war that are told by the participating soldiers, mostly not in public contexts, are anything but single-stranded myths. They are often chaotic, lacking chronology or a wider context. They are scattered reminiscences. There is a necessary gap between personal war recollections and official historiography. Because official historiographies are prevalent and only partial, to get a fuller picture of war we must seek personal accounts. "If we would understand what war is like, and how it feels," wrote Hynes, in *The Soldiers' Tale*, "we must turn away from history and its numbers, and seek the reality in the personal witness of the men who were there" (1997:xii). Following Hynes, who wrote of other places and settings, this chapter explores how the 1948 war felt for the Palmach soldiers who survived it. However, while Hynes's title suggests that the soldiers' narratives, placed together, form a single tale, this chapter seeks the multiplicity of war narratives.

Furthermore, while Hynes was interested in all aspects of the soldiers' war experience, the emphasis here is on the "untold"; on what was perceived as causing uneasiness and discomfort. Those are the tacit narratives dealing with the soldiers' feelings toward the enemy and touching on issues of ethics and on "human rights" (in their unique manifestation during war). The death of comrades is also at the heart of the war experience, and a delicate matter to articulate. Moreover, unlike Hynes, who based his approach on written memoirs, here the narratives come to life through oral narration. In that sense the narratives were "squeezed out" of the ex-soldiers rather than poured out by them on their own. This chapter considers the ways that the Palmach members recounted their 1948 tales fifty-five years after the events, within non-public settings.

The time that has passed enables the exposure of some silences that once were inherent in the 1948 narratives. One silence can be termed “the spirit of the era,” which encouraged minimal speech along with constraints over the expression of emotions. A second silence pertained to the language, which was characterized by a neutralization and sanitization, thus blurring the dark sides of war. A third silence was that of denial, relating to the identity of the enemy as well as to the perils of war. A fourth silence was to admit a certain phenomenon, yet downplay its significance (which becomes exceptionally evident in cases where military violence is directed at a civilian population). Finally, the fifth “silence” was a process of secreting, whereby certain issues were discussed only within the tightly closed unit.

The Palmach generation

The Palmach (“striking companies,” or “shock troops”) was established in 1941 as the regular fighting force of the Hagannah. The Hagannah, meaning “the Defense,” came into being in 1920 as a countrywide organization of the *yishuv*. The Hagannah declared itself to be representative of the entire *yishuv*, but was associated with the mainstream Labor Party under the leadership of David Ben-Gurion. The Hagannah was generally a civilian militia that mobilized its members only in times of need, although it gradually grew better trained and equipped, especially when the British supported activities that complied with their agenda (in the late 1930s and early 1940s).

The Palmach was indeed founded as part of the Hagannah with British support. However, soon after the El-Alamein victory this support was halted. The *yishuv*, eager to keep the force going, invented an arrangement that would combine two tasks for the soldiers. Each month would be divided into two: two weeks would be dedicated to work on a kibbutz, while the other two would be for military training. This combination led to the establishment of Palmach units called *hakhsharat* (sing. *hakhsharah*, from the Hebrew verb meaning “to train”).¹ The *hakhsharat* comprised young men and women (roughly seventeen to eighteen years of age) who were eventually to establish new Hebrew settlements after a period of preparation (Kadish 1995). These youngsters were recruited from the dominant and well-established segments of the *yishuv*.² The women were mostly an auxiliary force, rarely participating in the actual fighting. The members of the Palmach (and the Jewish army in general) were highly motivated, especially after having learnt of the Holocaust. Their sense was that their war in Palestine would determine the fate of the Jewish nation; it was a war of survival.

The unit considered here, which I shall name Hakhsharat Rishonim, was formed in the autumn of 1947. At its inception Hakhsharat Rishonim numbered over fifty young men and women, born in 1929–31. Most of its members were born in Mandatory Palestine to parents from a Zionist-socialist background, many of whom made a living as farmers (known in Hebrew as *ha-hityashvut ha-'ovedet*, literally translated as “the working settlement”). Some members were born elsewhere and arrived in Palestine as children. They graduated from local agricultural boarding schools, the hotbed of socialist Zionism, and joined the Palmach on the eve of the outbreak of fighting. Out of twelve “Israel hero” bars awarded after 1948, three were granted to men from Hakhsharat Rishonim. When the 1948 war ended the *hakhsharah* continued as a group, and established a new kibbutz on the ruins of an Arab village, whose inhabitants had been expelled only months earlier.

This chapter, which focuses on the *hakhsharah*'s men, and the [next chapter](#), dealing with its women, are based on a variety of sources. Other than literature on the experience of soldiers in war, and specifically that of the Palmach, I use my own ethnographic material: twenty interviews that I conducted between 2003 and 2005 with members of the *hakhsharah*, who were then in their mid-seventies; video films that document Hakhsharat Rishonim's fiftieth anniversary party and their tour to their 1948 battlegrounds fifty-five years after the events; and the veterans' written accounts and memoirs. Memoirs are popular among Palmach veterans. Their authors are often people who had acquired higher education, appreciated literature, and borrow literary images to describe their war experience. These memoirs hold a dialogue with the more public and official versions of the war. Yet their authors are also well aware of the gaps between the personal and the public, being middle-class soldiers who “consider that the preservation of one's daily life is an appropriate and interesting activity” (Hynes 1997:32). Many of these memoirs have been published only in recent years, often in the form of self-produced paperbacks, for circulation among family and friends. In parallel, the members of Hakhsharat Rishonim responded to a general wave of public commemoration and created a large album on their wartime experiences. Their album, along with those of other *hakhsharot*, was deposited with the Palmach museum in Tel Aviv, and many of them kept copies at home.

In the years that followed 1948, many former Palmach members became leading figures in Israel, especially in the army and in political life, enjoying the prestige of “the founding generation” (Keren 2004). However, the members of Hakhsharat Rishonim did not enter politics or become part of the military elite, despite their clear affiliation to the highly regarded founding generation.³ One of the prime traits of the “Palmach

generation” was a reluctance to disclose emotion. When I asked an interviewee whether the unit’s soldiers would talk among themselves of personal matters, he noted: “Much less than we would today, I’m sure. I think to myself, should we meet to talk about these matters today we would surely speak of each and everyone’s ‘burden’ (*mah she-kol ehad sohev ito*). It would surely be more personal than it could have been back then.” When asked why, he replied:⁴

I don’t know why. That’s how we were brought up. That’s how we were educated. I know that I’m generalizing but that was the spirit of the era . . . We had things that with today’s sensitivity are ungraspable. We were tougher (*kshuhim*). We were stronger (*hasonim*). And perhaps, in parallel, we understood less. It’s not as if we were made of a resistant material. But that’s how we were brought up. I’m not sure whether what I’m saying would fit everyone but I’m sure it fits many of those who lived back then.

The norm was maximum restraint, and emotions were expected to be repressed in the public domain. This was also a gender issue: Men were more masculine if they did not speak. This inclination had its roots at least a decade earlier, as is evident from Berl Katznelson’s words written following the violent events in Palestine in 1936: “This generation of Israel, of which the entire world – including his own country – are his gallows, knows neither weeping nor prayer and plea like his forefathers, yet is as stubborn and unyielding as they were” (Katznelson in Habas [ed.] 1937:13). This norm of demonstrative toughness persisted after 1948. In an oft-quoted line, the prominent poet Lea Goldberg ([1955] 1970:199) wrote in the 1950s: “To this generation, crying is disgrace (*la-dor ha-zeh ha-bekhi hu klimah*).”

It was a generation that perceived of itself not only as self-reliant but as the prime support for the entire Hebrew *yishuv*. For the members of Hakhsharat Rishonim, 1948 was a war for survival; they felt personally responsible for its outcome. On 14 May 1948, when the unit was heading for the crucial battle of Kirin, they heard that Ben-Gurion had declared the establishment of the State of Israel. They sniggered. Here is how an interviewee described it:

And then, at four in the afternoon, we were notified: The Hebrew state is declared in Tel Aviv. It mattered to us like the garlic skin [*ke-klipat ha-shum* – a phrase indicating that something is negligible]. We paid no heed. Someone said that the battle will be decided here, not there. What is being uttered or not has no significance.

Such an interpretation, almost inevitably, did not reach the public domain. Likewise, the opinions of these soldiers toward many other issues were destined to remain far from public discussion. It was these issues,

some considered sensitive to this day, that I had asked to hear about during interviews.

The image of the enemy

In some contexts of war we find that the enemy is demonized. Some of the best-known cases come from American soldiers' accounts of World War II in the Pacific and from the war in Vietnam. American soldiers expressed deep hatred toward the enemy, derogatively naming enemy soldiers gooks, dinks, and zipperheads (Kennett 1987; Cameron 1994; Bourke 1999). The hatred was often based on the assumption that the enemy is made of a different substance. E.B. Sledge, a Marine who fought at Okinawa, wrote: "This was not the dispassionate killing seen on other fronts or in other wars. This was a brutish, primitive hatred, as characteristic of the horror of war in the Pacific as the palm trees and the islands" (in Hynes 1997:163). Sledge went on to describe the shock he experienced when coming across mutilated bodies of American soldiers. To him it embodied the extent of the Japanese hatred toward the Americans. In turn, it fostered the American perception of the Japanese as inhuman. Endowing the enemy with inhuman traits was also common toward the Vietnamese. Shay wrote that the Americans described the Vietnamese as "monkeys, insects, vermin, childlike, unfeeling automata . . . physiologically inferior, primitive, barbaric and devoted to fanatical suicide charges" (1995:105).

Such demonization of the Arabs did not dominate the Palmach narratives. It rarely surfaced, and when it did, it was as a reaction to Arab mutilation of bodies. A possible explanation for the absence of a general ongoing dehumanization in the Palestine case is the proximity of the two societies in daily life. The communities lived side by side, often speaking each other's languages and bearing relatively similar physical features. The Palmach soldiers noted that it was not easy to distinguish during fighting whether those in front of them belonged to Arab or Jewish forces. There must have been some complexity in the process of transforming the villagers from near home, the orchard partners, the work companions, or the fruit vendors, into "the enemy." Rather than being viewed as evil, the enemy was depersonalized and disassociated from anything familiar.

What the Palmach soldiers chose to do was distinguish between "the Arab neighbors" and "the Arab enemy." For one, they were mobilized throughout the country and, being away from their localities, rarely came into direct contact with Arabs that they had known previously. Another method of objectifying the enemy was by emphasizing the participation in fighting of Arabs from other countries. This enabled the Palmachniks,

until May 1948, to think that they were fighting “foreign volunteers” and, after that, the Arab armies. Again and again the Palmachniks demonstrated what seemed an intentional lack of knowledge of the enemy, or projected foreign identities on the enemy. One of the unit’s oft-told stories comes from the height of the fighting at the ill-fated battle of Kirin. During the battle Assaf was sent to notify the officer of a large group of Arabs approaching. On the way he came across an enemy soldier, who jumped on him, and the two began to wrestle. A comrade came to his assistance. Finally, a third comrade arrived on the scene and killed the enemy soldier. This odd event became famous, partially because Assaf was badly injured, and many interviewees related to this injury. The enemy wrestler, the Palmachniks argued, was a Bosnian volunteer. Why they assigned him this identity, they could not explain. Someone came up with the term Yugoslav, and they all took it for granted.

On another occasion the unit was sent by night to attack a house near Shefa-‘amr (Shefar‘am in Hebrew). Again the claim was made that it housed “all kinds of ex-Nazis, Yugoslavs, Germans, who came to assist the Arabs.” From these narratives one could get the impression that few Palestine-born Arabs actually fought.⁵ This perception complements the hegemonic Zionist narrative that prevailed for many years, according to which the Arab inhabitants of Palestine did not fight, but merely waited for foreign assistance, and at one point chose to flee. Thus, although the local Arabs have always been accused of prompting the war following the 29 November UN resolution, they were also represented as cowardly, since they fled without putting up a fight. Different studies have shown that in some localities Palestinians certainly put up a fight (Shoufani 1972; Nazzal 1978). From the way the Palmachniks construct the image of “the enemy,” we tend to think of it as foreign, and we learn how the Palestinian resistance was erased from the emerging Israeli narrative of 1948.

Another way to depersonalize the identity of “the enemy” and disregard the local and civil nature of early 1948 warfare was to adopt a sanitizing language. This, again, was fed from and back to the public Israeli version: The local Arab fighters were labeled “gangs” (*knufiyot*), a term going back to the 1936–9 clashes. Often, rather than say that a place was conquered (*nikhbash*), it was declared “freed” (*shuhrar*). Another example of language sanitation comes from the manner of describing the first organized military attack: Following the killing of thirty-nine Jewish workers in Haifa’s oil refineries, the *hakhsharah*’s men were sent on a retaliation action (*pe’ulat tagmul*) at a village east of Haifa. It was believed and stated that some of the refinery’s workers lived there. In *Sefer ha-palmah* it is defined as a punitive action (*pe’ulat ‘onshin*), and the command is: “Attack the village, harm as many men as possible, destroy property, refrain from

hurting women and children" (Gil'ad 1955:55). According to the Palmach account, at least sixty Arab men were killed in the raid, and this is also the number to appear in Palestinian sources.⁶ Two Palmach men were killed.⁷

Upon their return from this mission, the *hakhsharah* organized a get-together, defined as a party. Describing the event in his memoir, Kobby wrote the following: "After the battle, seventy of the killers (*ha-rotzhim*) [the local Arab inhabitants] were liquidated (*hush*). We had no casualties but the other [Jewish] force lost its officer Uri, and Srulik, who volunteered for the mission, was killed." Indeed, the night attack on an Arab village was hardly a battle, but was retroactively renamed as such, and became a significant moment for the members of the *hakhsharah*: the beginning of their war. The party was to become a tradition, celebrated yearly.

Yet the killing in the village was face to face, an "intimate killing," as Joanna Bourke (1999) called it; it was not easy for the participating soldiers to adhere to the common laundered terms. This reconsideration of terms has intensified in recent years, in the context of a more sober and critical political environment. During the *hakhsharah*'s fiftieth anniversary party, Gad described the events in the village, and said: "These things don't sound too good nowadays. Things looked pretty different back then and no doubt nowadays an investigation committee would be called in." In an interview with Gad I had asked him to give more details of his personal experience in the village. He was not disposed to do so, and his answers were conspicuously short. Yet those short answers were still characterized by a sincerity that disclosed his discomfort.

GAD: The instructions were very vague. When speaking of militarism, we went through many military stages. Instructions, then, were very primitive, you could say; they counted on the spirit of sacrifice more than on one's professionalism or knowledge. They could only count on that because that is all there was ...

BEN-ZE'EV: Then, when you were near the village, what happened?

GAD: We drew near and stood outside the houses. It is not nice to say: "Take the men out and separate them to hurt them." That was carried out more or less, let's say so. During the battle it was very difficult. [Something indecipherable on the tape].⁸ There were places where there was resistance or where doors would not open. So Shaikeh had an axe. We were given axes to break the doors. This is funny in today's terms. That's what happened.

BEN-ZE'EV: Is it unpleasant to talk of it? Is it difficult to remember?

GAD: It is not difficult but it is not pleasant. True. It is not pleasant (*lo na'im*). We found ourselves in an unclear difficult situation. You don't know exactly what to do. It's not as if you're instructed – how to get in, how to break into a home and take the men, separate them from the others and kill them or not. The instructions were general.

And so upon their return some men described first a sense of elation, for having come back alive, and, later, a crushing feeling at what they had done. “Was that war?” they wondered. Yet for them the attack on the village was only the opening chord of their own participation in the war. From then on they were pulled into a chain of violent events and battles. The troubled story of the “conquest” of the village did not reach any public discussion.

“We were moral”

The 1948 experience, especially in the context of “strangers” like me, and others who were not “there,” was – and is – often collapsed by the participants into a simplified narrative. For example, in reply to my request to describe the unit’s night attack on the village, Baruch was very short:⁹ “We shot a few shots, they shot at us, and then we had to retreat.” Baruch, who was generally eager to share stories and anecdotes – how they prepared for a battle, how someone was warned not to play with a hand grenade, how he was made to care for the dead – rarely dwelt on the actual violent confrontations. It may have been the outcome of the assumption that I would not understand, as a woman who had never been to war.

Yoskeh, especially at the start of our talk, was more articulate than Baruch in explaining why narrating the detailed war experience is useless. When I pressed him a little, asking of specific battles, he responded by saying:¹⁰

I don’t understand your question. What’s a battle? I’ll tell you what a battle is – You get equipped, wear your combat webbing equipment, put on a steel helmet, stand in line, walk in a row, wherever you stand you stand, you carry a load on your back, sometimes you switch over the heavy load to others, sometimes you don’t, you walk somewhere, you lay on the ground waiting for something to happen or you attack. Yes, that’s it, everything is the same . . . all battles are the same.

Clearly, he was impatient at my prodding. He also testified that he never “sat down” with his children to tell them of his war experience. Neither I nor his children constituted the appropriate model for sharing (Kirmayer 1996); we were not part of the social group who made up the setting for a lengthy and detailed testimony, an exchange and certainly not a debate. Moreover, knowing that I had previously studied Palestinian perspectives of 1948 and that I was from another generation and another social context, for Yoskeh I was a suspect, potentially seeking reasons for expressing moral indignation about him and his comrades. These moral deliberations were something to engage in with other members of the *hakhsharah*, and not when facing an outsider.

When talking to a semi-outsider like me, interviewees argued that Hakhsharat Rishonim was exceptionally moral. All the interviewees emphasized that the company's officer had a clear rooted norm against looting. They recounted how they would take nothing – “from a needle to a shoelace,” as one of them termed it. When they entered the Arab neighborhoods of Safad, in May 1948, they found the homes deserted. Their inhabitants had just fled, with such haste that they had left all their belongings behind. The veterans did hint that the first battalion to enter Safad engaged in some looting. However, when one soldier from their unit was found to have “picked up” a shaving kit, he was reprimanded and made to throw it away. The rejection of taking booty would later become a ritual, as in Giora's description of an event that took place during the expulsion of the Arabs of Lydda and Ramle:

Another company was attached to us and one day someone says: This company robbed the refugees. Among us it was unacceptable. We said to our officer [a new one by now]: “Listen, there was robbery here and among us it's unacceptable.” . . . So he organized an evening line-up in the *khan*'s courtyard and said: “So and so happened.” We knew who the thieves were and what they had taken. “Anyone to have taken anything must place it on the stone here.” All those who had taken something placed it there, with the exception of a few. We said [to them]: “You too.” They were all from the same company. The officer says: “Alex – smash!” And Alex crushed the watches . . .

While expulsion somehow seemed acceptable, looting was not. Likewise, firing procedures were also open to individual interpretation. Assaf described how he found himself shooting to kill:¹¹

ASSAF: In Kabri I killed someone. . . .

BEN-ZE'EV: What happened in Kabri?

ASSAF: The company was in the back. Some four, five or ten, I don't know how many. I and someone else went as a front squad (*kitah maqdimah*). We were near a wall when a dog started barking. The reason that we went in front was to say that all is quiet or something of the sort. I can't remember. We went ahead and lingered near a wall watching. Perhaps we then had to call the others to join but suddenly an Arab comes out of the house because of the dog's barking, asking: *Min hadha? Min hadha?* [“Who is it?” in Arabic]. And I shot him and probably killed him and the rest of the company joined in. I received no order but I felt that there was nothing else to do (*ein mah la'asot*). The company joined us and we advanced inside the village, bombed the house and retreated. That's what I remember.

BEN-ZE'EV Do you remember yourself thinking about it later?

ASSAF: Not that much (*lo harbeh mi yode'a mah*). I just remember that the section's officer (*mem kaf*) asked me later [about the killing]: “Tell me, how did it feel?” And our company's officer (*mem mem*) was there and said to him: “Cut the

“bullshit” (*mah ata mevalbel loh bamoah, tafsik lekashkesh lo shtuyot*).¹² That’s what I remember.

Whereas in the above case some may argue that the killing was unavoidable, since the men were on a mission to bomb a house and the Arab happened to be in their way, in other cases there was less moral justification for killing. Sometimes the elderly Arabs who remained in the villages when the rest of the population had left became a target. The following case was recounted by Yoskeh, who, as noted earlier, was reluctant at first to say anything:

We reached Yarta and there something happened that I will not tell you: An old Arab woman was killed there. That is, I can tell you without disclosing who did it. Someone saw the Arab woman and shot a burst at her and she ran and even picked up her shoe. It was important for her to hold the shoe. Then he shot another burst and another burst at her. And she died.

It was somewhat surprising that, over half a century after the event, the name of the man who committed this war crime was still a secret. Was it loyalty? Shame? A code of silence? Probably all three and more. It was an exception that could not be overlooked, delineating the boundaries of norm and deviation. Later in the interview, when reflecting on the moral consequences of the war, Yoskeh adhered to the topic, arguing that his company kept to high moral norms with the exception of the woman’s killing:

We fought in the central front, in the northern front, in the southern front, and I remember no such [immoral] deeds other than the terrible case in Yarta when one of us killed an Arab woman simply for the sake of killing. That is terrible and I will never forget it. Otherwise, I cannot recall any improper behavior by one of us or by people who were with us.

In the accounts regarding the looters of the Ramle refugees and the killer of the old woman, the exception comes to clarify the rule: the Palmach veterans perceive and present themselves as moral. Later on in the interview Yoskeh returned for a third time to discuss the killing of the woman:

I want to tell you something. We were touring Yarta not long ago [in May 2003] and I was walking near a friend of mine telling him: “Let me remind you” [of the woman that was killed here] . . . And he says: “I don’t remember it happening.” A friend of mine who was near me in the battle. He says: “I don’t remember it happening.” I say to him: “It couldn’t be that you don’t remember.” He says: “I don’t remember it happening”. And I see it in front of my eyes. I see her running up the hill. I see how she runs. She had a white shoe. She bent and he shot. I see it with my eyes. And he says: “I don’t remember it happening”. Believe me: If he says he doesn’t remember, he doesn’t remember. Namely, it has been erased. Just as I have erased many things.

Erasure, Yoskeh clarified, was inherent to the intense experience of war. When I asked him what the consequences of the incident were at the time, he noted that there were no consequences whatsoever. “No one boycotted him [the killer] . . . Only I boycotted him in my heart.” Like so many other issues, this too was silenced, he noted:

I don’t remember any discussions I had with anyone [during the war]. Nothing whatsoever all through the war. I don’t remember even a single discussion – that I sat down and talked. Only once did I talk to my friend Zvi, yes, whom I had brought to Hakhsharat Rishonim and I said to him: “I don’t know why I pulled you into all of this. More people are killed here than where you were before.” That is what I remember. But otherwise, I held no discussion with anyone throughout the war.

A solid silence accompanied the war; events and reflections that could have been discussed, elaborated, and interpreted remained unuttered. However, fifty-five years later, during a tour of the site, Yoskeh was slightly more prepared to talk, at least with an ex-comrade, and, although hesitant, also with me. Like Gad’s earlier comment that the conquest of the village near Haifa would have invited an investigation committee nowadays, we find that other incidents are reconsidered, a little more openly, fifty-five years later.

The oral narratives of war that were told over fifty years after the events were somewhat similar to published war memoirs. Like memoirs, they came late in life. Hynes defined the memoir genre as “reflective, selective, more self-consciously constructed than the immediate reports, an old self looking back – sometimes across half a century – at what the young self did, what happened to him, what changed him” (1997:xiv). Many of the interviewed Palmachniks had written their memoirs in some form, whether merely on scattered papers to remain in the drawer (yet pulled out to show me copies during interviews, as if needed to support the oral account); to distribute among family members, or to be read at *hakhsharah* parties; and some also for a wider public circulation. Therefore, by the time *some* of the oral narratives were told to me, they had been processed rather than remaining “raw.” They had been weeded, rephrased, and shared. Yet despite this process, some of these narratives were also unresolved, nagging, open ended; they were stories that haunted the Palmach veterans through the years.

Here is another disturbing interaction that distressed the soldiers. During this event they came face to face with the suffering inflicted on the Arab population. As noted earlier, at the height of summer, the original company, now intermingled with “new soldiers,” witnessed the

expulsion of the inhabitants of Lydda and Ramle. Here is Giora's account:¹³

GIORA: I saw a nation walking into exile with all the occurrences that accompany it ... They left with quilts and pillows in their hands and bit by bit lost them, until they were left with only their clothes on. The days were unbearably hot. They passed near us and we had water there, cisterns, and we gave them water.

One day, in the afternoon, just before the evening, someone passed and suddenly fell on the shoulders of one of us and said: Eli, Eli, Eli. Eli studied at Mikve Yisrael [an agricultural high school] and this Arab used to work there and had known him. Or perhaps he had known him from Ness Ziona [Eli's town of origin]. He begged us to allow him to sleep on the stairs of this building, this *khan*. We would not allow them to come near the *khan* fearing that one would take out a gun against us. We were only twenty people there. Eli said: OK, sleep here. The next morning we found him dead.

BEN-ZE'EV: Dead of what?

GIORA: A broken heart (*shivron lev*). We gave him tea in the evening and it seemed that everything was OK. But he never woke up. He wasn't a young man. And like him, many died on the track – children, babies. We saw mothers abandoning their babies – placing them under trees. We really tried to help them.

Giora begins and ends with a partial denial of responsibility for the refugees' suffering. He and his unit merely stood on the side, bearing witness to the expulsion; they gave water to the refugees; the man who died on the stairs died of a broken heart rather than the heat and the journey that was imposed on him; they "really tried to help them." Another account of the Lydda/Ramle expulsion appears in Michael's self-published memoir:

After the conquest of Lod and Ramla [their Hebrew names], thousands of refugees left on their way east (*yatz'uh le-darkam mizrahah*). From the place we were stationed we could see them from the early hours of morning till the middle of the night. From one horizon to the other, trailed an endless stream of people – men, women, elderly, and children. Some were riding donkeys while others walked. They had few possessions: A mattress, some clothes, some cooking utensils. The experts among us said that inside their mattress was their entire wealth. When the refugees reached our point, we directed them to the courtyard where a well was located. With dry throats and thirsty to death they stormed the full buckets that we drew from deep down. Suddenly, a baby fell into the well and they did not even consider stopping their attack on the bucket. Only with force did we manage to make room and pull out the baby, moments before he fell into the deep water.

The procession that seemed like an endless trail of ants moved in silence. Even the dogs did not bark. We did not know that we were witnessing a scene that would define history.

The mere choice to tell this story in print (published in 2003) may indicate that Michael wanted to demonstrate that simple soldiers witnessed and, possibly, took part in making history. Yet what did it mean – that the expulsion of Lydda and Ramle should be justified from today's perspective? Was it the history that he had hoped for? Michael's narrative contained ruminations on the events, implicitly suggesting that the refugees had lost their humanity – it was the soldiers who saved the baby, not its kin. However, it took Michael many decades to decide to write this scene down and expose it beyond the members of Hakhsharat Rishonim, the secret bearers. A story-thread covered by a partial silence was emerging.

Dealing with death

Denial is a key to the entire experience of personal warfare; soldiers cannot give themselves to fighting without it. Therefore, as we have seen, in the Palmach narratives the Palestinian Arabs were at times denied their mere presence and at others their humanity. Denial was applied not only toward "the enemy"; it was partially applied to the way that soldiers coped with the war itself, and the death of comrades. Recalling their first encounter with death, some veterans described surprise; death, somehow, seemed improbable. Here are Giora's recollections of the retreat from the first retaliation activity:¹⁴

We received the order to withdraw and then realized that there are two men seriously wounded . . . I had to carry one of them because there were no stretchers. And so we placed his hands here [pointing to his shoulders] and someone else carried him from the legs. Walking like that in the mountains wasn't easy. It was awful (*nora*). Of course, we didn't think one can get killed despite the fact that the one that I carried had a bullet in his head. One had a bullet in his head and the other in his chest. We were sure someone would come and save them.

Kobby wrote in his personal memoirs of the same armed activity: "And so we played 'war' (*kakh sihaknu be-milhamah*)."¹⁵ By May 1948 the ratio of deaths in Hakhsharat Rishonim had become similar to that of the Palmach in general – one in four fighters was to perish. Death had become more tangible, especially when soldiers witnessed their comrades hit on the battlefield, and when they encountered dying soldiers calling out for help.

Some *hakhsharah* members were sent to care for the technical transfer of their comrades' bodies. In March some of the battalion's members were sent to ambush an armed Arab convoy that arrived from Lebanon. Two men from the *hakhsharah* were killed, when an Arab truck loaded with ammunition exploded. The British arrived on the scene shortly after the incident, and took the bodies to Haifa. Baruch was assigned to search

Haifa's hospitals and identify the bodies of the two *hakhsharah* members. Two months earlier he had been sent with two *hakhsharah* women to accompany another burial, and described the absence of mourning rituals within the unit:¹⁶

BARUCH: When we went back to our tents [after the burial], I wanted to listen to a record but there was an argument whether on such an occasion it is appropriate to listen to records. That was the disagreement then.

BEN-ZE'EV: Do you remember who said what?

BARUCH: I can't remember who objected. There were opinions that it is improper. We could not carry out any mourning rites [*evel*] nor sit the *shiv'ah* [the seven days of Jewish mourning].

Was the removal of the soldiers from the usual mourning procedure intentional, or was it merely an outcome of the heat of war? The usual argument was the latter, as Amnon Shiloah, a Palmach veteran who fought in the Jerusalem area, wrote in his memoirs:

When the battles raged and we were all in a grave situation, our good friends fell, and due to the times, we did not dwell on it (*lo 'amadnu 'al kakha*), as if we were merely pricked by a needle. But that little prick became a wide bleeding wound. Only now do we feel in our bodies the fierce pain. (1990:155)

Supposedly there was no time to mourn. But in parallel, there was no clear norm for how to mourn in this intense period of transformation. Saying little, especially regarding emotions, had an impact on this lack of mourning, and the guilt feelings toward those who had died probably had an impact on this silence too.

During the war, denial and distancing of death was at times replaced by cynicism. One memoir described how, when sitting silently in a truck and heading for their first retaliation mission, one of the soldiers broke the silence and said: "You will not lie on your first battle, so raise your hand if you are no longer a virgin." One raised his hand. Later on in the war they would joke and say: "Because so and so happened, it is your turn now [to die]." Language laundering, or the usage of hazy terms to talk of death, was constantly applied.

Another way of coping with death was to conceal information. Some of those who bore witness to death did not feel comfortable giving testimony. Michael described how twice he hid the details of deaths he had witnessed. In one case, he and his company were located on a "safe" hill, overlooking an adjacent hill where a lethal attack took place and forty-four Palmachiks were killed. Three young men from his small town, who had joined the Palmach as a trio, were killed during this battle while assisting one another. Shortly afterwards, Michael got "leave" to visit home during the second truce. He felt that people on the street

watched him, wondering how he had survived while the three younger men from the town had not. He felt guilty for being alive while they had perished. He went to the homes of these three young men and, when asked if he knew exactly what happened, he denied having been in their vicinity.

The second time Michael concealed the truth occurred some years after the war. He caught a long ride to Jerusalem on a milk truck. An older woman sitting in the truck overheard that he was a member of a specific battalion. She turned to him and asked: "Did you happen to know my son Yonatan who was killed in Damura?" "I don't think so," he answered. The fact was that he had known Yonatan very well. They had fought side by side in Damura, and when Yonatan, the only son of a Holocaust survivor, was hit by a bullet, Michael and another soldier carried his body. Due to the heavy fire, the need to retreat, and the assumption that Yonatan was dead, the commander ordered them to leave the body behind. Yonatan's body was never found. Leaving bodies on the battlefield could not enter any public canon, not even years later; neither could it be explained to the mourning mother.

As the death toll mounted the Palmachniks began realizing the magnitude of their losses, and could no longer apply a sweeping denial of the peril. A denial of the possibility of one's own death substituted for their original denial of all possible deaths. The following remark was inserted into one of the interviews:

I don't know if someone had told you but everyone in war thinks that nothing will happen to him. I think every soldier experiences it. And if one thinks something will happen to him, it usually does. You carry a feeling that someone is protecting you.

The sense of immunity, as well as its disillusionment, was also expressed by some of the British policemen (discussed in [Chapter 9](#)). James Hainge, who served in Palestine from 1945, a period of intense attacks on British armed forces, reflected on this feeling: "I think at 18 you're very [full of] bravado. You always had the feeling that oh, it wouldn't happen to me. I did have a rude awakening when we were blown up."¹⁷ For the Palmach members, as for any soldier, the war was a gambling game. Fear was denied a vocal expression. The men adopted a somewhat strange method to feel safe: amulets as forms of protection ([Saunders 2003](#)). The Palmachniks' faith in these charms was so strong and irrational that Assaf noted in his interview that when he was wounded, he could hardly believe it:¹⁸

When I was wounded I had a kind of horseshoe. It was taken from the heel of a shoe. Do you know it? There used to be a track inside the shoe heel where a hoof was fitted in. I had one of those in my pocket and it was my mascot ... And when I

was wounded I was totally astonished. I remember thinking – “but the hoof is in my pocket.”

The amulet came from Assaf's own shoe; if the Palmach self-image was one of relying on oneself, then it made sense to pick out the charm from one's own belongings. Often they were objects that were linked to battle, such as empty bullets and grenades' safety catches. To be on the safe side, Giora put these two together:

GIORA: On that occasion I went to wash near a water cistern and lost my charm. I had a lucky charm. Almost every soldier had such a charm. At the time I wrote a story about the charm, sent it to the army paper and won the fourth prize.

BEN-ZE'EV: What was the charm?

GIORA: An empty bullet that I once found in my pocket. And so it stayed in my pocket. And later a hand-grenade's safety catch that I tucked into the empty bullet. It was in my coat pocket and after we finished washing I discovered the charm was gone. Don't ask. With a few other friends, we were down on all fours searching because it was clear to me that without a charm . . . [silence]. On the eve of the next battle I said to my officer: “Listen, I'm not sure I'll join this battle because I have no charm.”

Such an assertion demonstrated not only dedication to the charm but also the strong sense of the voluntary nature of fighting. However, second thoughts, self-criticism, and doubt did surface sporadically during and shortly after the war. These attempts were restricted to a small number of ex-fighters, and were unwelcome in the public sphere.

Subversive tales and closure

Silence regarding the darker sides of the 1948 war engulfed the great majority of the veterans, but not everyone. Immediately after 1948 Uri Avnery, then aged twenty-five, published his war memoir, “In the fields of the Philistines, 1948,” based on a column he had written during the war itself.¹⁹ “In the fields of the Philistines” won him fame, and within a few months ten editions of the book were printed. Sitting in a bus in 1949, Avnery overheard two youngsters talking of his book, expressing regret for having missed the war. He wrote in response:

I thought that “In the Fields of the Philistines” was a war-hating book. My intention was not to glorify the war or blur its horrors. But if these two youngsters read the book and were jealous of us [the participants in the war], something was missing; the other side of the coin. At that moment I made up my mind to write it down. (1950:7)

Avnery was soon to publish a second book, “The other side of the coin,” whose soldier-heroes, he noted on the book cover, “are flesh and blood,

cursing is part of their language, carrying out acts of bravery alongside atrocities, dreaming of orgies and shivering in fear.” The themes revealed in “The other side of the coin” echo the hidden stories of war. One story is of a naïve Palestinian villager who left his family and walked the road to Ramle to find work. He was ambushed by Avnery’s unit, wounded, neglected as a prisoner, and died a few days later. Another is of a wounded Jewish soldier lying helpless in the hospital bed next to Avnery. Avnery learnt from the nurse that the soldier was suffering from injuries in the stomach that the doctor had failed to diagnose. The soldier thought that he was being neglected because he belonged to the right-wing Irgun military faction and not to the mainstream Palmach and Hagannah. The soldier spoke to Avnery through a long night of suffering, and died the next morning.

“The other side of the coin” did not win the same fame as “In the fields of the Philistines.” In fact, it was taken off the shelves via a bureaucratic procedure, and was not published for another twenty-six years. The general public, led by a dominant political apparatus, did not want to deal with its messages. It was way ahead of its time.

S. Yizhar’s two stories – “The prisoner” and “The story of Khirbat Hiz’ah,” published in 1949 – suffered a similar fate. “The prisoner” discussed the deliberation of a soldier on how to treat an Arab prisoner, while “The story of Khirbat Hiz’ah” described the conquest of an Arab village and the expulsion of its inhabitants.²⁰ These heretical narratives were not only rejected by the general public, which wanted to keep believing that 1948 was a war characterized by purity of arms, but even the Palmachniks found them hard to bear. Yoskeh noted in his interview that he was astonished when he first read Yizhar’s stories; they did not strike a chord. “Only later did I begin to believe it, when documents from government and army discussions were published. Only then did I begin to see that there was some kind of decision.” Yoskeh did not say any more, but he probably meant a decision to expel Arabs and not to allow them to return.

What should be noted here is that five decades after 1948 there was a wave of commemorative enterprises. The self-doubt and guilt feelings that lingered were now more openly expressed; mourning was now more acceptable. In addition, the Palmachniks were growing old, and hoped to leave their tales for future generations. One collective manifestation of this commemorative wave was the creation of the *Hakhsharat Rishonim* album, prepared for Beit ha-Palmach (Home of the Palmach) in 2003.²¹ It consists of photographs accompanied by captions, a map of the sites of the *hakhsharah*’s battles, some caricatures (relating to lucky charms), and short texts.

Two pages of the album are dedicated to the seven men listed as “our losses [killed in action] (*ha-halalim shelani*).” The Hebrew term used for those killed, *halal*, has no parallel in English. It comes from the root for space and indicates the empty space that remains following the “disappearance” of the one who had died. The *hakhsharah* lost seven young men during the war, out of roughly twenty fighters. Under the photographs of the men killed, the date and place of death are indicated. Alongside the photos is an enlarged map of Israel, and photographs of those killed appear on the map, on the location of their place of death, thus creating a graphic link between the country and those who have sacrificed their lives for it.

A notable date in Hakhsharat Rishonim’s calendar of commemoration was the half-century anniversary in 1998. Hakhsharat Rishonim organized a large party, the very same party established during the war, only this time members of the soldiers’ extended families were invited. What had thus far remained within the small circle of *hakhsharah* members now went public. One member added a new performance to the regular texts and songs. He sang the original Palmach anthem, but changed the lyrics.²² To exemplify this change, let us compare the original lyrics of the first verse of the Palmach anthem with the “new” ones. The original was:

The storm will murmur in the vicinity
But our head will not bend



Fig. 7.1 Palmach members, 1944 (the men in the picture are not related to the ones discussed in this book) (Courtesy of the Palmach Photo Gallery, the Palmach House)



Fig. 7.2 The expulsion of Lydda's Arabs, July 1948 (Courtesy of the Palmach Photo Gallery, the Palmach House)

We are always ready for command
We, We, the Palmach²³

In the new version the veteran wrote a eulogy, mourning the loss of their 1948 values, the loss of an ideology and path. Here is the first verse of the new version – similar to, yet also very different from, the original one:

The storm has been silenced
And our head is bent
We have long forgotten
The dream of 1948²⁴

The Palmachniks tell their tales in their own characteristic way – laconically, avoiding big words. They have not forgotten their dream, but it simply faded when it hit reality. Looking back with a sense of amazement at who they were and where they are now, they are caught up in a sense of loss – they lost their youth, they lost their comrades, and they lost their vision. And just as it is still hard to tell their own tale of 1948, it is also hard to admit that the forces around them were more powerful. They had hoped for something else.

8 The Palmach Women

The recruitment of women was not on the agenda when the Palmach was first established as a guerilla force, in May 1941. Only a small number of women were accepted at the start. However, as mentioned in Chapter 7, the idea of the *hakhsharah*, a unit combining young men and women, came into being in 1942. As the structure of the *hakhsharah* took root, women became an integral part of the Palmach. However, as early as 1943 it was decided that the women would train separately from the men, would be commanded by women, and would mainly carry out auxiliary military functions. The number of women in the Palmach reached its peak at the beginning of 1948 – over a third of the Palmach as a whole.¹

The participation of women in the Palmach became at the time a symbol of its existence – a young woman in shorts with a tent or a desert landscape in the background was the popular image. Women's incorporation into the Palmach had ideological roots in European socialism. August Bebel's influential book *Woman under Socialism* ([1883] 1904) had a lingering formative influence on socialist movements, of which the Palmach perceived itself as an offshoot. Socialism, argued Bebel, could succeed only if women were liberated from the family role imposed on them by the capitalist mode of production. The most direct influence on the Palmach came from the Soviet bloc. Women's integration into the Red Army during World War II, at the very time the Palmach was established, had a further impact on the Palmach ethos of gender equality (Kadish 1995:118–19).² Such egalitarianism was presented as an indicator of modernization and progress. Through women's participation in the defense force, the Jewish population set an image that contrasted with that of Arab women, understood as adhering to traditional gender roles and hence as "backward" and "primitive."³

But in fact, whatever the public image or the self-image, women's role in the Palmach was a restricted one. This chapter focuses on the women of Hakhsharat Rishonim and explores how they coped with their symbolic salience vis-à-vis their actual marginalization. It begins by looking

into the construction of the public image of Palmach women by examining a 1990s film created by the Palmach veterans' organization as well as other female commemorative enterprises. It then moves to consider the women's self-perceptions, and the explicit as well as implicit roles that they were expected to perform in 1948. The women's war memories portray two rather different ways of relating to the *hakhsharah* and its men. On the one hand, a strong sense of solidarity created through the isolation of the group and the fictive kinship patterns within it. On the other, the relegation to auxiliary and support roles that placed them in an inferior position, especially within a context whereby the fighter is the epitome of nationalism.

Commemorating combatant women

In 1988 a nonprofit organization of Palmach veterans, the Ohalei Palmach (lit. "the Palmach tents"), was established.⁴ One of its aims was to produce films that would make accessible to the general public different aspects of the Palmach. The date of the organization's appearance on the public scene deserves some attention. In 1977 the Likud Party, associated with the Israeli right, attained power after many years in opposition. The Palmach veterans, sons (both literally and metaphorically) of the prestate Zionist socialists, felt in the years that followed that their history was losing ground; the Likud government was investing primarily in its own "revisionist" history.⁵ In response, the Palmach veterans began organizing themselves in 1984 – first by establishing an association, later growing into establishing Beit ha-Palmach ("the home of the Palmach"), incorporating a film series, an internet site, an archive, and a multimedia museum. One of the interviewees from Hakhsharat Rishonim, Herzlia, commented on the political moment that led to their organization:⁶ "[At that time] exactly, Begin and his friends came to power and began to deny the Palmach's existence. Today it somehow has its place but at that time there was a tendency to deny what had happened [the central role of the Palmach in the establishment of the State of Israel]." Herzlia continued by noting how a Palmach veteran that she had known decided to set up an archive and encourage the *hakhsharot* to prepare albums of their past. And indeed, the members of Hakhsharat Rishonim collected material, and Herzlia was among the creators of the album, which was then deposited at the Palmach archive, and copies were distributed among the *hakhsharah* members.

While many of their commemorative projects can be fascinating for the purpose of analysis, this chapter starts off by examining only two

such enterprises: the Ohalei Palmach's film on women; and a small book that recorded a day conference on the Palmach women. The Ohalei Palmach's film was part of a series headed by Haim Hefer, a well-known lyricist and former member of the Palmach, and Dana Kogan, a producer by profession, also of the 1948 generation. Between 1988 and 2002 they produced eighteen films. Only one of these was dedicated to the Palmach women, and bears the title *Akhyotenu giborot ha-tehila* (Our sisters, heroines of fame). While the entire series is dedicated to different fields and units of fighting, this film is different because it is about the women in general. Why dedicate a film to the women if there is no parallel film dedicated to the men? Perhaps because the underlying assumption was that the Palmach was a manly body – a body of fighting men. The construction of manhood and maleness as the epitome of the Zionist ethos was established partly through the Palmach (M. Weiss 2002). In contrast, the Palmach women were understood as unique, as an anomaly; a phenomenon that deserved attention, despite the fact that at one point they had comprised a third of the Palmach members. That is, the women's presence was championed, but they were certainly not perceived as the heart and pulse of the military organization.

The women who were chosen to be portrayed in the film are those few who were directly involved with fighting or those who were killed. In other words, despite the small number of female fighters, they were the ones to become the heroines of the film. The film's blurb, which appears both on the cover of the film cassette and on the film's website notes:

Since the establishment of the Palmach in 1941 and until it was dismantled at the end of the War of Independence in 1949, 1,600 women served in different capacities, be it as parachutists, radio operators, paramedics, instructors, culture and welfare coordinators, secretaries, drivers, providers of ordnance and weapons, and more. Some of them were officers. The presence of women in the Palmach was a decisive factor in the establishment of the Palmach spirit. Thus were formed the Palmach comradeship (*re'ut*), humane leadership (*ha-manhigut ha-'enoshit*), the voluntary disciplinary style (*signon ha-mishma'at ha-hitnadvutit*) and the heritage of Israeli culture and humor (*moreshet ha-tarbut ve-ha-humor ha-yisraelim*). Twenty-two Palmach women members fell in its different battles.⁷

What does this text emphasize? First, it dwells on the fact that these women held expert military roles. This, as will become apparent further on in the chapter, was atypical among Palmach women. Most of the women in the Palmach served in auxiliary capacities: cooking, washing, liaison (dispatches, supplies), and maintenance (clothes, arms). The film's blurb also notes that "1,600 girls served" in the Palmach, a number that exceeds others sources of data.

Moreover, why does the blurb call them “girls” (*banot*)? A simple answer would be that indeed, this was the common language, the accepted term, at the time; the women in the Palmach were named “girls,” and indeed, they were mostly young. Moreover, their self-image, especially when looking back after half a century, was that they were merely girls when entering service. However, when we survey the introductory text of Ohalei Palmach’s other seventeen films, we discover that the men are not referred to by the equivalent term, “boys” (*banim*). Only once does the term “boys” appear, alongside the term “girls,” when it is said: “Hativat Yiftach-Palmach was comprised mainly of training groups (*hakhsharot*), ‘boys and girls.’” In all the other instances the men of the Palmach are referred to according to the names of their units, as well as “forces,” “units,” “fighters,” or, once, as “youngsters.” Hence, already in the introductory text to the film we are to learn that the men and women of the Palmach were not counterparts – the men were fighters, and hence implicitly superior to the “girls,” who by their mere popular definition were belittled.

The “girls” are said to have contributed to the Palmach’s unique spirit. If the women were rarely fighters, why is there a reference to comradeship? Is comradeship not a term derived from battles and male bonding? If the “girls” contributed to a sense of solidarity, why use “comradeship,” a masculine-oriented word? Likewise, if the officers were mainly men, and the very few female officers commanded mostly women’s sections, in what way did women contribute to the “humane leadership”? There is a clear gap here: The women are portrayed as integral and central to the Palmach ethos, while their contribution was actually rather different from its self-presentation.

Finally, the text places two figures side by side: 1,600 women are said to have served in the Palmach, while 22 fell in battle. The low ratio of deaths among women is glaring, especially if compared to the men. While during the first half of 1948 among the Palmach male fighters it is assumed that roughly one in three men was killed, among the women the proportion was dramatically lower.⁸ If we calculate the ratio of fallen women during the entire Palmach period, 1941–8, we reach one dead female soldier to seventy-two who served. In other words, the numbers emphasize the great gap and the dissimilarity between the sacrifice of the men vis-à-vis that of the women. In a setting and a generation whereby death, sacrifice, and respect are bound together, the women, again, are set at a lower rank.⁹

Hence, there are indications regarding the lower status of women in the Palmach even in the film’s blurb and its position within the entire series. But what of the film itself – what does it choose to portray? The

forty-minute film is based on interviews with roughly ten women. The interviews are interspersed with passages read from women's 1948 diaries, archival photographs of battle scenes, and reconstructions of certain episodes. It is clear why the film's title is "Heroines of fame"; the women chosen to be interviewed stand out as active, aspiring to be equal to the fighting men, self-trained in overcoming fear and being members of the small group who held professional roles during the war. "We were all *jedayot*," says one, using a Hebrew slang word borrowed from Arabic meaning that they were tough.¹⁰ The women of the film are those who participated in battles, traveled to Europe as radio operators or parachutists, killed Arabs in face-to-face encounters, served as paramedics under fire, or specialized in arms training. Some of them describe the headaches caused by the nitroglycerin in preparation of explosives, the effort to carry on despite sleep deprivation, and the circumstances of being wounded in battle. These women, and their stories, are similar to the men and the stories they tell.

The film, either due to the 1990s context in which it was produced or to its attention to the women's perception, shows some willingness to touch on what were for many years considered delicate issues. Two of the interviewees recall their experience of what we now term post-traumatic stress disorder. One of them is Netiva Ben-Yehudah, who prior to the film described the episode in her semi-autobiographic 1948 trilogy.¹¹ Ben-Yehudah narrates how she shot, from a distance of 4 meters, Arabs who were running away from a bus that had been booby-trapped by the Palmach. Following this episode she returned to her base, and lay in bed for four days staring at the ceiling, after which she decided to leave her unit. A second interviewee, Aviva Rabinowitz, described how when the war ended she went to bed for ten days, turned her face to the wall, and could not bring herself to do anything. It was her worst war experience, she noted, worse than the serious injury she encountered earlier.

Belated responses to exclusion

But the above examples were exceptions. The film, almost throughout, preserved its "fighters'" tone. This, it seems, indicates that those highly motivated to fight were also highly motivated to commemorate. Many of the women that appear in the film appeared twelve years earlier, in 1986, at a conference on "The actions of the Palmach woman-soldier" (*pe'ulot ha-haverah ba-palmah*).¹² This one-day conference was transcribed and published as a booklet by the "Center for the History of the Hagannah Defense Force named after Yisrael Galili." Yet while the film, a product

of much editorial work, is relatively univocal, the discussions of the 1986 conference disclose diverging opinions. For instance, in one of the conference's panels Ada Sireni, a former Palmach member, dared to express an alternative to the heroic female image.¹³ Sireni, herself a member of a *hakhsharah*, described the division of labor along gender lines that evolved within these groups – men as fighters and women as caretakers – saying:

I will surely cause a disappointment to those who seek the female fighters in the Palmach. I believe that what is significant is not necessarily found in war but rather in the sharing of daily life. Those who were not members of the *hakhsharah* would talk with envy of the *hakhsharat* because the girls created a “cozy home” and fulfilled all the other roles, those more important and less so, so that the fighter would feel at home, in the full meaning of the word (Center for the History of the Hagannah Defense Force 1988:17, inverted commas in original)

Netiva Ben-Yehudah, one of the prominent Palmach spokswomen, responded sarcastically to Sireni's comments: “What will be remembered by history will be ‘the cozy home’ and not the actions?!”

Indeed, the (in)significance of the Palmach women cropped up recurrently during this one-day conference. Toward the end of the day a woman from the audience called for a change in the lyrics of the Palmach anthem. Four decades after the Palmach was dismantled, the anthem's second verse still greatly agitated her.¹⁴ Its lyrics are as follows:

From Metula [at the northernmost point of Israel] to the Negev [the southern region] [*mi-metula 'ad ha-negev*]

From the sea [Mediterranean] to the desert – [*min ha-yam 'ad ha-midbar*]

Every young and good man takes arms [*kol bakhur ve-tov laneshek*]

Every young man is on guard [*kol bakhur al ha-mishmar*]

The woman who interrupted from her seat argued:

For years I sang the Palmach anthem and now I wish to correct it: “Every young and good man takes arms, every young woman on guard” [*kol bakhur va-tov laneshek, bakhurah al ha-mishamar*]. I am serious. It is my wish that from this place a call for change will emerge.

The sense of urgency was as strong as the sense of marginalization among some of the women forty years after the events. They were still hoping to set the relations of power straight, if only through changing the anthem's lyrics. From the conference's booklet it is clear that this group of “chosen women” was well aware of their prominent role in defining the nature and essence of the Palmach women's public image. Perhaps that is why the image they aspired to did not seem something of

the past, but something to recreate in the present. At the opening session one of the conference's organizers, Rina Dotan, reflected on this issue:

We are consciously aiming to contribute our part in history [*litrom et-helkenu la-historia*] and make us part of it both as individuals and as a group. We wish to emphasize that we were "that kind of a group" (*havurah she-kazot*), a special one, one that gradually came together, because an inner voice was calling, the voice of an era and its events, the voice of the labor movement that believed in security and settlement as the guarantee of our return and revival (*tekumah*). We wish to leave something for the generations to come, a source for historians and researchers, for writers and storytellers, for educators, for playwrights and directors. Indeed, they are interested. Some of them are with us here. (Center for the History of the Hagannah Defense Force 1988:8)

It is evident from Dotan's words that commemoration entailed a dual struggle. One part of it was over the survival of the Palmach's role in the history of the state, but another issue was internal to the Palmach; it was the attempt to redefine the women's place within it. This group of women, who appeared both at the conference and a decade later in the film, hoped to reincorporate into public history their understanding of the role of Palmach women.

Rina Dotan played a leading role in the Palmach women's commemoration, and so following the appearance of her name in different publications, I interviewed her in September 2006.¹⁵ Rina joined the Palmach in 1944, at the age of eighteen, and shortly afterward was asked to recruit graduating high school students to the Palmach. She later became a paramedic (including serving on the front lines) as well as a medical secretary. She commented that she was relegated to secretarial work in parallel to being a paramedic because she was a woman: "They would not have asked this of a man."

All along Rina perceived herself as a feminist, and was active within the women's branches of political parties as well as a member on different boards of directors. She was a fervent promoter of the idea that "equal obligations [for women and men] are a key to equal rights." Among other initiatives Rina and her friends, along with a group of prominent feminist academics, organized a conference on the role of women in the Israeli army. She noted that she approached the army saying: "You must send your senior staff. We don't want to be something pertaining to the past. We want to be contemporary and you need to be our partners in this dialogue." The large conference was considered a success, and as a result dozens of Palmach women started giving talks to young female soldiers and young women in youth movements.

It was involvement in contemporary issues until the late 1970s that led Rina to commemoration activities from then on. Through her public

activities she learnt that some Palmach men were beginning to interview veterans ranked “battalion commanders” and higher, and said to herself: “If so, there was not a single woman member in the Palmach.” In response, she and a group of friends established a self-documenting project of Palmach women. As each of them recruited her own social circles, they managed to record 209 interviews with Palmach women. It now seemed that whereas a real revolution in women’s rights was not quite achieved in the time of the Palmach, belated activism placed women “on the map.”

Netiva Ben-Yehudah played an exceptionally salient role in this awakening. Serving in the Palmach from 1946 until 1948, Ben-Yehudah, unlike most Palmach women, performed a set of professional military roles, including demolition and bomb disposal, topography and scouting, training recruits, transferring ammunition, and escorting convoys. In 1981, over three decades after the events, she published her first – witty and controversial – quasi-autobiography, based on her experiences during the first months of 1948. It was one of the first works to demythologize the heroic image of 1948. In the next decade she published two more novels on the topic, similar in style. Her books won a wide readership, well beyond the Palmach generation.

Why did it take Ben-Yehudah over three decades to relate her war experiences? In other words, if there was a sense of injustice among the Palmach women, why did they remain silent for so long? Yael Feldman (2000), in an article devoted to Ben-Yehudah’s Palmach trilogy, provided her explanation of this riddle.¹⁶ Feldman argued that initially, in order to conform to her generation’s norm, Ben-Yehudah had hoped to prove that she was strong, and “strong people do not talk. Strong people keep silent,” she wrote (quoted in Feldman 2000:152). However, the silence that characterized the Palmach generation did not encompass all arenas. Literary works did flourish in the aftermath of the war, primarily fictionalized memoirs. Yet this literary scene was utterly dominated by men. The Palmach women, wrote Feldman, “hardly left their mark on the literary legacy of their generation. Nor has the situation changed since” (Feldman 2000:144). This male domination of the literature was accompanied by a “high” and relatively formal language, adhering to the rules and regulations of written Hebrew.

Ben-Yehudah’s books sought to break this male literary domination at several levels. At the linguistic level she broke all rules: spoken Hebrew became written Hebrew, packed with the usage of slang, language mistakes, and the invention of original new words. At the content level it aimed to finally give voice to an unusual narration of the war, which happened to be that of a woman. That mattered because,

as Ben-Yehudah herself put it, “I do not think that there was ever an underground movement in the world where male chauvinism was celebrated so vehemently” (Ben-Yehudah 1981:296, my translation).¹⁷ The 1980s was finally the time to go public with this declaration. Exposing male chauvinism was part of a larger confession: the need to describe one’s immediate experience, which had remained sealed from public ears for many years – the untold, nonheroic facets of 1948. “Too much has been left out,” Ben-Yehudah stated in the introductory pages to her second volume, “Through the binding ropes”:

From among all the bad feelings that I carry since the beginning of the state, one is awful: The “Zionist experiment” is not documented properly. Not right. With disappearances. With concealment. All has been written by people who were emotionally recruited, who had all kinds of interests. And I have this belief that only if all the details will be registered, only if people will look into the facts, straightforward, without bypasses, with integrity – only then would we be able to extrapolate the right conclusions from the Zionist enterprise and only then will we allow ourselves to act as sane people, and only then, one could, for instance, create here, in the land of our fathers, smart, beautiful things, great works of art. Only then will culture begin here. Only then will it be a good place. (1985:3, my translation)

Ben-Yehudah was motivated by both a positivist and a romantic approach; she seemed to be arguing that all the details can be revealed and, if done wholeheartedly, the record will finally be reliable and true.

Ben-Yehudah succeeded in making the Palmach women more visible and real. However, because she was unique, the experiences of most of the Palmach women did not find resonance in her story. Authentic and devoted to telling her story she certainly was, but not quite representative. The stories that were told by the *hakhsharah* women stand in stark contrast to Ben-Yehudah’s narrative. First, the *hakhsharah* women lacked motivation to be full-fledged fighters – or at least were not willing to assert themselves. Second, they adhered to puritan norms, which Ben-Yehudah detested. However, like Ben-Yehudah, the women of the *hakhsharah* describe their helplessness in light of their inherent marginalization within the Palmach. The roles they were given, and with which they complied, consisted of the very essential components that Ben-Yehudah was reluctant to accept. Within the *hakhsharah*, possibly more than elsewhere, the women were relegated to traditional feminine roles.

Gender roles

At the declarative level, the Palmach was devoted to gender equality. However, already in 1945, Yigal Alon, its commander in chief, argued

that the only combat roles available to women should be in radio communication and as medics (Kadish 1995:121). In the winter of 1947 Alon expanded this policy to prevent women from participating in combatant roles altogether.¹⁸ Despite some opposition and a few exceptions the decision was implemented, and women became the military support forces. Their common tasks, as manifested in the interviews, were to oversee food supply and meals, do the washing, maintain weapons, serve as home medics, and, at times, guard (their kibbutz), serve as lookouts (on cars coming in from Lebanon), and accompany convoys (where weapons could be hidden from the British by women). Talila Kosh Zohar summed up this development:

Despite the vague Palmach commitment to equality, the women were usurped from the prestigious roles – the fighting roles – and made to be “a queen within her own house.”¹⁹ The prominence gained by being “mothers” to the soldiers did not coincide with the mythic image of the fighting *tzabar* woman, did not correspond with true gender equality, and certainly did not testify to a new feminine model within the hegemonic system of national symbols. (1999:26, my translation)

Kosh Zohar’s argument reverberates in the accounts of the *hakhsharah* women. Rivka’leh, for instance, decided to ignore the Palmach veterans’ organization. While her husband, also a member of the *hakhsharah*, joined the organization and attended their meetings, she did neither. The entire idea seemed alien to her. “Let bygones be bygones” (*mah she-hayah hayah*), she remarked. “It [the Palmach experience] did not imprint on me such great experiences. The girls [!] were not so much part of the making. They were companions (*mitlavot*).” Moreover, on another occasion she noted that the men of the *hakhsharah* were the heroes. “We [the ‘girls’] admired them,” she noted. Rivka’leh took the outsider’s position – she found no interest in public commemoration, nor had she any incentive to discuss the gender inequality of which she was well aware.

But not all the women reacted as she did. Some were still disappointed with their Palmach roles, often voicing men’s explanations. Ruti, the squad women’s commander, described in her interview a fragment of a conversation she recalled from the early months of 1948:²⁰

I remember they [the men] left . . . there was information that a gang was based in a house in Jurba. And they left. I was with the battalion and company commanders. I had an argument with them. I think Ron said: “The kind of work you [women] do is much more important than going with the young men. First, because you are physically unfit and second, because someone has to prepare the hot water, the food, the welcome, the encouragement, when they [the men] come back. And these are more important than having you go out to battle.” And in fact I remember that we arranged the dining hall and the hot water and everything.

Ruti, like many of the other women, seemed to have surrendered to the role she was assigned, although not wholeheartedly. Others, such as Lea, were still upset six decades after the events, not necessarily by what she was made to do but by the fact that her contribution was not acknowledged:²¹

The support military roles that are nowadays carried out by men used to be carried out by the girls from the *hakhsharah*. Was there a launderette? No there wasn't. They [the girls] would stand and wash the [men's] clothes and socks and the "cheese" [smelly socks] and iron their clothes and wash their rooms and place the clean clothes so that when they came back from the battles they would always have a cozy home. They didn't return to a tent, like soldiers do today. They came back to a family, to a home. There would always be someone waiting for them, waiting with a warm meal, with a packet of chocolate under their bed. It didn't come down from heaven; didn't come down from heaven. How can one go and fight with the weapons unprepared, unready and broken? How can one go on a mission hungry? Are these things possible? And secretaries? Everything, everything, all the support roles were fulfilled by the young women.

On the one hand, Lea emphasized the importance of the feminine roles that the women carried out. On the other, she voiced the insult of being marginalized, saying:

It was clear to me that we [the women] are an integral part and will participate in everything. Suddenly, when we were in Ju'ara, we are told that there is a decision not to allow girls to participate in fighting. That was an insult. I must say it was certainly an insult.

The women noted that the division of labor was not only an outcome of the assumption that men are more capable militarily. To prove it, they argued that male domination continued after the war ended. When in late 1948 the *hakhsharah* moved into the ruins of an Arab village to establish a new kibbutz, all the prominent roles were, again, appropriated by the men: the secretary for external affairs, the bursar, and the kibbutz coordinator. At the time the women did not challenge this state of affairs. Moreover, most of the women did not have intensive professional careers in the years that followed either, and relied on their partners as main breadwinners. What the women did hope to achieve was recognition of the role they did fulfill. In 2003, when the *hakhsharah* members went on a trip to the sites of their battles, some women complained: when they reached the end of their tour they stood for a group photograph, and this is how one of them described what happened:

The boys ran ahead and stood [within the frame] while the girls remained seated at the side [outside the frame]. Only two or three of us said "We, too, were there; we, too, fought." And we stood for the picture. And if you have this

picture you will be able to see that there are only three or four girls within the large group of boys.

It was noted in the previous chapter that in recent years some of the *hakhsharah* men were more willing to talk of issues that had previously been cloaked in silence. A similar change can be detected among the women, who seemed more defiant. The more liberal social context in which their war stories were now being told colored their experience and accentuated their sense of inferiority. They reflected on the generational differences, and characterized the *hakhsharah*'s men as more chauvinist when compared to their sons and sons-in-law.

However, unlike Netiva Ben-Yehudah's clear statement, theirs was more like a commentary on subjugation than a call for change. The tone, when talking of the war, had a nostalgic yearning. In that sense, it differed from the men's rendering of the war. The men, through the war, leapt into maturity and became national symbols. The women's experience was much lower key: They left their families to become part of a compact social group, and they were impressed by and attracted to this intensity. They often likened the *hakhsharah* to a family, as one of them said: "We were a bunch of youth, men and women (*ne'arim ve-ne'arot*), like a unified family for the good and the bad." Within this metaphor of a family, and the clear gender divide, the women soon found themselves playing mothers, sisters, and lovers.

Fictive kinship: mothers and mourners

Cleaning, cooking, and washing are traditional maternal roles. But beyond that, the role of "mothers" in the Palmach was also semiofficial: Each squad was designated a mother or two (sing. *ima*; pl. *imahot*) who would be in charge of the soldiers' needs, meaning the nonmilitary logistics: clean socks, transfer of mail, and the like. The more responsible and involved among the women were approached to be "mothers," usually by the male officers. This meant that when the men were out on military operations, some women were accompanying "mothers," although stationed behind the lines. Me'ira described how one of the officers asked her if she would be a mother. When she agreed, she and Herzlia were taken to outposts in the Latroun area. This stint gave Me'ira a taste of war:²²

We were mothers there and worked well. I cannot remember being afraid. We heard artillery shells flying above our heads and bullets. It was then that the foul-up [*fashla*, slang derived from Arabic] in Latroun [front] happened when company B of the new religious guys [was hit]²³ ... We did not participate,

but we could see everything from the outposts. I felt an inner transformation. I suddenly understood it wasn't a summer camp or holiday. It was war here. I remember it as a bad dream.

Me'ira's "motherhood" excursion occurred during a period known as the "battles of the ten days" (*kravot 'aseret ha-yamim*) in mid-July 1948. One of the disastrous consequences of these "battles" was the expulsion of the vast majority of the Arab population of two large towns: Lydda and Ramle. The number of refugees from this expulsion reached 50,000–70,000 people, including 15,000 who now fled for the second time, after having reached these towns following the conquest of their own villages earlier in the war (Morris 2004:425).²⁴ At the height of summer the inhabitants of these towns were made to walk east toward Ramallah, where a new border line was being formed.²⁵ Me'ira, who until then had experienced the war as a release from her mother's domination and a wonderful social grouping, explained how becoming a witness to these events changed her perception:

I remember it like a bad dream. Really. I remember that my personality completely changed; my thoughts; my behavior. I saw a column of Arabs – families – father, mother, children, grandchildren, leaving their home in Lod [the Hebrew name for Lydda], Ramle, and walking toward the Jordan. What shall I say? They were loaded with bundles. Bundles wrapped in sheets and rugs. They carried sewing machines. It was June, I think, and it was hot, very hot. And they were throwing away their bundles. And kept walking, dragging their feet; bent. I want to tell you: Children, old people. This picture ... They went through the tended fields. I felt it was a great loss ... This threw me into the war because until then I was like a freelancer. It is not nice to say so but it is true.

Me'ira clarified that "motherhood" on the frontlines and the encounter with Arab suffering was an exceptional occasion. Framed as a bad dream, it was a one-time experience that did not match the war's other positive experiences of laughing and having a good time. Herzlia, who was with Me'ira during this stint, referred to it as "one of the most difficult scenes from the war of liberation; a scene hard to forget," adding:²⁶

I can actually see it (*mamash roah et-zeh*) – the columns of refugees leaving the place, escaping to somewhere (*le'ansehu*), disappearing into the unknown (*el ha-ne'elam*).

BEN-ZE'EV: How was it? Could you describe how it looked to you?

HERZLIA: It looked awful (*nora*). Columns of people with babies. Women. What you saw was black. Everyone wore black. Many children all along the way, as we were riding a jeep. Suitcases. Bundles too heavy to carry were left behind. I think they reached their destination empty handed ... They did not complain, they did not turn to us, they were indifferent. They walked on the side of the road.

The fact that these refugees were portrayed by Herzlia as “disappearing into the unknown” led to another question: What sense did she make of these events? This is how she answered:

At the time, we didn’t think we were doing something bad. We were only doing something good. That was clear. It was the War of Liberation, we are fighting for our existence [present tense in original], and no one was thinking where things are heading and what will become of them … To say I had humanitarian thoughts – I probably did but I didn’t talk about them and did not mention them to anyone, and it did not bother me later throughout the war. Yet it remained in my memory, in my consciousness.

Through “motherhood,” Herzlia and Me’ira drew closer to the male soldiers’ experiences. As a result, not only did they, like the men, come face to face with warfare, but their narrative adopted some of the lacunae and sanitation processes that framed the events within an acceptable discourse.

The women who remained in the support roles, who were not eyewitnesses to the events, were more easily able to circulate a processed and sanitized war narrative. For instance, Pnina, who also happened to arrive at the twin cities of Ramle and Lydda subsequent to their conquest, due to her role as a wireless operator, described them as follows:²⁷

There was no conquest of Ramle and Lod [Lydda]. They escaped out of their own will (*hem barhu levad*). No one remained; no one. I passed in the jeep with Moshe Dayyan and we saw a dead city, both Ramle and Lod – no one was there. The homes were open, everything was in place, and they simply escaped.

Like Pnina, some women did arrive on the skirmish scenes, but it was always after the events. Most of the time they remained in the background and were not fully aware of what goes on in the frontlines. What they mostly did was to clean rusty hand grenades, work in army camp kitchens, or mend uniforms. Another feminine role was to care for the wounded. Rivka’leh served in what was named “the sick room” (*hadar holim*).²⁸ There, almost throughout the war, she attended those slightly wounded. In fact, she said, her prime task was to give emotional first aid, perhaps what today a psychologist or a social worker would do. When Dallik was seriously injured, the *hakhsharah* women sat by his bedside, changed the dressings on his burns, and brought him balloons.

These practical gestures were linked to the wider symbolic role of women as the mothers of the nation. In the Palmach case, the soldiers were the embodiment of the emerging nation, while the women were to care for them. Hanan Hever (1999) described the salience of tending to

the soldiers' bodies and bereavement in women's poetry on 1948. Lomsky-Feder (2005) demonstrated how in the context of national memorial ceremonies many years later – in the 1990s – women were still portrayed as the mothers of the nation. At the same time they were often positioned in the background: voiceless, passive, and in mourning. Her research into changes that occurred in the last decade showed that in school memorial ceremonies there is “a fortification of the female voice” (2005:301), but it is often the amplification of the mourning female (2005:309).

In the Palmach there was little institutionalization and no clear procedures regarding death and mourning: There was no requirement to attend funerals or to observe the Jewish customary seven-day *shiv'ah*.²⁹ Yet the little that was done was often associated with the women, thus conforming to a universal image of females as mourners, prevalent in early role models such as ancient Egypt, the Bible, and the Greek tragedies. Many of the women described how they would stand near the soldiers' buses as they left for action, and waited for them as they came back. Their first action upon the men's return was to count the returnees and check whether all “their children” had returned. And while the men mostly avoided expressing grief and mourning in public, the women were permitted to do so, within limits.

While nowadays there is a special unit of the Israeli army to notify families of soldiers' deaths, there was no such unit in 1948.³⁰ Two or three members of the *hakhsharah*, often the women, were sent out to tell the families. These assignments had a lasting effect, Lea noted:³¹

The most difficult thing that I remember regarding death is being sent with Rivka'leh to notify the family. We were like social workers ... There was a member/friend (*haver*) called Ara'le, I cannot remember his family name. He was killed and we had to travel to Haifa to his parents to notify them of his death. We were only girls. No one prepared us for this. We wandered around the house, straying for hours. We just could not bring ourselves to enter the house. Finally we came in and the parents understood it themselves. They looked at us and they understood and it was the most difficult thing ever. Terrible.

Rivka'leh described her own memories of the same event: “I remember us coming to Ara'le's parents. He was an only child. His father – it was a tragedy. He pulled his hair, [asking] where was he killed and how, and we didn't know what to tell him.” Death was as always difficult to grasp, but perhaps even more so within the 1948 context that silenced its presence. Lea explained how death ceremonies, lamentation, and bereavement were pushed aside:

There was no time for bereavement. Members were killed and immediately after that one had to leave for another mission. It was all so intense. It was very sad but how long could you mourn? Two days you would mourn a friend and on the third day there was a party and singing, but that was an escape. The party was an escape. Therefore, when we later went down to Sarafand, and there was the first truce, people found themselves in a difficult situation (*anashim hayu be-matzav al ha-panim*).

The women assisted in normalizing military conditions. They welcomed the men returning from the field, met up with them throughout the war, and supported them. When the men were moved to a certain battlefield, the women were based nearby. The women's presence was comforting, not only as fictive mothers but also as sisters and lovers. However, during the war love affairs were not encouraged, and when they budded they remained concealed, conforming to a dominant puritan mind-set.

Puritanism and endogamy

The Palmach was known for its puritan ethos.³² Nitsa Ben-Ari showed how the 1948 *tzabars* were presented as "pure" while the others, whether Arabs or new Jewish immigrants, were depicted as overtly sexual (2006:92). Taking as a case study S. Yizhar's epic on 1948, *Yemei tziklag*, she demonstrated how the *tzabar* men fantasize rather than actually having sex. Even when fantasizing, censorship is applied: The *tzabars* dream of talking to the women they yearn for, they imagine kissing them at most, and they relate to them as sisters. Eros, in the Palmach era, argued Ben-Ari, was transferred to the love of nature and the land (2006:97).

In an attempt to shatter another convention, Netiva Ben-Yehudah chose to portray herself as an antithesis to these puritanical norms. In the film "Our sisters, heroines of fame" she declared: When I had finished kissing my Palmachnik, I'd go to my kibbutznik to finish off the night. All our [Palmach] young men died virgins.³³ Unlike Ben-Yehudah, and in line with the puritanism that is evident in most of the canonic literature of 1948, Hakhsharat Rishonim women adhered to a puritan self-presentation even sixty years later. They abstained from using "dirty words" in the interviews; they were rather reluctant to discuss couples that were formed during the war; and, although relationships were certainly part of the *hakhsharah* life, sex was not on the agenda and was not to be discussed. As protagonists of a revolutionary period, they were supposed to invest their vigor in the joint ideological and military project, not in "silly love affairs." This was the explicit expectation, but reality proved more complicated.

Ruti described with scant words an episode related to her unfulfilled love and passion for Menno, an officer. One had to prod a bit to understand what she was trying to say:³⁴

RUTI: Let me confess to you. I loved Menno. Deeply (*nora*). But I wasn't the only one. All the girls loved him. At one point the Arab Section came to us.³⁵ They were on a mission to Haifa and we had to evacuate our tents for them. Menno remained alone in his tent and I don't know how I ended up sleeping in it too. I couldn't sleep all night.

BEN-ZE'EV: Did you become a couple afterwards?

RUTI: No. He didn't even touch me.

The test of self control was exercised more officially, when the *hakhsharah* decided on mixed male-female lodging. Another form of control was in the unstated expectation that the “girls” should not date “boys” who were not members of the *hakhsharah*. This expectation was not clearly spelled out, but the following incident, described by Herzlia, is informative:

There were two beautiful girls [in the *hakhsharah*]. Nice ones. I didn't know them that well. I wouldn't say they were empty-headed girls [*reikanyot*]. They were friends and there was a group of guards [*notrim*] in the kibbutz where we were stationed. They had friendship ties with them, nothing more. And they would have a good time [*hayu mevalot*] with them. They [the guards] were a little older [than us] ... I can't remember what happened in the [*hakhsharah*] assembly but I do remember it was decided to expel them [the two girls].

Lea was angrier when describing this event, saying:

It was [considered] unacceptable that the girls from the *hakhsharah* would roam the fields of strangers [*telekhna lir'ot bi-sdot zarim*]. It was a crime without atonement. And they took two girls from the *hakhsharah* and sacked them for that. When I think about it today I think it is terrible what they have done to them ... No one will tell you about it because it is embarrassing. It is my first time to talk about ... These things were not talked about, a kind of taboo.

Again, taboos may be broken, but only long after the events. Some interviewees argued that they cannot remember the expulsion of the two straying women. Gideon said that it was in fact an outcome of internal feuds between the girls, who were left behind in the kibbutz when the men were out on military missions. Clearly, the explicit reasons were not necessarily the implicit ones. Most likely, even back then there was no declared agreement that the young women were expelled because they had turned to men from “outside.”

When the war ended, couples sprouted like mushrooms after the rain, and relationships were permitted to be public. In other words, only when the sense of recruitment for an urgent common objective diminished was there legitimacy for potential nuclear families that would

emerge and split off. Finally, nine weddings followed within Hakhsharat Rishonim. In the *hakhsharah* album, all the names of the pairs are listed together and placed within a heart. Although the endogamy pattern was only an implied norm, it triumphed.

A life apart

Through the months of war, Hakhshara Rishonim developed into a microcosm – they felt secluded, existing within their own temporality and bounded spaces. Although there was a clear difference between the male and female war experiences, the fictive kinship patterns were also strong, serving as a source of solidarity. Members of the *hakhsharah* were absorbed within themselves, isolated within a bubble existence, as one of them noted:

We didn't read newspapers. We didn't listen to the radio. Every now and then echoes would reach us. We didn't know what was going on in other places – each one in one's own military zone. There we knew what was going on.

This sense of detachment was an outcome of the circumstances – Hakhsharat Rishonim was often on the move, limited in contact with other *hakhsharot* within their regiment and with no contact to regiments stationed at other battlefronts. There were no telephones available, the mail was slow, and visits home to see parents and siblings were rare. Many noted that they did not see home for months despite the seemingly short distances. War cut them off completely. Samuel Hynes noted that “war is more than actions; it is a culture” (1997:8). Although the wars Hynes reviewed were mostly far from home, even when they were near to home they fostered a separatist culture. This new culture also imposed an exile from one's previous life.

Among the Palmachniks the sense of detachment was also voluntary, an outcome of an inward orientation – their war role seemed much more important than what they had done previously. They were now totally committed, and quite intentionally they cut themselves off. Lea described how in the first months of the war, when there was still the option to be socially involved with people on their first kibbutz, they chose to withdraw themselves:³⁶

Another thing that I must mention is our anti-Semitism. We were anti-Semitic [meaning here that they rejected immigrant newcomers, who were Jews]. There was a Polish *hakhsharah* and we wouldn't hook up with them. We felt ourselves above everyone. The rain would enter our noses [a phrase to demonstrate arrogance]. We felt better than everyone, including the kibbutz children.

This was a way to consolidate their image as *tzabars*. They were a new creation, disconnected from the Diaspora, from the newcomers, from their parents' generation of immigrants; they embodied the new Jew – speaking Hebrew with the right accent, local and tough. They preserved this image by sticking to those like them – the Palmach and the *hakhsharah*. When the women did go on vacation, some described discomfort; it didn't feel right to be seated at home, even for a few days. Pnina searched for something to do while she was home:

Since we came down there, I had not been home, and that was a pretty long time, a few months. I was given leave and hitchhiked home alone, changing rides, finally reaching my hometown on the top of a back trailer. I got there, saw my mom, saw my dad, my little brother and sister, and didn't have anything else to do. I had seen everyone and didn't know what to do. I longed to go back [to the unit]. There was a hospital there. I volunteered, simply volunteered. Came and said: "Look, I am based in so and so, got a leave and have come to volunteer."

The hospital where Pnina volunteered was overcrowded with casualties that had arrived from the battle in Latroun. Pnina witnessed how dozens of men were sorted into three large rooms: lightly injured, seriously injured, and the dead. She noted that her six days of volunteer work at the hospital were the worst that she had experienced throughout the war. Despite the fact that it was not within the framework of Hakhsharat Rishonim, it still set her aside as part of the separate group, imprinted by the bubble existence of the 1948 generation. She married a member of Hakhsharat Rishonim and to this day lives on the kibbutz that the *hakhsharah* established in late 1948.

Discussion

The nation is often portrayed as feminine. In Hebrew the word for nation, *ummah*, is feminine (although there is also a masculine form: '*am*'). Likewise, the homeland, at times referred to as the motherland, is again a feminine word in Hebrew: *moledet*. This feminine identity is associated with the nurturing mother, the mourning mother, and the suffering feminine beauty. Rarely is the feminine nation symbolized like Delacroix's *La Liberté*, leading the men, holding a rifle and a flag, trampling bodies. While women may be placed in the forefront as a symbol, more often they remain with traditional feminine responsibilities. In an article examining the images of women in the Indonesian army, Saraswati Sunindyo pointed to the copresence of conflicting messages:

Images of contemporary military women in Indonesia are contradictory. On the one hand, they are portrayed as symbols of gender equality and advancement, while on the other, they are positioned as the *little daughters* in the military household [italics in original]. (1998:4)

Sunindyo limits her discussion to the women's public images. We do not learn from her what the actual practices are. In the Palmach case we can compare the image and the practice, and conclude that the image of the woman as representing advancement and gender equality was directed outward. The Palmach image of the "mother" of the household (much like the Indonesian "little daughters") was mostly inward oriented. This was a confusing combination for the Palmach women, both because they had not expected to play second fiddle and because of the lack of recognition for their contribution.

Outwardly, the Palmach generation is seen as a unified entity, and the *hakhsharah* members are understood as a closely knit group, still keeping in touch after so many years. Indeed, in many ways it is true. However, close scrutiny also exposes a divide between the women and the men; the war experience and its stories diverge along gender lines. Even if not always wholeheartedly, the men were given pride of place or, as one of the women said: "We admired them; really admired them." We should also bear in mind that the women from Hakhsharat Rishonim who were interviewed for this chapter (and, of course, the women who were involved in nationwide commemoration) are the ones willing to tell their story and the ones who still wish to be heard. Others women's voices vanished, some severing their contacts with *hakhsharah* members, some refraining from expressing their opinions. When I phoned Shosh, whose husband was killed in battle in 1956, and asked to interview her, she replied: "Oh, I have nothing to say. What I have to say is not important."

Shying off, as we see, is at times common to both the rural Palestinian women of the Nakba generation and to some of the female Palmach veterans. As we had seen, some Palmach women were stirred to act in the fourth decade after 1948 and to establish their own contribution through the field of commemoration. In contrast, Palestinian women of the Nakba generation continued to fulfill their backstage function within the family, and their forms of commemoration were inward oriented rather than outward; most of them did not think that their stories had a place in the public arena. This division may be due to the fact that while the Palmach, as part of Zionism, was of a socially transformative nature, and some of this was reincarnated from the 1980s among a few of its women, the Palestinian generation of the Nakba did not voluntarily



Fig. 8.1 Palmach women accompanying a convoy, Spring 1948 (the women in the picture are not related to the ones discussed in this book) (Courtesy of the Palmach Photo Gallery, the Palmach House)

wish to transform; change was imposed on it. Yet the second generation of Palestinian women showed a significant awakening in the field of commemoration; but this is beyond our scope here.

This chapter has suggested that most of the Palmach women were trapped within two forces. On the one hand, there was the persistent Palmach ethos of women's liberation and gender equality. On the other, there was the small and vocal group of Palmach feminists who have been very active in the last decades, initiating commemorative enterprises and standing up to the male chauvinist ethos. Most of the Palmach women did not identify either with the first or with the second. The women of Hakhsharat Rishonim narrated a war story in which they were neither treated as equals nor given legitimacy to voice their dismay. Almost sixty years after the events, little of their critique managed to break out of the *hakhsharah* confines.

Part IV

British Mandatory Memories in the Making

9 Carrying Out the Mandate

British Policemen in Palestine

This final chapter moves its focus to the British daily experience of Palestine's human and geographical landscape. It will explore the testimony of agents of the occupying power in the last days of the British Mandate. These testimonies provide a rather different viewpoint from those of the occupied population. Both the police and the people they supposedly served lived through this violent period together. They have a common history, but different narratives of that history. The picture that emerges from the policemen's human voices is both complementary and similar to that which transpires through the maps discussed earlier in the book. Michel de Certeau tells us that people create urban maps by traversing the city (1984:93, 97). British policemen developed their own tactics, in de Certeau's terms, in order to make the space habitable. The policemen's experiences and interpretations, both urban and rural, enable us to see how they perceived the actual task of governing Palestine.

In the situation in which the British Mandatory power found itself in 1945, there were two overlapping but separate conflicts going on at the same time. On the one hand, there was a vertical axis of authority and conflict, moving from the constituted legal power down to the population it controlled. At different times between 1936 and 1948 groups of Arabs and Jews revolted against the same authority. While the Arab administrative and military forces were crushed by 1939 (following the Arab Revolt), the Jews were the prime force against the British in the 1940s. At the same time, there was a second axis of conflict, which moved horizontally between Jews and Arabs. The testimony of members of the Palestine Police about this period, collected sixty years later, tells us mostly about the vertical axis and how that relationship has been remembered.

Usually, police accounts contribute to an "official" narrative: what happened in the eyes of the authorities. It is the police who create an inventory of diaries, files, and reports describing the controlled population. These reports shape later accounts of the period. Palestine's population during the Mandate period, especially in comparison to previous periods, was well recorded in this way, and the police played a role in the

collection of such information. Ex-policeman Robert Hamilton described how he collected data for the state during his service in Nazareth:¹ “You did patrols; you did the census – the near census – around the towns. The far away ones were done by the mounted police in the villages, and up in the hills. Once a month you went round and you took a census of the births, deaths and marriages, and you handed that in to the Town Hall.”

The police participated in the regular census, as well as in creating records of the “deviant population.” One of the few sources of Arab villagers’ portraits from the 1940s is found in a hard-cover volume compiled by the Zikhron Ya‘aqov police detachment.² This volume contains identification photographs of all the local villagers detained at the station. Thus, while the population was closely monitored, rarely do we come across a thorough documentation of the policemen themselves.

A rare source is an oral history project based on interviews with surviving Palestine policemen, most of whom were in their eighties, conducted by the Middle East Centre Archive (MECA) at Oxford since 2006.³ Their narratives seem exceptionally candid, possibly due to the erosion of political correctness in old age. Many of these men remained involved with the Palestine Police Old Comrades Association network, still active in England.⁴ Thus, they probably overrepresent those in whose lives service in the Palestine police was a major event.

In this chapter I use interviews conducted by others, and not myself. The interviewers, associated with Oxford’s St. Antony’s College Middle East Centre, were well read on the history of Mandate Palestine, and specifically on its police.⁵ They followed a prescribed set of questions set within the chronology of the policemen’s service. As we follow the daily contact zones between the British policemen and Palestine’s local population, we are offered another view, that of those representing what they understood to be a privileged modernizing system.

The historical backdrop

The Palestine Police faced different challenges throughout its period of service. The two main periods of turmoil were when clashes erupted with Arab insurgents in 1936–9 and with Jewish ones in 1943–7. The former were termed by the British “the Arab troubles” and came to be called by the Arabs “the Revolt” (*al-Thawra*).⁶ In light of these troubles, the officer and engineer Sir Charles Tegart (previously involved in the formation of a new British policy following the Indian insurgency) arrived in Palestine to assess the situation and offer his expertise (Sinclair 2006a:107). Among other recommendations, Tegart suggested the erection of dozens of fortified police stations throughout the country. These reinforced concrete

police stations, with defense towers and armored doors, were built to the same basic architectural plan, and from the late 1930s Palestine's landscape was dotted with these prominent landmarks, often located on hilltops and visible from a distance.⁷

The Arab troubles died out as world events unfolded towards World War II (Kimmerling and Migdal 2003:129).⁸ However, three years later, with the British victory at El-Alamein, and the retreat of Italian and German forces, the Mandate government found itself facing a new insurgency, this time initiated by two Jewish underground right-wing armed forces known to the British as the Irgun and the Stern Gang (and known in Hebrew as the Etzel and Lehi respectively).⁹ Between 1944 and mid-1946 the Irgun alone carried out forty attacks, while in the two final years of the Mandate their attacks grew to over eighty (Charters 1989:182; Sinclair 2006a:108). The largest Jewish armed force, the Hagannah, tended to abstain from supporting these actions against the British, although from October 1945 to July 1946 there was a United Resistance (Tnu'at ha-Meri ha-'Ivri) integrating all the Jewish underground movements (M. J. Cohen 1982:68–95; Charters 1989:52–60). Yet throughout these years the Hagannah opposed the British Mandate, and the general feeling among the Jews of Palestine was that it was time for it to end and for a Jewish state to be established.

During these final years of the Mandate, the images of the Arab–Jewish–British conflict depended the violent events affecting each community, both in Palestine and elsewhere. Most members of the Palestine Police had served in the shadow of World War II. Ex-policeman Gerald Green commented on it:¹⁰

I suppose for every 20 people who joined the Palestine Police in '46 and '47, out of the 20, only three came from civilian life. I went out with one chap, Captain Alistair Alexandrou, [who] got the military cross in a rifle regiment.¹¹ Got training, he'd got a decoration. Some of them were highly decorated people. We found it tough going, us who came from civvy [civilian] life but they were very good. They used to teach us all about guns and things and nail bombs and mines.

Thus, these British men knew about war. It was a war that had been won, at terrible cost, but with the unanimous support of the British population. Now, in 1945, coming to Palestine, they entered a very different world and encountered a hostile population. Even back in England support for the maintenance of Britain's presence east of the Suez dwindled (Louis 1984:226–64; Kent 1998).

For the Jews, including those in Palestine, the recent cataclysm of the Holocaust dominated everything. The Palmach fighters (as mentioned on p. 128) felt as if they were the remnants of a vanishing race; their extended

families had been wiped out in Europe, and the imminent war (the 1948 war) would be the Jewish struggle for life or death. Therefore, not only did the Jewish population intensify its preparations for a Jewish state, but its hostility to the British grew as a result of the official policy of preventing boats carrying Holocaust survivors from landing on Palestine's coast. Ex-policemen Mark Russell commented on the occasional Jewish identification of the British police with the Nazis:¹² “On the whole, particularly when we were doing all these searches and things, you were bound to meet lots of people [Jews]. They used to talk to you and they used to call you Gestapo. We were very much regarded as very unpopular.”

While for the British the defining event was World War II and for the Jews the Holocaust, for the Arabs it was the revolt of 1936–9. As we have seen, the rural Arab population likened the violent incidents of 1948 to a force of nature, intensifying and receding, in different manifestations at different places and times. These upheavals were understood to be part of a chronic condition of conflict. The majority of the Arabs did not imagine that in the near future the conflict would change its character and that they would risk losing their land and their traditional lives. They did not prepare for war or for a future life elsewhere, and did not organize themselves to oppose British rule. Generally speaking, during the 1940s the Arab population was fairly welcoming toward the British authorities, and specifically toward the policemen, as described by ex-policeman Edward Wells, who served with the Palestine Police Mobile Force:¹³

Especially when we were stationed in Ramallah, off duty we used . . . a couple of us used to wander round the hills and pop into the local *medaffi* [village guest house] in any local village and sort of be welcomed there . . . If we'd popped in, they would have sort of come and had a cup of tea or something like that.

Thus, in the early post–World War II period Wells and his companions could move around freely between Arab villages and be welcomed. Young British men were joining the Palestine Police, thinking that the Mandate would not end soon.

From England to Palestine

The choice to join the Palestine Police was a voluntary one. This may have led to an overrepresentation in the force of the more adventurous men. They came from varied social backgrounds.¹⁴ Some described their working-class background, at times attesting to their “rough upbringing.” One was the son of a sheet-metal worker, another of a millerite (“who is a person who looks after machinery”); a third was the son of a butler.¹⁵ Others were middle class, with mothers who were housewives and fathers

who were “a dentist,” “an engineer,” or “a surveyor.” There were also those who came from families associated with the colonial service.¹⁶ Victor Cannings, himself the son of a farm carter, commented on this spectrum of backgrounds:¹⁷

There were people out there, in fact there was one from Eton actually in the squad above me named Henry whose uncle was a master. When I came back I found out. So there's people from all walks of life but they all got on well together. I wouldn't say there was people from the slums but from pretty low down, even lower than me in the pecking order.

This heterogeneous group of policemen faced a very disparate population of Jews and Arabs in their daily tasks. The local population was incorporated into the Palestine Police. By 1945 the police regular force numbered 8,000 men, half of whom were British and the other half Arabs and Jews (Horne 1982:311).¹⁸ Moreover, if one considers the auxiliary forces, all in all between 1945 and 1947 the police workforce fluctuated around 20,000 (Charters 1989:89).¹⁹ When the policemen first arrived in Palestine, most were ignorant of its current state of affairs, as John Card replied when asked how much he had known:²⁰

Very, very little, very little. I knew about the Balfour Declaration, I knew that the Jews had been promised a home there. I knew there had been an uprising with the Arabs, prior to my going out. I think that's what I was more worried about, that's what the problem, as far as I could see, would be – fighting Arabs. Because that's what all the problem was, pre-war. Pre-me going there, I mean.

Gerald Green noted that he “knew nothing at all” in advance but “soon found out.” He joined due to an earlier acquaintance with Hugh Nolan, a high-ranking officer in the Palestine Police. He had also come across Raymond Cafferata, who was recruiting for the Palestine Police.

Although a few had begun their higher education before arriving in Palestine, they were often motivated by a political awareness, which sparked an interest that led to volunteering with a sense of vocation. Mark Russell was one of the few who attended university – Cambridge – immediately after World War II with young men who had just come back from the war.²¹ Palestine, he noted, was at the top of these students’ concerns:

RUSSELL: I think I was having an argument about the future of the Middle East in a pub in Cambridge and I said, “Well, I'll go and sort it out and join the Palestine Police.” And that's the end of that part of it. There was no interview or anything like that. So much to my father's annoyance I got on the train and went to the Crown Agents for the Colonies and signed up.

ROGAN: But why the Palestine Police?

RUSSELL: Because that's what we were talking about. We weren't talking about anything else; we were talking about Palestine.

ROGAN: And what was it in Palestine that you thought needed sorting out?

RUSSELL: Well, I thought it was the problem that's obviously there and it still is.

Hasn't nobody solved it yet. I wasn't very successful sixty years ago and they haven't gotten it much better now.

Russell's reminiscences disclose a certain naïveté that took him to Palestine, echoing the civilizing mission in which they were engaged, in order to bring progress – or simply an English sensibility – to its subjects. What is vividly recalled, and described with lucidity, is the extent to which these men brought with them a romantic approach, informing their images and sense of the Holy Land. Note the language of Bertie Braddick:²² "Well the place interested me because of the geographical situation, like from the Bible you see, getting up from Jerusalem, that made a big difference seeing round there." Or in Geoffrey Owen's way of expressing it: "I think one had a feeling of affinity to the Holy Land." This biblical world was mobilized by Raymond Cafferata during recruitment, when he referred to Palestine as "the land of milk and honey,"²³ and it was this Palestine that the newly arriving policemen expected to find on arrival. When Green first came to Palestine, by ship to Port Said and then by train up the coast, his excitement about the land seemed to combine a fascination with the biblical entwined with the landscape of a developing, up-to-date, colony:²⁴

And you began to wonder, well, where the hell is the train going? We can't see any Haifa. And when we turned round the corner at Mount Carmel, there was about as far from here to that stone wall, the beach, railway line, and then the road. You came round the corner and you saw this staggering, beautiful city of Haifa, straddling Mount Carmel. Beautiful sight. You could see Mount Hermon, snow-capped in the distance in Syria. Lovely sight that, modern city.

The policemen's choice to go to Palestine frequently disclosed this kind of romanticism, an attraction to adventure and a sense of duty and self-sacrifice. When Martin Duchesne was asked for his first impressions upon arrival, he noted:²⁵ "Absolute delight. It was in the autumn. It was warm. There were oranges, chocolate bars. There was the fact that at last we were really doing something." Upon arrival by train from one of the Egyptian Mediterranean ports, and having crossed the Sinai, these newly drafted novices were sent for six weeks of training. Roy Leadbeater recalled:²⁶

I'll never quite remember whether we went through Port Said or El Kantara, but we did go by rail to Haifa. We were met by Palestine Police from the school and they were all very fit looking and sunburnt. I was very impressed . . . The training

consisted of 12 weeks of marching up and down, weapons training, but the one part that I did enjoy was that they drummed into us what a policeman was all about was the prevention and detection of crime, just as though we were in England.

Palestine did not disappoint the young men arriving from England; it stood up to their expectations and offered good weather, good food, a beautiful landscape, and more action than they had expected. Moreover, as Leadbeater noted,²⁷ the Palestine Police aspired to be a regular police force, its tasks comparable to those carried out in England. Yet it was also quite evidently different.

Daily tasks

During the weeks of preparation for service, policemen learned to adjust policing to the local setting. It was “about learning the law, you had to learn about the language, you had to learn the customs, because the law was the same as this country’s [England], but then you had the Muslim religion and the Jewish religion . . . and that was all fitting in differently”, noted Robert Hamilton,²⁸ adding that there was “a certain amount of riot training.” Despite the policemen’s desire to be “normal,” Palestine was a colonial setting. In those years they were reminded that they were in a foreign world in revolt rather than at home. In his book on the Palestine Police, Edward Horne described it so:

Even while Great Britain struggled to stave off the Nazi forces of darkness, a wicked group of Jewish extremists, saw fit to inspire their co-religionists to attack the British in Palestine in 1942, followed a year later by a larger group and in 1945 by the whole *yishuv*. This campaign, which had an inexcusable barbarous side to it, worked up to what Flavius Josephus in an earlier age aptly described when reporting upon a similar situation, as *The Jewish War*. (Horne 1982:264)²⁹

By the mid-1940s the British armed forces had become a prime target of violence. The attacks intensified, and reached a peak on 22 July 1946, when the Irgun attacked offices of the British Secretariat, the military command, and the police Criminal Investigation Division, located in the King David Hotel. Ninety-one people were killed. Horne noted that within a period of one year the Palestine Police lost “130 young Britons . . . to which must be added a long list of Arab and Jewish officers who also did their duty” (1982:311). Gerald Green, in his interview, provided another explanation for the high casualties:³⁰

When you think that at the end of the war the British army had hundreds of thousands of troops, and people, the British forces. What were they going to do with them? So they stuck over a hundred thousand into Palestine. They didn’t know what to do with them. When you think that Palestine is about slightly larger

than Wales, the country of Palestine, and the population is about 1.1 million or 1.2, you got one soldier to every 12 civilians. So the casualties were going to be very high because you were sitting targets, weren't you? If they'd only had twenty thousand troops there the chances of being shot at were considerable less.

The ex-policemen felt that postwar Palestine was overcrowded by armed British forces. These forces were shunned by much of the Zionist population, who had decided that it was time to establish a Jewish state and be rid of the British. The tension was evident in the policemen's everyday encounters, especially within Jewish areas. Yet, in line with "business as usual," the policemen were sent out on regular beats, the term used for the standard traversed round of a policeman's day. This was what Bertie Braddick did in Tel Aviv:³¹

Well actually my beat was the main road and all I had to do was walk from the Police Station through the back turnings and alleyways till I got to one end of it where there was a railway crossing and I'd walk along a pavement in one direction for the whole eight hours till like near the end of the patrol time then I'd go through the back turnings. Or I'd walk up and down the same street. I'd walk from the railway crossing and walk down past the bank to the sea front where it was and then I'd have a look along the sea front, see if there was anything down there and then I'd walk back up the other side. That was about all I'd do. Walk up and down.

Braddick's practice of mapping a specific section of the cityscape by walking back and forth comes across as a rather circumscribed task, but then this is what British policemen did at home. When talking of the Palestine Police Old Comrades Association magazine, Braddick complained: "And it's not very interesting because they even name places who [*sic*] I couldn't even see. Because I saw, all I saw happened within let's say, a quarter of a mile of central Tel Aviv." It was this repetitive beat that turned the policemen into convenient targets for attack. On 4 November 1947, at a point along this route that Braddick knew well, he was shot by a Jewish terrorist:

Well the actual shooting it was over in three seconds coz he fired from behind and I didn't even have time to turn around and see who was shooting. But I did when he stopped [shooting for a moment] coz although I was on the floor when he stopped I saw his face and hands on the gun.

Asked about the nature of his wounds, Braddick elaborated:

One through this leg here. One through my hip, one through my chest and that one went through my chest and into that bicep. That was four. And then there was the one that hit my shoulder, hit the shoulder blade and ricocheted up through my neck and into the jugular vein. That was the end.

Braddick was seriously injured – half his body remained paralyzed for many years. His bitterness showed in his criticism of the way things were handled by the British police:

Well I think that they [the controlled population] were treated too softly. And they, that shouldn't have been tolerated for one day at all. And that's all there is to it. We were too soft on them. I mean the Germans and Russians wouldn't have stood for anything like what we stood for. Being killed and maimed and everything. Police stations blown up.

The policemen were in the eye of the storm, especially in the Jewish areas. Some described post-traumatic effects. Mark Russell, who worked for the Criminal Investigation Division (CID), felt he carried the aftereffects of witnessing an execution: Having been called to a site where British soldiers had stopped a Jewish car loaded with arms, he was later requested to identify the Jewish men when tried in court. Russell was perplexed that the men were sentenced to death, as they had not even been charged with murder. Finally, it was Russell's role to identify them both before and after execution at the Acre jail. Here are his words:³²

We got there and we went to the chap who was the governor of Acre jail, who was a civilian. Nice guy. We went to his flat. He said, "You chaps had better come in here. It's going to be a long evening. We're not going to do this until two or three in the morning." His wife had got some sandwiches out. I can't remember but we sat there and talked a bit. The only other guy was the hangman, who had been flown out from London. But he was a professional. He was a very interesting chap, actually, very, very interesting man. He'd hang people all over Africa and all over the place. He said, "They're all the same, that's the funny thing. It doesn't matter what race they are. Well you'll find when you go and fetch them out of the cell they just come with you as if you were going to the corner for a newspaper. Most extraordinary." And they do.

Russell was shaken by the experience, noting that it was the worst day of his life. Upon his return to the Jaffa police station he was confined for days to barracks, fearing he would be wanted by the Jews. He commented on his condition upon his return to England:

Well, I think you lived in fear all the time. You don't realize you do, do you? I imagine it's the same with people who've been in ... I'm told by my wife whom I met when I went back to Cambridge and a lot of other people, including some who knew me before and afterwards, I was in a terrible mess, really. I was terribly jumpy apparently and very twitchy about things. Because you spent a long time when you were never, where you never sat with your back to the door. You were armed all the time. You just lived on ... Quite a lot of the people I knew were killed, you know. It was a fairly dangerous job. I mean, the CID got very dangerous in Jerusalem at one time, very dangerous. I think you were nervous, yes.

Russell was indeed exposed to the exceptional task of execution. He was hesitant to visit Israel many years later, fearing revenge. His assumption was that there are Jews who know of his involvement in the execution. As many of the Jews who worked for the Palestine Police, especially in the regional districts, were indeed agents who delivered information to the Jewish Agency and the Hagannah, Russell had good reason to fear (Gelber 1992:582–9).

As we see, forces beyond their control defined the rules that governed relations between British policemen, Arabs, and Jews. The British police had to adjust to the difficult situation imposed on everyday life. Therefore, although they were keen on getting to know Palestine and spending time outside the confines of their barracks, their stations, and their daily routine, their relations with the local population were inherently unstable. Geoffrey Owen noted that even if they dealt with the local population fairly on a one-to-one basis, the British were suspected of partiality by both communities:³³ “The Arabs thought we were favoring the Jews and the Jews thought we were favoring the Arabs.”

The two communities

Even before relations between the Britons and Jews deteriorated, the circumstances of Mandatory rule set limits to the possible consolidation of close friendships. Victor Cannings related a memorable event from the time he was a police contravention officer (dealing with petty crime) in Nazareth, still during World War II. He had worked alongside a local Arab policeman by the name of Jamal Fahoum.³⁴

I went down there once off-duty, to a place called the Garden Café and don't you get too excited about that because it wasn't much like a garden. I was drinking a beer when Jamal was in there with his friends and he'd come over. “Oh, Mr. Cannings, come and join us.” So I did. They had the odd little things you were eating and that.³⁵ I remember more or less coming to my senses in an Arab cinema listening to an Arab film. I said, “Good God.” So I remember getting out. We lived in a big fort, a Tegart fort, which was the second largest. I think Gaza had the largest one. Up on the hill. I remember thinking I've got to get in the middle of the road and walk home up this hill. Fortunately a little pickup came along with one of my friends and picked me up.

Although there was no evident danger, a British policeman was not expected to get drunk with Arab friends. Moreover, residence was in a confined fortress. Yet there was also a reciprocal decency. Robert Hamilton, who also served in Nazareth, then a city with a Christian majority, described the following:³⁶

They [the local Arab population] had no problem with us, we had no problem with them. Their favourite thing was – the King at the time was King George, the 5th or 6th I think – when you were really settled in the town they would call you George.

In contrast, British relations with the Jews were tense. James Hainge, who was stationed at a camp near the beach, would be sent out to patrol. When asked about boats arriving with Jews from Europe, he noted:³⁷

It was a beach and the Jewish people, that we didn't realize at the time were coming out of the concentration camps, were trying to land on the beach and gain access. And our job was to send them away. I feel quite guilty about this because we didn't have a clue where they were coming from. We were just told that they weren't allowed in and, of course, we did our best to keep them out as that was our instructions. I don't think any of us thought any further than that. We didn't know until much, much later why they were trying to get in and where they were coming from.

Yet despite these tensions, affairs between Jewish women and British policemen (and soldiers) were not uncommon. Hainge described the extent to which the Zionist community rejected them:³⁸

Being young blokes whose libido was a bit high they [the policemen] felt they had more chance with Jewish girls and quite a lot of chaps did form liaisons with them. But of course, were it found out by the Jews ... I mean, in some instances the chaps were shot by Jewish terrorists, picked out as targets, and were certainly ostracized. It was frowned on by the force. Several chaps did marry Jewish girls but I don't remember them ever being allowed into the Tegarts to live with them.³⁹

There were such affairs, and they were opposed not only by the Jews but by the British administration, possibly because these women were a potential fifth column. Geoffrey Owen, who was stationed in Palestine from 1937 to 1938, thus experiencing a relatively calm period, did make Jewish friends during his service in Tel Aviv. Being more aware than other British policemen of local politics, he noted that “talking sort of directly to a lot of Jewish residents, they didn't have a great deal of time for the Zionist movement, which was going to upset their quiet everyday life. There was a lot of hostility to Zionism.” However, most people felt otherwise, and growing resistance to the British Mandate led to constant pressure on Jews to abstain from such friendships. Here is the way Geoffrey Owen put it:⁴⁰

There was another man, he ran the ice cream stall down in Allenby Road, corner of Brenner Street and Allenby Road. And he'd come from London, and he was quite a character, a youngster. I'd pass the time of day with him but if there were people about he wouldn't talk to me. Because he feared that he would be regarded as fraternizing. It was a bit of a stigma. We were ostracized, in a word. It didn't worry us and it didn't worry me.

The general state of affairs in terms of social life for the policemen, noted Owen, was isolation: “We just sort of socialized amongst ourselves.” Even casual street chats, as he described, became less common in the final three years of the Mandate. Gerald Green, who was a driver during this period, commented on his rides in some of the Jewish settlements:⁴¹ “Oh Petah Tickva, that was a dangerous place. We were often in Petah Tickva. And Renana [Ra‘anana], dangerous place. The London Café in Renana, very dangerous place. We got fired up [*sic*] many times in Renana and Petah Tickva. Dangerous places.” Dangerous were they indeed for Green, who was wounded twice. “I never like to mention my wounds,” he noted at the end of his interview, when asked: “I lost four great friends when I got . . . I was the only survivor, four of them were killed.” Green was saved by a Palestinian doctor, with whom he kept in touch for the remainder of his life.⁴²

It is perhaps not surprising that many ex-policemen of this period favored the Arabs over the Jews. Some of them expressed strong anti-Semitic feelings. Frank Jones elaborated on why he felt this way:⁴³

I treated them all [Jews and Arabs] as Palestinians; they were always all equal. Until they [the Jews] hanged those Army Sergeants [Martin and Pace], and I thought “what sort of people are these?” They were killing off 6 British policemen a month; they murdered over 250 of us. When we left the mandate, we left behind 350 British graves, that was over the years as well. But what really turned me was on the 29th September 1947, it’s printed here. Ian Grant and I, we were both at Zikhron [Ya‘aqov], and we’d been delegated to go to Haifa and await an armoured transport to go to Jerusalem to pick up a suspected terrorist and bring him back for trial. We got to Haifa alright, and we had to report to HQ. As we were going into the compound, through all the barbed wire and what have you, the constable on duty at that entrance, Ian Grant knew him, and we stopped, just a couple of minutes, just to talk to him. And we saw the barrel bomb coming over the wire, and someone shouted it was a bomb. I turned me back, got blown off my feet down the road. And it was a bomb, and the sole intention of it was to kill policemen. Asst Superintendent Samuels, he always, whenever I met him, both in Palestine and I met him in Birmingham a few times when I got back, he always referred to me and Ian as the two luckiest people alive, because “if you’d hadn’t have stopped, and had taken another couple of paces, we would never have found you. You would have been blown through the barbed wire and that would have been the end.” So, I thought, fate. That’s when I knew I was coming home. But, that’s when I knew what an evil people the Jews were. But I still tried, when I was a policeman, to be fair to everybody. But not when I came out of the force. I thought “Well, I wouldn’t urinate on a Jew if he was on fire.” If my mother had heard me talking like this she would have said “don’t be wicked!” . . .

I met some really wonderful people around the world. Same as us. Different religions, different colours, different languages, different food. But basically we’re all the same. Except the Jews. I’m sorry to be like this, but that’s how I feel. I know its wrong.

Like Jones, Bertie Braddick, whose injury by a Jewish terrorist was described above, developed strong feelings against the Jews:⁴⁴

Well I'm not sorry for going there [to Palestine] but I regret what the Jews did and I think they should pay for it. And frankly I would like to see the Arabs wipe them right off the face of the earth. Every single one of them, man, woman and child, not only there but everywhere. Coz they don't, I don't think they deserve to have a piece of land, or to live or to eat or drink or anything. They're a load of rubbish.

In the style of these statements, as in the interviews in general, one can detect class distinctions; the less educated were more likely to make anti-Semitic statements. But clearly, all the policemen felt little empathy toward the Jews of Palestine as the Mandate was coming to an end. Robert Hamilton, who grew up in Belfast, was asked if he could see any similarities between the troubles in Ireland and those in Palestine. "No, no, no," he replied:⁴⁵

When you start talking about the sectarian thing, where I come from, that was a latter day thing. It wasn't around in my time [he was born in the 1920s] – that was later ... See, who invented terrorism? That's the question you've got to answer yourself. Who invented it? If you want to go down that road, that's where it all started – 1943, Menachem Begin – that's who started it all. So, all the other organisations in the world, the IRA, the Provos, the Baader-Meinhoff, the Red Hand of Italy, they all learnt from him ... switch that off ...

The recording, indeed, was stopped at this point, and we do not know what more Hamilton had to say on the topic, how he came to this conclusion, and what he thought of terrorist acts prior to those of the 1940s.

Yet while there were anti-Semitic strands in the narratives of some policemen, others were also well aware of the internal disagreements within the Jewish *yishuv* toward the British. Mark Russell was having a drink in a Tel Aviv bar when two Hagannah men approached him to warn him of Irgun terrorists in the vicinity. For Russell, his own experience at the bar encapsulated the entire British situation. The British withdrawal from Palestine had its logic, he said:⁴⁶

RUSSELL: There was no way out of the trap was there? They'd [Britain] got 120,000 men in Palestine by then I think it was. Which is probably more than we've got all together now.

ROGAN: Huge. Did you have any feelings about the decision to withdraw from Palestine which came in December of '47?

RUSSELL: No. I think it was the only thing to do.

ROGAN: So you approved of that.

RUSSELL: Yes. I think it was the sensible thing to do.

Exit

The League of Nations was dissolved on the eve of World War II, with the newly formed United Nations replacing it, and carrying on the responsibility for Mandates established two decades before. Both the United States and the Soviet Union were, generally speaking, in favor of the establishment of a Jewish state that would absorb Jewish refugees and form a stable part of the Middle East. Both the superpowers were committed to decolonization and the end of the Mandate system. Britain handed the Mandate over Palestine back to the UN, and the UN Special Committee on Palestine decided on partition with two independent states: a Jewish one and an Arab one (while Jerusalem and Bethlehem would remain neutral under UN supervision). On 29 November 1947 the UN general assembly approved the partition plan, and by May 1948 almost all British forces had left Palestine, including the police force. While those Palestine policemen who followed politics could see the withdrawal coming, many others could not grasp it; they were the pawns in a much larger game. Hamilton:⁴⁷

It came as a surprise in some respects that we came home. At the end of the day I think we were forced into it ... We only know little bits of the jigsaw ... When you're down at the bottom, where we were, you don't know what's going on up there. I'd love to know why it all ended up the way it did.

But the policemen, perhaps better than higher level decision makers, had a sense of the imminence of the violence that would unfold upon their departure. They regarded the resolution to partition the country as an absolute disaster, "which it turned out to be," noted Russell: "It was the craziest lines on a map situation." It was evident to the policemen that the balance of power was in favor of the Jews. Geoffrey Owen noted that he "always had a feeling that people did not realize the seriousness of the situation, which was developing there. It was quite obvious that Zionism was going to be more prevalent than it was." Unlike other policemen, Owen saw how weak the Palestinian Arab position was, though we should bear in mind that all of this was said in retrospect. "The Arabs had lived there without any legal title in respect to titled deeds as we know it. But they'd lived on the land there for several generations and that sort of thing. So there was never any thought of pieces of paper." Thus those without official titles to their land were already underprivileged in a legal system ruled by bureaucracy, paperwork, and maps. And more generally, when civil war approached they were also unable to organize a countrywide army and mobilize forces in their own defense.

The outcome of the immense gap between the capabilities of the two populations in Palestine was foreseen by the British policemen. This is

how Victor Cannings put it:⁴⁸ “I don’t think there was ever any doubt that the Jews would win. They were far too clever for the poor old Arabs, I think, and also they’ve got the money and one thing and another.” Martin Duchesne was also quite clear that by the time he was leaving, in April 1948, he had a sense “that the poor bloody Arab had been done dirty, quite honestly, and to that extent the heart had gone out of it.”⁴⁹ Back in London, Duchesne heard of Israel’s declaration of independence and “was quite appalled” by the civil war, the “typical Arab chaos,” and by what he saw as the negative outcome – the establishment of the State of Israel. Roy Leadbeater reflected on the creation of Israel as follows:⁵⁰

Of course, if you ask me today was creating a state of Israel the right thing to do? Some of my Jewish friends would be shocked if they heard me say this but I felt that it was a mistake. Because you cannot simply take the map and draw a line through it.

Leadbeater’s comment on the mistake of drawing a line, complemented by Russell’s observation that it was “the craziest lines on a map situation,” takes us back to the evident gaps between those who promoted a partition map, those who accepted it, however reluctantly, and those who anticipated its disastrous consequences. And we should not forget that all this was happening shortly after the partition of the India and Pakistan, and the ensuing bloodshed that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. For the policemen, their departure, and the subsequent communal war that broke out, meant more than the termination of British-ruled Palestine; their self-proclaimed civilizing mission was also in ruins. So were their fantasies about their biblical land of milk and honey, and the multicultural entity they hoped to guide to maturity. To some, Jewish nationalism was a mystery. This is how Mark Russell put it:⁵¹

Palestine was a country; it had always been a country. We had been brought up believing that it was a holy land. We knew there were two sets of people there, but we, well, I, didn’t think it should be in any way divided. I saw [it] as a continuing entity and I honestly couldn’t understand what the Jews were on about. They had done very well in what they had achieved in Palestine. They had a good life in a nice country and what the hell were they doing squabbling about it and killing us. We could understand the Arabs and the Arab Rebellion in the Thirties, because they had seen it coming and it was essentially their country.

Remembrance and return

There is an element of sadness in these recollections. It was partly the nostalgia of lost youth, but also a sense of mourning for the devastation that had been wrought in the land they had come to know. Gerald Green,

who was seriously injured and lost four friends in a Jewish attack, noted that when the time came to depart, he did not wish to do so: "Well, nobody wanted to leave Palestine, strangely enough. Palestine Police were happy." They had the satisfaction of looking back on their passage from youth to adulthood. The test is one they passed, Duchesne noted:

Very quickly it became the major experience of my life. I think it was the most formative. I grew up from being a schoolboy, because I went literally from school straight there, to being a man. I enjoyed it, positively enjoyed it. I enjoyed the excitement. I enjoyed the authority. I thought it was a worthwhile job, and I believe it was appreciated by an awful lot of the population.

Geoffrey Owen returned to this point time and again during his interview: "I got something out of Palestine, which I never could get out of London"; "It was a place where men were made. Youngsters grew up"; "The soldiers and the policemen who served any length of time in Palestine have an indefinable something inside them now, which causes respect, or awe, or something. I'm not going to dare say a holiness, but there's some feeling of affinity with the place. It's quite extraordinary, actually"; "This is what I was saying about this ethereal something, which is indefinable, but it's there. You know, it's like we stepped on holy ground, you know?"

Roy Leadbeater also related to the transcendent nature of the experience, saying: "Palestine did something to me and I can't quite tell you what it did for me." Horne's book on the Palestine Police makes this point in its opening passages: "We went through much together and this book is a testament to a life and a land we all learned to love with a fierce passion, as deep as any Jew or any Arab, all of whom were once our colleagues" (1982:10).

The Palestine experience is described as the peak of these men's lives. The motto chosen by the Palestine Police Old Comrades Association is "There is no promotion after Jerusalem."⁵² The association was established when the police still operated in Palestine, and remains active to this day, despite the fact that its members are aging. It manages to maintain its vitality through the work of a dedicated group of older activists. The association's main event used to be a yearly parade in the autumn, marching from Whitehall to the Cenotaph Monument and placing a wreath. When the number of the marchers dropped below fifty this parade, which had lasted for decades, ceased. The Old Comrades possess a special tie with the colors of the force (navy, white, and red), publish a journal, run a website, hold occasional meetings, and used to go on organized tours to Palestine, which many defined as "pilgrimage."

In their recollections, their period of service in Palestine becomes entwined with their pilgrimage experiences. Geoffrey Owen returned to

Palestine twice: once in 1987, to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of his service; and then a few years later, in a group organized by the Palestine Police Old Comrades Association. While describing his service in the 1930s, he linked it to his visit to the Middle East in the 1980s:

OWEN: I can remember having to accompany a group going over the hills. We were looking for the bandit Fawzi? Is Fawzi mentioned in your notes?

KNIGHT: Fawzi Qawuqji?

OWEN: Yes. Whatever his name? Qawuqji? Something like that, yes interesting – well is it interesting? When we went back on that first, in '87, and we went to Jericho, we went into a little cafe and had some orange juice, or something. Coming out, there was an old man sitting on the stool by the entrance, and I spoke in my rusty Arabic, and said, passed the time of day with him, and he said, "Hey, where did you learn that?" and I said, "I was a British policeman here." And he was very interested; he spoke reasonably good English, by a mercy. And then he said, "Did you ever meet Fawzi?" and I said, "No, but I chased him for a while over the hills." And he said, "Well, Fawzi is dead now, but that's his car." And he pointed to a huge, brightly green painted American [unclear] that was standing by the side of the road, and said that's Fawzi's car. And that made me chuckle.

It seems that Owen felt that time was moving in a full circle after fifty years. The same sense of continuing conflict is noticeable in Mark Russell's account of his return. He waited forty years, fearing Jewish revenge for his involvement in the execution in the Acre jail of Jewish men. Russell:⁵³

I was very reluctant to go back to try out because I thought they've got long memories, these guys, 40 years later. So we waited to go. My wife wanted to go on a pilgrimage back to . . . it was about 1980 . . . about forty years later I waited. 40, 45 years and I said to Jen, "We'll go eventually." We walked on El-Al [Israel's airline]. She said, "What are they going to do to you?" They give you that double quizzing, so a chap says, "Have you been to Israel before?" I said, "Yes, but before it was Israel." "What were you doing?" he says. "I was a Palestine Policeman." "You must be okay then," he says and passed me straight through. It was very anti-climatic with this big concern. But I understand his logic, you know.

In many of these remarks, it is difficult to separate memories of the 1940s from the way later events frame their account of the past. To the question "What was it like going to Israel?" Russell replied:

Some things were very interesting. I've always been very fond of; it was a pilgrimage sort of thing. I've always been very fond of Galilee and I still am very attracted to the place. Never mind the politicians who owned it. I found it interesting. Jerusalem I thought was very disappointing, which it is. It's been built up and wrecked. I think that's the most disgraceful thing about the outcome of all of this is that Jerusalem isn't some sort of international city. I think the way the Jews have taken that over really does get me cross still. I think that's appalling.

Anticipating disappointment, others were more reluctant to return to the Middle East. Robert Hamilton put it this way: “I don’t know what it’s like now [Palestine] . . . I’ll be honest with you, I wouldn’t go back now, I’ve got good memories of it and I wouldn’t want to go back and spoil it.” Duchesne elaborated on the reasons for not going back:

I’ve never been back. I had a little trouble with the Muslim Brotherhood, on the one hand, who threatened me because I had been too partisan towards the Jews by escorting them on these convoys. It was eventually explained away but I was still told to keep clear. And by the time I got to the point of it not really mattering, I’d rather lost the inclination, because I’d fallen out in my mind with Israel. All my friends who’ve been back have said how dreadful Israel . . . what they’ve done to the place is appalling. When I was there, there were three million Arabs and just under a million Jews officially. There are now 7 million Jews.⁵⁴ In a country the size of Wales, with a habitable area about the size of Somerset and Devon put together. And the indigenous people condensed into one tiny bit, rock bit at that. Lots of my friends have been back. So I haven’t really . . . I’ve been to nicer places.

Conclusion

The ex-policemen’s memories map their Palestine. It is a Palestine judged through a prism spanning over sixty years. The Palestine that they had known – a beautiful biblical land, emanating a certain holiness, a land on the verge of constructive modernization – had gone sour. The local population, which could have prospered had they not been so mired in conflict and hatred, was ungrateful to the British. In the eyes of the ex-policemen, imperial rule had been just; it was the explosive situation that had wrecked everything. Even though Palestine was not a colony, the colonist mentality is evident in the way these policemen went over the ground of their youth again. In contrast, the conduct of the local population makes no sense to them. To put it in Russell’s words regarding the Jews: “What the hell were they doing squabbling about it?” It is with regret for what has become of Palestine that the ex-policemen speak.

The nostalgia that governs their memories is of a reflective type, to use Svetlana Boym’s terminology. Reflective nostalgia is concerned with the irrevocability of the past – in contrast to restorative nostalgia, in which the past remains eternally young and one aspires to reconstruct it, often for political means. Reflective nostalgia is associated with fragmentary individual narratives. The individual is aware of the fact that what she/he is missing, “the home,” “has been just renovated and gentrified beyond recognition” (Boym 2001:50).

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, we are here dealing with the vertical axis of the conflict: that between the ruler and the ruled. Along this

axis, the policemen were much closer to the governed population than were the policy makers; they were the ones to come into contact with the local population on a day-to-day basis during their beats, the mounted patrols, and their other tasks. But their memories delineate a Palestine not all that different from the one created through British administrative and military maps. What they have to say about their period of service reinforces the view that remembrance of the conflict in Palestine is best configured as a series of discrete concentric circles, rarely overlapping, rarely intersecting. Remembrance in all these cases is the art of individuation, of separation from other social groups who imagine Palestine and remember war in radically different ways.

Conclusions and Implications

This book focuses on a contested chapter in the history of the Middle East and on the ways people who lived through it understood and understand it. To uncover this story, it was necessary to lower the level of aggregation in our understanding of practices of remembrance of the upheaval of 1948. While well aware of Palestinian and Israeli official narratives, and their powerful impact, I have tried to go beyond them to show the ways smaller groups of people composed different stories, different understandings of what had happened to them. The outcome of the conflict in 1948 meant that “defeat” and “victory” served as a rough framework of these narratives. But that is just the beginning of the story of how people have remembered these events, then and now. As an anthropologist it has been my task to go back to the voices that have been to a degree drowned by political and politicized agendas.

Despite its robustness, it is evident that the national framework – what may be termed official memory – mutated over time. Certainly, the notions of national rebirth and national catastrophe are still there sixty years later, and are still dominant. Yet more localized, more isolated, more personal stories occasionally surface, which fit into older narratives, but also challenge their veracity or their utility. It is the jarring contrasts over time and within both Palestinian and Israeli narratives rather than the harmonies within the official story that formed the core of this book. My assumption was that the conflict exists not only in terms of the headline issues, such as “sovereignty over Jerusalem” or the “refugee problem,” but also within the stories ordinary people tell about what happened to them sixty years ago. The emphases and silences small groups of people share must be placed alongside the more common narratives, so as to form a better understanding of the legacies of the conflict.

Mythologies and their reversal

National myths are powerful on the level of everyday life because they are represented in songs, monuments, photographs, images, or the school

curricula. They infiltrate our daily life, and we must mediate between them and our personal experience. We should beware of them, because their simplicity is alluring. Nations throughout the world tell a nationalized story, often marking a clear division between the righteous and the sinful or the one to blame. This singular authoritative story leaves little leeway for other voices. These are the dominant stories that have prevailed in many parts of the world. In Europe they were dominant both before and after World War II and, to some degree, still are. In the colonies, discourses of national liberation or of “the civilizing mission” framed the struggle of decolonization. Yet in recent years the proliferation of voices diverging from the official narrative has not gone unnoticed.

This change can be attributed to a number of factors. The first is the limited life expectancy of national myths; the longer a political entity exists, the more its foundational myths become exposed to criticism and scrutiny. There comes a time when the language of nation building is less meaningful than family or community stories. We cannot always reconstruct the slow process that dismantles powerful national stories, but we can see the effects of their loss of authority.

The life cycle of national myths is tied together with the aging of the people who went through foundational moments in the life of the nation. The language of youth is not the language of old age. Old age is a time of self-examination and reflection, when people put down the burdens of work and have more time to survey their past and that of their people. Most of the protagonists of this book are in, or have passed through, this stage.

Finally, there is much evidence that transnational identities are beginning to compete with and at times displace those of nation building. From the late 1960s, waves of south–north migration and economic and ecological changes roughly described by the term “globalization” have contributed to a reassessment of the hegemonic position of the nation-state. Despite the blurring of nation-states’ borders, especially in the Middle East zones of conflict, much journalism, popular writing, and academic writing is still fixed on an older national moment. There is as yet no clear balance among the transnational, the national, and the local in the available literature on the Palestinian–Israeli conflict.

Israelis and Palestinians have not undergone the same blend of the transnational, national, and local. While Israelis have had a state for over sixty years, Palestinians have not. The outcome, on the one hand, is that Israel has had a proliferation of well-established mechanisms to disseminate its national myths, while the Palestinians have had far less institutionalization. On the other hand, as a response to the powerful unifying national processes, critical and revisionist versions evolved in

Israel, whereas the Palestinians have yet to experience the mere existence of a nation-state in order to be able to dismantle its idea. Both, it should be said, have a rich and varied diaspora of storytellers whose voices are heard throughout the world.

Tilting the balance toward the more personal and local, this book calls for a reassessment of the meaning of 1948. In [Chapter 4](#) we have become acquainted with the idea that for some rural Palestinians, what happened in 1948 was likened to a force of nature rather than a national disaster. There were other moments – for instance in 1938–9 – that were very violent, yet not termed war. Why then should they have believed that 1948 was any different? Yet from an Israeli point of view, the term “war” was the one used at the time to describe the invasion of Palestine by the armies of Arab states.¹ It took many years until the Palestinian villagers understood the full meaning of 1948. From the outset there was a clear disconnect between a majority of nationalized narratives on the Israeli side and multiple narratives from the national down to the familial on the Palestinian side.

The voice of the witness

This move toward the microsetting is also one that places more emphasis on the voice of the witness. There is a rich literature on what is now termed the birth of the witness. The problem remains, though, that almost no one traces the narratives that witnesses tell about their life over time. When one walks into the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, one is given an entry card with the name of a victim, as if in this very moment one is going to Auschwitz. This is the creation of an eternal present, a moment of suffering now and forever. This outlook on the witness takes history out of time.

What I have tried to do in this book is to place the witness back into time rather than to essentialize his or her experience. One cannot dwell on a certain moment, as if there were no before and after. Many of the interviewees I met were old people, and by telling their stories they reconsidered the trajectory of their lives. Things changed, and it was the change that they narrated. Secrets escaped, guilt was admitted, and gray took the place of black and white. Very often it was the interviewees who wished to be freed from the moment. Palestinian refugees did not want to talk only of the village as it was in 1948, nor did they want simply to tell a story of suffering. Jewish men who fought in 1948 did not want to recreate themselves as flawless heroic figures, nor did they wish to venerate the war. Anthropology can deal with awkward and contradictory stories.

These inner contradictions contribute to freeing the witness from outside constraints, and have the capacity to make a narrative dynamic.

Old age is the point in time when one realizes that the future did not turn out the way anyone had thought it would. What is it like when the actors return to the scene of the tragedy, national drama, or epic of their youth? What do they make of who they were when they were young? There is deep sadness in the loss of home and homeland and nostalgia about a lost youth, lost hopes and dreams. We should hear these voices and put them in time and place. We have to criticize, measure, as much as sympathize. We have to be able to be outsiders to this story. Witnesses must be honored, but not accepted uncritically. We have to remain free not to believe them. The voices are not sacred, but they are fragile, and all the more human for that.

Witnesses can tell us something about the transition from an explicit national project to the cluttered local and familial stories. The small scale has truths that the large scale obscures. The national story has more power, more money, and more reporters, yet the local and familial, the microsocial remembrances, have always existed alongside. All I am doing is adding another register to the national level. If we lose the voices of these groups of people, villagers, veterans, women, men, we will be poorer in many ways.

Silences and limitations

The passing of time also revealed gaps and silences in the narratives of 1948. Although much of this book is dedicated to what they covered, it is also worth considering the mechanisms that enabled these concealments. There is a range of social silences that differ significantly from one another (Ben-Ze'ev, Ginio, and Winter 2010). Certain facts are hidden on purpose, such as those that touch on the systematic Israeli dispossession of the Palestinians. For instance, Israeli archival documents dating back over sixty years are still not fully available to the general public.² Another silence is an outcome of inaccessibility. For example, as described in Chapter 1, for many years Palestinians lacked the means to publicize their narratives. A different silence is that of the Palmach veterans regarding the less heroic aspects of the 1948 war. It is a combination of keeping secrets, laundering language, self-censorship, and partial confessions. Narratives also leave aside what is taken for granted. These unspoken assumptions are at the heart of cultural difference, and here I refer to culture in its extended meaning: gender, ethnic, generational. How many of the silences was I able to detect, and how many remained out of reach?

I am an insider to the conflict. Israel has been the most powerful player in this story. This fact defined my position vis-à-vis both Palestinian refugees and Israeli veterans. I did not attempt to neutralize or hide my own position. This study was inevitably an outcome of my place within a polarized reality. For the Palestinians I was the suspect Israeli, for the Palmach I was the somewhat intimidating next generation; yet for both I presented a chance to look into something in a different way, from a different angle. In both cases, despite the inherent differences in my subject position and attitude toward each of these groups, I have tried to be empathetic. The act of listening was an attempt to understand how memory is being constructed, knowing that an outsider affects the creation of a narrative. In that sense, my interviews and presence could serve as memory triggers, engendering new reflections. Through the ongoing exposure to stories about the past, it was I who was most transformed. As the past grew thick and complicated, so did the present and my understanding of the Halbwachsian notion that the way we remember is tightly bound to the present.

The struggle over the nature of the past is not simply an intellectual issue, but has a direct bearing on my own life. I have heard dissonant memories around me throughout my life. I was struck by the differences in content and form when the very same story came from family members, from schoolbooks, or from the Israeli Society for the Protection of Nature. In no way am I suggesting that all versions are equally true – some can be very distant from truth, while others are much closer. Dissonance, however, has its virtues; the pretension to present the ultimate truth – or, stated differently, the return to mythology – can have far-reaching negative implications for the future of the conflict and for those like me trapped in it. Will the excavations in the Silwan district of Jerusalem be called the City of David and continue to yield Jewish findings? Will the Hebrew signs atop Palestinian remains continue to ignore them? Or will we grow more tolerant and bear parallel narratives and suffering side by side?

If these were the limitations and expectations of my own subject comprehension and position, there were also those of my chosen subjects. The shift toward the small units of everyday life inevitably requires us to ask who is represented in the material that I have examined. As noted in the introduction, the social groups chosen for this study are not demonstrably representative, although they did enjoy an iconic status. By choosing these emblematic populations, this book had hoped to open the way to a more complicated understanding of how contemporaries made sense of the events of 1948. But this is only the beginning. This story is still unfolding.

Where do we go from here?

The study of narratives at all levels entails a staggering research agenda and a lifetime's work. What I have been able to present here is only one small segment of the story of 1948. Yet my argument is that localized, isolated, personal narratives are essential to the understanding of the conflict as a whole. This kind of exploration should continue. We need to deal with more intermediary collectives that have been part of the conflict on all sides. Among the Palestinians, we need to have more detailed studies of villages, of localities, and of urban centers as well as of religious practices and their institutional settings. Because of the strength of the national narrative, internal divisions tend to be overlooked. Palestine until 1948, with its central location, was multiethnic and cosmopolitan. It had Turkmenistanis whose ancestors had arrived centuries earlier and who lived a semi-nomadic life in the Hadera-'Affula region; labor immigrants from the Horan who settled in urban districts; Bedouin whose livelihood was based on crossing the Jordan River from east to west; elite classes for whom Cairo, Jerusalem, and Beirut were interchangeable and concurrent homes. Moreover, the oral histories of many Palestinian *fellahin* point to former routes of migration from near and far. In other words, the diversity of Palestine's "Arabs" has become obscured under the accelerated processes of national revival and political conflict. Yet these other domains of life, these territories governed by what Arundhati Roy called *The God of Small Things*, deserves to be studied, both as a history of the past and as a vision for the future.

The same is true for Israeli Jews. While in this book there is a study of one Jewish elite unit, its esprit de corps and socialization, other facets of the Jewish population must also be studied. The multiplicity of Jewish origins and languages was something the nascent state overcame in part by deleting. More is needed on the views of those who were in Palestine in 1948 and decided to leave. How is the story of 1948 told by the family of Velvel Etkes, the Jewish engineer who was kidnapped and held in Ijzim (see Chapter 4) and who left for America shortly after the war? What about other alternative interpretations: How was 1948 perceived by the ordinary, nonelite soldiers, who arrived from the displaced persons' camps for survivors of the Holocaust or from Muslim countries?^{*} Did they share the ethos of the Palmach then, and do they share it now? What about the Israelis who went through the war of 1948 out of uniform? How did the civilians react to the exodus of the Arabs? And what happened after 1967 when these Arabs came back to see what had become of their lost

* There are some important references to these populations in the work of Sivan (1991) and Shapira (1994).

property? The Israeli “victory” should be studied in perspective. How were the British maps used by the authorities in the years that followed 1948? Did they feed into the militarization of Israeli society? How did the two *intifadas* open up the story of the original catastrophe of 1948 and help change ways in which people speak of it?

The juxtaposition of different narratives is the future of work on other settings of conflict: Sinhalese and Tamil in Sri Lanka; Turks and Greek in Cyprus; Tutsi and Hutu in Rwanda. Do they share a constitutive moment? Do they construct it in a similar manner to the one we have looked at? Are they, too, caught up in binary national oppositions? Did the same mechanisms that worked in the Palestinian–Israeli conflict work elsewhere? Did the British play a similar role? Was mapping and map usage the same in other places under British control? Does the familial level of narration differ over space?

This research tried to avoid championing one side over another, which ruins anthropology by clientship and advocacy. But it challenged the necessary or inevitable elements of the outcome of the story of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. There is no reason to believe that the change of narratives that I have shown will not recur in different and yet unknown ways, but it remains true that the simple prediction that there will be change is a way of breaking apart the paralytic notion of fatalism. Why consider acting or speaking if it is all going to get worse? Breaking a spiral of violence is beyond a work of scholarship, but imagining such a moment is the moral responsibility of the scholar.

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Notes

PREFACE

1. The village of Tirat Haifa is also referred to as Tirat al-Loz (Tira of the Almonds), Tirat al-Karmil, and al-Tira. In spoken Arabic it is pronounced at-Tireh.
2. This combination of military and civilian service was defined by the army as part of the “teacher-soldier” project. It was not uncommon for women to be drafted to serve in civilian institutions.
3. The study of Palestinian narratives of 1948 was part of my doctoral thesis, entitled Narratives of Exile: Palestinian Refugee Reflections on Three Villages Uprooted in 1948: Tirat Haifa, ‘Ein Hawd and Ijzim (Oxford University, 2001).
4. The Palmach, established in 1941, was considered to be the Jewish fighting elite. Its members were recruited mainly from the dominant left-oriented segments of Jewish society in Palestine. My study of the Palmach veterans was conducted between 2003 and 2005.
5. The Hagannah was the underground military force established by the Zionist Labor Party (Ahdut ha-‘Avodah) in 1920. It was the central and largest Jewish military force during the British Mandate period, and formed the basis for the establishment of the Israeli army. The Palmach was formed as part of the Hagannah. The interviews with ex-Hagannah members, conducted from the 1950s onwards, are now kept at the Hagannah Archive in Tel Aviv. I have used them primarily for Chapter 3.
6. I have chosen to use pseudonyms because interviews touched on delicate issues. The mere decision of Palestinians (especially in Jordan and the Occupied Territories) to speak to an Israeli researcher could be criticized. More important, there were memories that embarrassed my interlocutors, such as those dealing with misconduct, collaboration, or feuds. Moreover, interviewees were not eager to publicize private memories imbued with grief, disorientation, or frustration. Therefore, although at times interviewees would have liked to have had their names appear, I have adhered to pseudonyms, unless stated otherwise.

INTRODUCTION

1. Through a study of photographs from 1947 to 1950 describing the violence employed by the Zionist and later Israeli forces, Azoulay (2009) argues against

- the national interpretation by claiming that a disaster cannot and should not be defined in relative terms, namely “their disaster.”
2. For a classic example of the 1948 literature see Shamir 1973; for a discussion of the image of the *tzabar*, embodied by this generation, see Bardenstein 1998 and Almog 2000.
 3. Said Aburish was one of the first to publish a memoir (in English), entitled *Children of Bethany: The Story of a Palestinian Family*, in 1988. The 1990s saw a growing wave of such memoirs. An exceptional prose autobiography, incorporating the memories of others apart from his own, is Muhammad al-As‘ad’s *Atfal al-nada: riwaya* (The children of dew: a novel), translated into French and Hebrew but not into English. A woman’s memoir is Ghada Karmi’s *In Search of Fatima: A Palestinian Story*, published in 2002. Another celebrated memoir is Edward Said’s *Out of Place*, published in 1999. Hisham Sharabi published his memoir in 1978 (in Arabic) and Olive Branch Press translated it into English in 2008.
 4. While in the Palestinian case the unofficial commemoration of the Nakba crosses generations and includes the younger one, among the Israelis it is mostly the 1948 veterans who are involved in 1948 commemorative practices (which are not state sponsored).
 5. Many of the studies that emphasized subnational identities dealt with gender. See the work of Sayigh and Peteet (1986), Peteet (1991), and Sayigh (1998a, 1998b; 2002; 2007) on Palestinian women in Lebanon; and see the work of Talila Kosh Zohar (1999) on the Jewish women of the 1948 generation.
 6. The number of projects of a local nature seems to be growing. For instance, although there is no national Palestinian museum, there is a Palestinian museum in Umm al-Fahem. Its 2008 exhibition presented a collection of photographs of the Wadi ‘Ara area and its inhabitants from the beginning of the twentieth century until today. See Kabha and Raz (eds.) 2008.
 7. For studies on material and sensual remembrance see Seremetakis (ed.) 1994, Feldman 1994, Schama 1995, and Sutton 2001. On the embodiment of memory see Connerton 1989 and Narvaez 2006.
 8. See more on the Tegart police stations in Chapter 3, pp. 53–54.
 9. The interviews with the Palestine Police veterans are kept at the Middle East Centre Archive, St. Antony’s College, Oxford.
 10. For an analysis of life stories of members from the 1948 generation see Spector-Mersel 2008.
 11. On the canonization of the Palmach generation see Ben-Ze’ev and Lomsky-Feder 2009.
 12. For a discussion of the iconization of the *fellah* as national signifier see Swedenburg 1990. On the *fellahin* turned *fida’iyun* see Sayigh 1979.
 13. See Sinclair 2006b on this matter. Also note her description of how the policemen fade from the public scene. She describes the Palestine Police veterans parading at Buckingham Palace in July 1948 and being addressed by King George VI; their annual march for over fifty years to London’s Cenotaph; and their last sad parade in 2002, with only 100 participants.

CHAPTER 1: THE FRAMEWORK

1. The size of the populations is a controversial subject. Morris (2008:15) gives a figure of 1.2 million–1.3 million Arabs; Kimmerling and Migdal (2003:217) note that it was more than 1.3 million; and J. Abu-Lughod (1971:160) argues that it was almost 1.4 million. The Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry gave the following figures for Palestine's population at the end of 1944: 1,112,000 Arabs, 554,000 Jews, and 14,098 others.
2. The numbers of refugees are controversial. See a table of the different estimates in Zureik 1996:17. The number of obliterated villages is also disputed. The count depends on whether hamlets, often referred to as *khirbe*(pl. *khirab*), should be included. Walid al-Khalidi's detailed survey of villages gives the number as 418 (W. Khalidi [ed.] 1992).
3. However, there were geographical, generational and ideological divisions within the *yishuv*. There is a vast literature on the subject. See, for example, Kimmerling 1982; Shafir 1989; Halpern and Reinhartz 1998; Sternhell 1998; Shapira 1999; Gelvin 2000; Penslar 2000; De Vries 2010.
4. On the McMahon-Hussein correspondence see Fromkin 1989.
5. In the 1922 census the numbers of Palestine's inhabitants were as follows: 590,890 (78%) Muslims, 73,024 (9.9%) Christians, and 83,794 (11%) Jews (J. Abu-Lughod 1971:140).
6. The British administration grew from twenty-one departments in 1924 to forty-five in 1947 (El-Eini 2003:19).
7. Khalidi (1997) traces the roots of Palestinian nationalism to the late Ottoman period.
8. The Palestine Arab Executive convened every year from 1920 to 1923, and then reconvened in Jerusalem five years later. This committee grew steadily. It comprised mainly representatives from the middle and upper classes. See Porath 1974, Moseley Lesch 1979 and Muslih 1988.
9. The Hagannah was established in 1920 and was associated with the socialist parties, which represented the majority of the *yishuv*. See Slutsky et al. [eds.] 1954–1972.
10. For a study of reflections on this revolt see Swedenburg 1995.
11. To crush the revolt the British executed 140 Arabs, carried out mass arrests (by 1939 9,000 Arabs were detained), administrative detentions and house demolitions, imposed curfews, exiled local leaders, and held ongoing incursions into village homes (Morris 2008:31–41). It is estimated that more than 5,000 Arabs, 415 Jews, and 200 Britons were killed during these three years (Kimmerling and Migdal 2003:131). On the economic aspects of the revolt see Yazbak 2000. Also see the diaries of Akram Zu'aytir 1980. For a description of the events as represented through one village, Saffuriyya, see Hoffman 2009:52–63.
12. While legal immigration of Jews into Palestine was restricted, the *yishuv*'s military arms were invested in illegal smuggling of Jews into Palestine (Halamish 2006).
13. This cooperation began in 1938, during the revolt, when a British officer, Orde Wingate, was training Jewish soldiers in the Special Night Squads. Moreover, the British administration helped form the Jewish Settlement Police and the Jewish Auxiliary Forces (M. J. Cohen 1972; Salomon 2005).

14. The Arabs were more inclined toward joining the British apparatus based in Palestine, primarily as a source of income. See Adel Yahya's forthcoming work on the Arabs in the Palestine Police.
15. Palmach is an acronym for *plugot makhatz*, which literally means “crushing battalions” but is often translated as “striking companies.” “Shock troops” or “commando” may be a closer approximation of the term.
16. Here is a short estimate of the number of members of the Hagannah: By the end of World War II it numbered 35,000 men and women. The great majority of these troops (roughly 30,000) were members of Heil Mishmar (lit. “the guard force”), and commanded very little military knowledge. Heil Sadeh (lit. “the field force”), numbering 4,500 men, were trained, but on rare occasions. The Palmach numbered 1,500 troops. In addition, 12,000 youth organized in the youth battalions, Gadna, were seen as reserves. The Irgun and Lehi numbered roughly 3,000 on the eve of the 1948 war (Gelber 2004:25, 207).
17. Short for Irgun Tzva'i Le'umi (National Military Organization). See Charters 1989; Heller 1995.
18. This collaboration ended following the Irgun's attack on Jerusalem's King David Hotel, killing almost one hundred people (Clarke 1981).
19. During the Mandate's final year, 1947–8, the police expenditure was £4 million higher than in 1944–5 (Golani 2009:91–2).
20. The Anglo-American Committee of Enquiry in Palestine also recommended that Palestine remain a Mandated territory and that Britain lift the Land Act, which restricted Jews from purchasing land in 95% of Palestine (M. J. Cohen 1982:105–6). For Albert Hourani's testimony to the committee see Hourani ([1946] 2005).
21. The Arab Higher Committee boycotted the commission, explaining that the Palestinian Arab's natural rights were self-evident and could not continue to be subject to investigation, but rather deserved to be recognized on the basis of the principles of the United Nations Charter (Mayer 1986:339).
22. This was UNSCOP's majority plan. The minority plan suggested a unitary federal state (Robinson 1947).
23. On the joint Arab action see Mayer 1986. On the interests of each state, see Rogan and Shlaim 2001.
24. Demonstrations and anti-Jewish riots also took place in neighboring Arab states (Morris 2008).
25. Jewish settlements relied heavily on provisions from the outside, and convoys to remote areas suffered heavy losses. In contrast to Jewish settlements, Arab villages were more self-sufficient and a little less vulnerable in these early months of conflict (Golani 2009:63).
26. For a lengthy discussion on “the few against the many” see Kadish and Kedar (eds.) 2006.
27. The first operation was named Nahshon and carved out a corridor connecting Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The other was the battle of Mishmar ha-'Emek, in which the Jewish forces stopped the progress of the ALA from conquering the kibbutz, which would have opened the road to Haifa (Gelber 2004:117–25).
28. Irgun and Lehi forces entered Deir Yassin on 9 April, killing approximately one hundred villagers, including women and children. For descriptions and

- analysis of this massacre see, for example, W. Khalidi (ed.) 1992, Morris 2004, and Pappe 2006.
29. An Israeli officer's eyewitness account, that of Me'ir Pa'il, was translated and published in the *Journal of Palestine Studies* 1972, 1(4), 142–146.
 30. Morris refers to "Jewish areas" as those allotted to the Jewish state according to the partition plan.
 31. Nimir al-Hawari, a lawyer, was a political leader who left Jaffa in the winter of 1947. His relations with the Zionists prior to 1948 enabled his return to Palestine, now Israel, in 1950. On the significance of collaboration to the understanding of 1948 see H. Cohen 2008, chapter 9.
 32. There are also memoirs and accounts of 1948 written by politicians and army officers of the Arab countries that participated in the war. See, for example, Glubb (1957), al-Tall (1958), al-Jubury (1970). An integrative analysis of the 1948 Palestine historiography in Jordan, Iraq, Egypt and Syria see Rogan and Shlaim (eds.) 2001, chapters 4–8.
 33. In Arabic *al-Nakba: nakbat bayt al-maqdas wa'l-firdus al-mafqud*.
 34. The fact that Israel related to 1948 as a war and the Palestinians did not is not accidental. See Sivan (1991) and a discussion of this difference in [Chapter 4](#).
 35. In Hebrew the title is *Toldot milhemet ha-komemiyut*.
 36. Lorch's title in Hebrew was *Korot milhemet ha-'atzma'ut*. For a description of the sequence of events surrounding this book see Bar-On 2001:185–207. In parallel to the official and popular versions of the war, there were a few subversive publications, especially in the form of fiction (including *Hirbat hizah* by S. Yizhar (1949) and "The other side of the coin" by Uri Avnery (1950)). See more on this in [Chapter 7](#).
 37. Gil Eyal (2006:274 fn.28) lists five such prominent scholars who either worked for state bodies controlling the Arab population and later became academics or moved back and forth between the two. This was certainly not a rule. For instance, the anthropologist Henry Rosenfeld published a monograph on the impact of 1948 on the Palestinians in Israel entitled *Hem hayu fallahim* (They were *fellahin*) in 1964.
 38. There were many reasons for the emergence of this new corpus: a new generation that did not share the ideals of the 1948 generation; disillusionment with Israeli military supremacy (following the 1973 war); the rise of a right-wing government in 1977; lack of national consensus over the necessity for a war in Lebanon (1982); the opening of archives; a general shift toward a capitalist-individualist economy; and globalizing influences (for a discussion of several of the abovementioned factors see Sand 2004:101–3). On the limitation of what came to be known as the "new Israeli historiography" see Beinin 2005.
 39. For examples of these revisionist perspectives see Baruch Kimmerling (1982), Ilan Pappe (1988), Gershon Shafir (1989), Ella Shohat (1989), Uri Ram (1995), Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled (2002), Benny Morris ([1987] 2004), Yehuda Shenhav (2006), Oren Yiftachel (2006), Neve Gordon (2008) and Hannan Hever (2010).
 40. Another facet of this critical perspective is manifested in Emmanuel Sivan's (1991) analysis of the Jewish-Israeli 1948 generation. Its innovation is in the shift to memory processes, to the microsetting revealed through documents

such as memorial books, and in questioning some of the myths that had long been taken for granted.

41. The prevalence of surveys was a first indication of the growing importance of public opinion. See, for example, the extensive surveys conducted by Khalil Shikaki, <http://www.pcpsr.org/>.
42. The earliest works were probably those of Nazzal (1978) and Sayigh (1979). Later examples include the work of Peteet (1991), Lynd, Bahour, and Lynd (eds.) (1994), Swedenburg (1995), Tamari and Hammami (1998), Yahya (1999). A set of monographs on the 1948 destroyed villages, also incorporating oral history, was published by the University of Bir-Zeit. See Slyomovics (1991) for an overview of this series. *Palestinermenbered.com* has been an Internet source since the mid-1990s. It contains filmed oral histories as well as an interactive interface where members of villages can contact one another and post messages. For more recent oral history collections see Diana Keown Allan's Palestinian filmed archive of three generations living in Lebanon (<http://www.nakba-archive.org/>). See also the work of Badil, a Bethlehem-based resource center for Palestinian residency and refugee rights, which on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the Nakba (2008) published a volume of its journal *al-Majdal* featuring contemporary interviews with Palestinian refugees.
43. The common terms for the 1948 writers are *dor tashah* and *dor ba'aretz* (Gertz 1983). Prominent among the poets of this generation are Haim Guri and Haim Hefer (see their joint book of 1976), and among the prose writers one may mention S. Yizhar (1958) and Hanoch Bartov (2003).
44. The under representation of women among the writers identified with this generation is indicative of their marginal role. See discussion in Chapter 8.
45. The original Arabic title of this book is translated as “The strange chronicle of the disappearance of Saeed Abu al-Nahs [father of misfortune] *al-mutasha'el* [the pessoptimist]” (Habibi [1974] 1982).
46. Other influential Palestinian poets include Samih al-Qasim (2006), Tawfiq Ziad (1972), and Taha Muhammad Ali (2006 and see Hoffman 2009 for his biography), all of whom remained in Israel after 1948. Prominent among the female poets is Fadwa Tuqan (1985) of Nablus.
47. For instance, Haim Guri's lyrics for a popular song on 1948, “Bab al-Wad,” describe the convoys of Jewish fighters at the narrow gate of the valley going up the mountain to Jerusalem. This poem left a lasting impression on generations of Israelis and, along with the remains of armored cars still scattered at the roadside, turned “Bab al-Wad” into an icon of Jewish heroism and sacrifice (Guri and Hefer 1976:215).

CHAPTER 2: THE BRITISH CARTOGRAPHIC IMAGINATION AND PALESTINE

1. While there were parallel map series of other scales, the 1:20,000 scale maps used here were the largest scale set, covering the entire country, excluding the region south of Beersheba.
2. On these earlier maps there is a wealth of research. For an example on Jerusalem's early maps see Rubin 1992.

3. P. Collier (1994), Scientific Cartographer, Man or Man of Straw. Unpublished paper presented at Institute of British Geographers Conference, University of Nottingham, 4–7 January 1994.
4. See responses to Harley's arguments in Dahl (ed.) 1989.
5. The PEF maps were drawn using the cartographic methods of the period: mapping based on trigonometric principles with absolute identifiable locations set on the ground (known as trig points) and a fixed scale of one inch to a statute mile. The triangulation method was applied earlier by the engineer Pierre Jacotin (1765–1827), Napoleon's cartographer, who accompanied the Middle East expedition of 1799 and published a set of maps of Palestine. France played a leading role in the introduction of new cartographic methods, manifested in the 1744 Cassini di Thury topographic survey of France, followed by a map of 1:86,400 (Shatner 1951:149).
6. See Moscrop (2000:129–136) on the reasons for abandoning the Eastern Survey.
7. The native population did not always welcome the PEF's personnel. The survey was constantly in danger and could not proceed without an armed guard. When camping near Safad in 1874 they were attacked and several members of the party, including Conder and Kitchener, were seriously injured. See Moscrop 2000:109–110.
8. S.F. Newcombe was in charge of this pre–World War I map, titled the Wilderness of Zin.
9. The German forces were also using PEF maps during World War I. See Gavish 2005:12.
10. Smith published many of his short articles in the *Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly* (Campbell 2002).
11. Campbell 2002:296.
12. In a military history of the Jezreel Valley, Eric Cline (2000) argues that General Allenby imitated Thutmose III's battle tactics, of which he learnt through George Adam Smith's book, among others.
13. *Military Map of the United Kingdom* together with Minutes of Evidence and Appendices, produced by the British War Office, 1892.
Its recommendations were indeed implemented, and included a more conspicuous sketching of contours; further classifying roads; depicting footpaths; inserting houses; omitting all unnecessary names; omitting church names; using unified conventional signs; distinguishing nondeciduous from deciduous trees; adding features such as post offices and wells on the colored versions of maps; and generally encouraging more color in maps.
14. Close (1905:iv) commented that the field methods are mostly those in use by the Survey of India. The prime source of information for the book was the work of the Royal Engineers Officers throughout the empire (1905:iii).
15. Close's outlines were slightly altered in 1912, with a new style agreed upon by the War Office, with hachures and with a better road classification. This new style, the "Popular" edition, became the model for subsequent Ordnance Survey mapping in the twentieth century, and was also adopted by the army for maps prepared in anticipation of World War I (Collier 2009).

16. Topocadastral maps combined topography and registration of property.
17. In Britain itself it was required by law to show county, district, and parish boundaries (Seymour 1980:110–1).
18. A similar parallel can be made to the categorization of “woodland” and “forest” as indicating trees less than a certain distance apart; a greater distance was defined as “scattered trees” (Collier 1998).
19. Tree crops are relatively stable, and from a military point of view can provide cover. This is why some variety of trees is indicated (Gollier et al. 1998).
20. Some of the marshland drying projects were joint Zionist–British enterprises. For instance, PICA (Palestine Jewish Colonization Association), the Rothschild-sponsored organization for land purchase in Palestine, became the owner of some of the land dried near Caesarea (Kedar and Forman 2003).
21. For instance, Arab al-Ghawarina, dwelling in the Kabara marshlands on the southern plain of Mount Carmel, had their name registered on the hill of their new permanent location. Others, such as Arab al-Wushahi, who lived in temporary dwellings east of the village of Ijzim as well as in Ijzim itself, were not mentioned at all.
The process of dispossessing those who do not appear on the map is still applied in today's Israel. There are dozens of unrecognized Arab settlements, primarily in the southern region. The inhabitants are put under pressure to leave, primarily through the demolition of dwellings, the confiscation of livestock, and the poisoning of fields (Abu al-Heyja, Beidas, and Jones 2001; www.assoc40.org/en/, accessed 1 July 2010).
22. Gavish noted that Salmon, fervent for cartographic innovations, rejected a standard system for mapping; each country should produce maps that bestow its unique features (Gavish 2005:230). However, even Salmon did not wish to disrupt national unity and create a unique legend for each locality. Financial constraints surely affected the inclination to use a unified legend.
23. The letter was published in Gavish 2005:240. The original letter is found in Colonel Salmon's collection of legend sheets, Royal Geographical Society, London.
24. The British produced two types of maps in languages other than English. One was the cadastre map sketching blocks and parcels according to the land settlement. Those were published in English and Hebrew or English and Arabic, according to the language of the population whose land was parceled. The administration wanted the maps to be comprehensible to the local inhabitants for the sake of tax raising and control. The second multilingual map was known as the road map. Most of the maps, and primarily the series of topographic maps, were solely in English (Gavish 2005:240).
25. Personal communication with Mustafa Kabha.
26. For instance River Qishon (Nahr al-Mugatta'); the Crusader's ruin of Belvoir, with the Arabic name in brackets (Kaukab al Hawa); Tel Hordos (Kh. Firdaus); and Lake Tiberias (Sea of Galilee).
27. It is not clear from this document, a draft, who wrote it. However, I assume it was the newly appointed postwar reconstruction commissioner. It may be

found in the Israel State Archive (from now on cited as ISA), Colonial Office 733, file name: Post war reconstruction and development, original file number 76221, microfilms 586–588. These files are microfilm copies of originals kept at the National Archives, London. The great majority of the British Mandate documents disappeared at the end of the Mandate. A small, yet significant, portion is preserved in the Israel State Archive.

28. ISA, Colonial Office 733, microfilms 586–588. A letter from Sir Harold MacMichael, the high commissioner, to Oliver Stanley, secretary of state for the colonies, 19 April, 1943.
29. ISA, Colonial Office 733, microfilms 586–588. Titled Official Communiqué.
30. *Ibid.* Emphasis of the divergent roles of town dwellers and villagers, even if explained as complementing one another, echoes a binary opposition persistent in the British imaginary, as Raymond Williams has demonstrated in *The Country and the City* (Williams 1973:289) This binary classification was applied by the Mandate's Lands and Surveys Department, which divided most cartographic projects into "urban" and "rural" ones (Gavish 2005). It is worthy of note that this division was a rather blurred one in Palestine's Mandate period. Prominent families owned houses in the city and in the village and moved between the two (such as the al-Madis of Ijzim); villages became neighborhoods of cities (such as Tirat Haifa or Balad esh-Sheikh); villagers moved to cities (especially in the early 1930s) and then moved back (during the revolt).
31. ISA, Colonial Office 733, Post war reconstruction and development, original file number 76221, microfilms 586–588. The document does not bear a name but I assume that it was written by Harris as a later memorandum, written by H. Kendall, the town planning advisor, attributes a similar argument to Harris.
32. ISA/RG2/501/15. 27 January 1945, Village Planning and Development and village and small township water supplies.
33. The option to expand the grant was for the consequent three years (1945–8). See ISA, Colonial Office 733, microfilms 586–588. Outward telegram, 3 December 1943. To Sir H. MacMichael from S. of S. Colonies.
ISA, Colonial Office 733, Post war reconstruction and development, original file number 76221, microfilms 586–588.
34. ISA, Colonial Office 733, microfilms 586–588. A letter from Sir Harold MacMichael, the High Commissioner, to Oliver Stanley, Secretary of State for the Colonies, 19 April 1943.
35. ISA, Colonial Office 733, microfilms 586–588. A secret letter from the HC to Oliver Stanley, 7 July 1943.
36. ISA/RG2/501/15. The Village Surveys Salfit map of 1:2,500 is also found at the Hagannah Archive, Map collection 503.
37. Kendall to Chief Secretary. Subject: Village Development and Town Planning. 21 June 1945. ISA/RG2/501/15.
38. Most of the villages were drawn at a scale of 1:1,250 for the built area and 1:2,500 for the village and surroundings.
39. The great majority of these maps, almost two hundred, are kept at the Geography Map Room at the Hebrew University. Similar copies are kept at

- the University of Tel Aviv map room, which also produced a map showing the distribution of the villages that were surveyed.
40. A. P. Mitchell, Director of Surveys, to Chief Secretary, 11 October 1945, ref. E/4/47. ISA/RG2/501/15.
 41. See ISA, Colonial Office 733, microfilms 586–588.
 42. ISA 4982/1 N Village Development Schemes. To District Commissioner, Galilee District, from Robert Scott, Acting Chief Secretary, 23 May 1945. Throughout the British Mandate period many of the village schools and clinics were built through cooperation between the villagers and the government. Often the villagers were expected to donate the plot of land: see Shepherd 1999.
 43. *Ibid.*
 44. This village file is kept at the Hagannah Archive, Tel Aviv.
 45. A similar case applies to a village survey map of the village of al-Faluja (at a scale of 1:1,250) kept in a file of the Givati Brigade from 1949. Israel Defense Force Archive, 1041/1948, file 19.
 46. For instance, the Ordnance Survey map of Birmingham key has all the coastal features, although Birmingham has no beach.

CHAPTER 3: CARTOGRAPHIC PRACTICES

1. According to the British government's survey of Palestine, roughly two-thirds of Palestine's Arabs were villagers (the estimate is for December 1946). Regarding literacy, Ayalon (2004:17) writes: "A reasonable assessment by a seasoned observer in 1947 put the overall literacy rate in Palestine's Arab community at 27%: 21% for Muslims (men 35%, women 7%), 75% for Christians (men 85%, women 65%)."
2. Analyzing the Palestinian Arab community in 1948, Sela wrote: "The Palestinian political leadership did not prepare the organizational tools required for the fulfillment of its targets, in terms of recruitment, establishing institutions and fostering a reciprocal relationship with the population, as did the Jewish *yishuv*. Instead, the political elite invested most of its energy in an internal struggle over power and influence" (1996:118–19).
3. For more information on these excursions, see the publications of their notorious guides: Ze'ev Vilnai, Azriel Broshi (1968), Pinhas Cohen (1938), David Benvenisti (1946), and Nathan Shalem (1973).
4. See Shalem (1973) for a picturesque description of a night spent at the village of Turmus-'Aiya (pp. 351–2) and another at Jaljilia (both north of Ramallah) (p. 356).
5. Salomon bases his argument here on a transcribed interview with Ze'ev Vilnai.
6. These patrols started in the Jerusalem area in the summer of 1936 (Salomon 2005:6).
7. Even before the establishment of Wingate's SNS, the Hagannah organized a countrywide-recruited force named *plugot sadeh* ("field companies," known as *fosh*), which had a small intelligence unit. Many of the members of these field companies joined Wingate's SNS. Because the *fosh* force was based on permanent service (rather than temporary recruitment) it was disassembled for economic reasons.

8. Information found in an interview with Birger kept at the Hagannah Archive, file 196.54, 12 March 1985.
9. Birger collaborated in writing this guide with Eliyahu Hershkovitz. Their guide is kept in the Hagannah Archive group 34, file 154.
10. In his interview (Hagannah Archive, file 196.54, 12 March 1985) Birger noted that the first technical department was established for a short period with the aim of registering the Arab Revolt attacks on maps. Birger remained a leading authority in the field of topography and later published a classic book titled *Topography* (1978).
11. Interview with Yoeli, 18 April 2005, in his home in Tel Aviv. The interview was conducted in English due to the presence of my colleague Inger Marie Okkenhaug.
12. *Ibid.*
13. The cooperation was mainly with the Special Operations Executive of the British Headquarters in the Middle East. See Gelber 2001:416.
14. See Salomon 2005:22. Salomon comments that there is some controversy regarding the date of this course and the number of its participants.
15. *Ibid.*:28.
16. Salmon was stationed in Palestine from 1933 to 1938, was first the director of the Palestine Survey, and later commissioner for lands and surveys.
17. Interview with Asher Solel, 27 September 2005, at his home in Tel Aviv. The interview was conducted in Hebrew. Miriam, Solel's wife, participated in the discussion.
18. According to Solel, the British field surveyors comprised three companies which mapped the area south of the Euphrates and one that covered its northern area.
19. Solel spoke favorably of Major Gardner, who headed the unit and was highly regarded by the soldiers. Gardner, according to Solel, had previously served as a cartographer in India, and after World War II was put in charge of all British military mapping (including France).
20. After Solel retired he wrote a doctorate on the demarcation of boundaries in Palestine and published a book based on this work. See Solel 1991.
21. Hagannah Archive, interview with Meir Pail, file 194–1, 7 January 1985.
22. The fusion of two images of the same area taken from slightly different angles permits the judgment of depth or distance.
23. Interview with Zvi German, 4 January 2007, conducted in Hebrew at German's home in Ramat Hasharon.
24. Yazur's file is currently kept at the Hagannah Archive.
25. Interview with Gilia Katinka-Plotkin, on 7 December 2006 at her home in Tel Aviv. The interview was conducted in Hebrew. Also present Julia Boecker.
26. In a history of the Hebrew Air Force, Amber, Eyal, and Cohen (1997:90–1) write: The Palmach pilots used their navigation flights for the purpose of aerial photography. The first trials were made in 1945 by the technical department of the Shay (the intelligence arm of the Hagannah), headed by Pinhas Optikman [sic; should be Aptekman, later known as Yoeli and appearing

- earlier in this chapter]. Under the pretext of flying sick children, targets were photographed from an airplane owned by the “Aviron” company ... The altitude of the flights was set according to the diameter of the target on a map at a scale of 1:20,000 and according to the camera’s capacities although at times it was contradictory to the civil aviation regulations. Each target was photographed at least three times in a flight: Diagonally from afar, diagonally from near, and vertically. Six or seven targets were covered in each flight.
27. German also referred to this basement, saying: “I remember a basement in Tel Aviv on Frug Street. I was there once or twice altogether and it had a large sketching table.”
 28. Interview with Birger, Hagannah Archive, file 196.54, 12 March 1985, pp. 8–9.
 29. For example, there is a sun-made copy of a map of Acre at a scale of 1:1250 dated 1929, originally produced by the town planning adviser and entitled “Acre – Old Town Scheme,” numbered 474 in the Hagannah Archive. There is also the very same map, hand-copied, dated 1944, numbered 679.
 30. Interview with Yoeli, 18 April 2005, at his home in Tel Aviv. The interview was conducted in English due to the presence of my colleague Inger Marie Okkenhaug.
 31. This information was given to me in an interview with Ilan Shtayer of the Hagannah Archive. It probably originates in the interview with HaCohen.
 32. Yoeli was first a lecturer at Haifa’s Technion and later at Tel Aviv University.
 33. Cadastral maps probably did exist in some homes, in light of the British introduction of parcellation in some parts of Palestine. Land deeds were means of proving ownership, but so were maps.
 34. It is possible that the photographs are from the 1936–9 revolt rather than from 1948.
 35. Hagannah Archive, catalogue no. 6519.
 36. Hagannah Archive, catalogue no. 2943.
- اصدار الاوامر توضيحة الخطبة لكل زعيم على الخريطة وفي الصورة الزعيم فخر الدين قائد المنطقة الشمالية
يتلقى التعليمات على الخريطة.
37. Fawzi al-Qawuqji was born in Tripoli, Lebanon, becoming a professional army officer. He led the Arab volunteer force into Palestine in 1936 and then became the head of the ALA in 1947, which was formed under the auspices of the Arab League (Parsons 2007).
 38. Mona Anis and Omayma Abdel-Latif (1998), Fawzi al-Qawuqji: Yesterday’s Hero, available at http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/1998/1948/367_qwqj.htm, accessed 27 August 2009.
 39. IDF archive 1970/1046, file 180, The Egyptian Factor in the War of Independence (*ha-Gorem ha-mitzri be-milhemet ha-‘atzma’ut*) by Dov Yinon. Written for internal army use some time in the 1950s.
 40. *Ibid.*, p. 271.
 41. *Ibid.*, p. 259.
 42. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
 43. The table needed to decipher the numbers was unavailable.

CHAPTER 4: 1948 FROM A LOCAL POINT OF VIEW

1. The interviews with the villagers and the archival work at the IDFA were part of my work toward a doctoral thesis: see Ben-Ze'ev 2001. The term Israel Defense Force is a translation of the army's official name, *Tzva ha-Hagannah le-Yisrael*.
2. The interrogations of Palestinian Arabs were conducted with men after the fall of the village. The IDF no longer needed details about the village, but mainly wished to prove certain claims to the UN commission that was investigating the circumstances of the fall of Ijzim. Because of the terms used in these investigation reports (such as "gangs" for the village fighters and "police" for the Israeli army forces), there is reason to suspect that some reports were written by the Israelis and the villagers' signatures were coerced. These reports are thus a dubious historical source, but they can shed light on the budding construction of the Israeli historical narrative. See, for examples, Israel State Archive (ISA), 2427/1 Foreign Ministry files, 17 September 1948.
3. These data are based on a census titled Village Statistics conducted by the British Mandate on 1 April 1945. An IDFA document (2168/1950, file 57), from 17 September 1948, based on the last official British statistics from December 1946, states that the inhabitants of Ijzim numbered 3,140. The document is a memo adjunct to a letter to the foreign minister regarding the three villages.
4. These numbers are drawn from the above-mentioned Mandate Village Statistics survey of 1945. The population was probably slightly higher by 1948.
5. See *Sefer toldot ha-hagannah* (the Hagannah history book), Slutsky et al. 1954–72:1363–4; *Toldot milhemet ha-komemiyut* (A history of the War of Resurrection), 1959:253; Lorch 1961:277–9.
6. In many villages, elderly people and some women and children remained during the conquest. In the case of Tirat Haifa, for example, after the fall of the village the captive men were taken for interrogation in prison, and the Jewish forces transferred and abandoned the rest of the population at the emerging cease-fire line with Jordan. See Dirbas 1991.
7. My interviews with Abu Ashraf were conducted on 16 and 30 August 1996 at his home, in Hebrew. We also met on less formal occasions a couple of times.
8. Tawfiq al-'Aref was one of the village *makhātir* (headmen).
9. I met Jamil for the first time on 25 September 1996 at his home in Irbid, Jordan. I met him five more times on different occasions during my visits to Jordan (during 1996–8). Our discussions were conducted in English. In the above quote I have made minor corrections to the English.
10. *Ha'aretz*, 3 February 1948, p. 4.
11. IDFA 7249/1949, file 152, 4 July 1948.
12. IDFA 244/1951, file 67, 6 July 1948 [sent to the officer in charge of Haifa by the city's intelligence officer]. A shorter version is in 922/1975, file 1176, 7 July 1948.
13. Amin was born in Ijzim in 1934 and lives in a village in Israel. I interviewed him in Hebrew in his home on 9 August 1996 and met him for subsequent talks on 16 and 30 August.

14. Abu Na'im lives in a village in Israel. I interviewed him in Hebrew on 26 November 1996 and 26 February 1998.
15. Daliyat al-Karmil – the Druze village a couple of kilometers east of Ijzim.
16. IDFA 4663/1949, file 46. The letter is dated 6 July. The army document that quotes it is dated 10 July.
17. The interview with Shafiq was on 20 May 1998 in his home in Haifa, and was conducted in Hebrew.
18. Many intelligence documents on the village indicate that the Jewish forces were concerned about British defectors and other “foreign” volunteers who might be assisting the Arab forces.
19. IDFA 6400/1949, file 66, 12 July 1948.
20. Among the notes was another letter from Kupershstock to Salomon and a list of names of Arab prisoners held by the Jews.
21. ISA 931/6/P.
22. IDFA 6400/1949, file 66.
23. IDFA 7249/1949, file 137. Members of Etkes's family told me that not long after the establishment of the State of Israel Etkes and his wife moved to the United States (where he had spent a few years prior to his arrival in Palestine).
24. IDFA 7249/1949, file 152, 14 March 1948 [An intelligence account from Hiram to Teneh]. Also filed elsewhere 5942/1949, file 23.
25. IDFA 5942/1949, file 23, 16 March 1948 [An intelligence report from Hiram to Teneh].
26. IDFA 7249/1949, file 152.
27. There is still a popular saying among the Palestinians regarding this Iraqi lack of orders: *bayn aku wa-maku al-filastiniyyun intaku* (between the presence [of orders] and the lack [of orders], the Palestinians were screwed). I thank Avraham Sela who drew my attention to this saying. Nafez Nazzal (1978) described the same lack of Iraqi orders in the Galilee region.
28. IDFA 2506/1949, file 85. The correspondence is in English.
29. IDFA 6400/1949, file 66, 4 July, 1948: “The people of Ijzim receive small arms from Tul-karem, through paths in the mountains that pass by Umm aj-Jimal near Zikhron.” IDFA 6400/1949, file 66: “No foreign army in Ijzim . . . Every night food supplies, ammunition, arms and equipment are transferred from the triangle to the village.”
30. IDFA 7249/1949, file 152, 4 July 1948. The reference regarding relations with Umm az-Zinat is bewildering, as Umm az-Zinat was conquered on 15 May. The intelligence may have been collected long before it was written down.
31. The interview with Abu Wisam was conducted on 7 November 1996, at his home in Irbid, in Arabic. Also present were some other men of at-Tireh who live in Irbid. Abu Wisam was ninety-six years old at the time of the interview.
32. Abu Na'im lives in a village in Israel. I interviewed him in Hebrew on 26 November 1996 and on 26 February 1998.
33. The army translator indicates that he cannot identify the word *mundel*, possibly *munadilun*, meaning fighters.
34. This passage is translated from the Hebrew translation that is kept at the IDFA. The word used for “exposed” in Hebrew was *nitgalenu*. IDFA 5942/1949, file 3.

35. The alleged massacre at Tantura has been a subject of controversy in Israel. Teddy Katz wrote of it in an MA thesis for the University of Haifa. A newspaper article based on his thesis led the Jewish soldiers associated with this massacre to sue Katz. The university withdrew from any responsibility, and Katz signed a precourt agreement with the prosecution to apologize for his allegations. See Ram 200:209,229–9.
36. IDFA 6400/49, file 66, and 2506/1949, file 85.
37. Abu Na‘im lives in a village in Israel. I interviewed him in Hebrew on 26 November 1996.
38. The documents regarding the air bombings of 12 July are IDFA 137(38)/1951, file 178, and IDFA 922/1975, file 1182; the document regarding 17 July is IDFA 922/1975, file 1176; the document regarding 19 July is IDFA 922/1975, file 1032.
39. IDFA 5942/1949, file 3. The units that participated in this attack, on 21 July, were six companies from the military police organized as three companies and one company from an auxiliary force organized as three companies (IDFA 7249/49, file 130).
40. IDFA 922/75, file 1044. The final operation – one battalion (Alexandroni number 33) (roughly 900 soldiers) (only two companies from this battalion are mentioned in the description of the battle); one company from battalion 21 (Carmeli); one company from battalion 15 (Golany). Supporting weapons – two 65-millimeter cannons; two 120-millimeter mortars (heavy mortars); six armored cars from the 7th and 3rd brigades; bombers and battle aircraft.
41. IDFA 137(38)/1951, file 178.
42. IDFA 137(38)/1951, file 178.
43. IDFA 137(38)/1951 file 178, dated 26 July 48: “bomb same dome at 1000 and search from low altitude.”
44. I first met Abu Da‘ud in his Haifa home on 12 September, 1996. We met again on 18 October and 24 October 1996. We spoke Hebrew.
45. IDFA 5942/1949, file 3.
46. IDFA 5942/1949, file 3. An intelligence report, compiled by the IDF and based on Arab sources, gave the following description of how things developed in the three villages: “After a battle of a night and a day it was decided that all of the armed youngsters would leave the villages and break their way out towards ‘Ara and ‘Ar‘ara. At dusk, ‘Ein Ghazal and Jaba‘ were abandoned. The people gathered at Khirbet Kumbazeh and from there left in convoys, fifty to one hundred people in each convoy. Each convoy was secured.” (IDFA 922/1975, file 1044))
47. IDFA 5942/1949, file 3, 27 July.
48. IDFA 5942/1949, file 3.
49. IDFA 922/1975, file 1044. According to this document 800 people reached ‘Ara safely.
50. One wonders what is meant by “the people returned.” It could mean that some of the people who stayed nearby (in the mountains or in the Druze villages) tried to go back to the village and rescue their produce and belongings.

51. ISA, *heit tzadik* 2427/1.
52. Abu Na‘im lives in a village in Israel. I interviewed him in Hebrew on 26 November 1996 and on 26 February 1998.
53. The reasons for this transaction are not clear to me.
54. The interview was conducted on 9 October 1997 in Haifa, in Hebrew.
55. IDFA 5942/1949, file 3.
56. IDFA 2168/1950, file 26. As for ‘Ein Ghazal, twenty-two were reported killed, thirty-three were missing, and 2,464 people were located; in Jaba’, eight were killed, five missing, and 1,494 located.
57. IDFA(2)716/1949, file 1.
58. They were ninety people, mainly from Ijzim: thirty-nine children, forty-four old women, and seven old men. IDFA 244/1951, file 129.
59. IDFA 7249/1949, file 82.
60. IDFA 4663/1949, file 125. Also 4663/1949, file 125. In this letter the deputy officer of Arab Property office in Haifa writes to the head of the Alexandroni unit demanding the return of the property taken from the three villages.
61. IDFA 5942/1949, file 3, 11 August 1948. In a letter Walid writes to Shitrit, he wishes to be granted permission to rescue his property in Maqura “before it is presented to robbing and looting hands” (ISA, gimel 302/86). In April 1948 a committee comprising representatives from Jewish settlements was established in order to oversee the handling of Arab property (IDFA 4663/1949, file 46). At the end of August they confiscated some looted property, such as four horses found with four different people in Zikhron Ya‘aqov (IDFA 4663/1949, file 125).
62. Whereas the houses of Ijzim remained intact, most of the houses of Jaba‘ and ‘Ein Ghazal, which were closer to the main road, were systematically destroyed shortly after they were seized.
63. Walid was a friend of Bekhor Shitrit for many years, from the time Shitrit had worked with the British police force. When the Israeli state was declared Bekhor Shitrit became the minister of the minorities office, and later the minister of police.
64. ISA, gimel 1319/66, 12 December 1948.
65. ISA, gimel 1319/66.
66. See the anthology compiled by ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Kayyali (1975:235).

CHAPTER 5: RURAL PALESTINIAN WOMEN

1. More on reenactment in [Chapter 6](#).
2. Camp women were usually those who came from a rural background and resided in the refugee camps. More wealthy Palestinians, often from an urban background, also lived in camps but some were able to buy homes outside of the camps.
3. For example, Bayan Nuwayhed al-Hout worked at the Palestine Research centre in Beirut, carrying out research on the leadership and political institutions during the Mandate period (Nuwayhed al-Hout 1981) and on leaders

such as ‘Izz al-Din al-Qassam (in 1987). She later wrote a book on the events in Sabra and Shatila (in 2003).

Also prominent in the political arena was Khayriyya Qasimiyya, who published on the symbolism of the Palestinian flag (in 1970), on Jews from Arab countries (in 1971) and edited the memoirs of leaders such as ‘Awni ‘Abd al-Hadi (1974) and Fawzi al-Qawuqji (1975).

4. Rosemary Sayigh’s *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries*, published in 1979, is now considered a classic work on the revolutionary period.
5. Halbwachs published a book bearing this name in 1925. See parts of it translated into English by Lewis Coser in Halbwachs 1992.
6. Lila Abu-Lughod (2007:79) reflects on this generational gap between her father, who grew up in Palestine in the 1930s and 1940s, and herself: “There was also the strangeness of a life so different from what I knew growing up in the United States, a life I could access only obliquely through some childhood years spent in Egypt and summer vacations with relatives in Jordan.”
7. At the beginning of my research, I once arrived in some Palestinian homes in Haifa without prior notice. People welcomed me into their houses, but it was evident that for better relations of trust I should come with prior notice and a recommendation from someone that the family knows.
8. The wave of oral history studies, such as Grele and Terkel 1990 and Tonkin 1992, exposed the uniqueness of personal, nonofficial narratives. In a study of oral history and textual authority in Jordan, Shryock (1997) demonstrated the competition over a historical narrative between tribes. These oral histories are so incompatible that they pose a threat to contemporary relations if registered in writing.
9. The term “salvage anthropology” or “salvage ethnography” was developed at the turn of the nineteenth century, and applied primarily to the collection of oral and material data on the vanishing tribes of America. See the work of Robert Lowie, Franz Boas, and Alfred Kroeber.
10. Shatila refugee camp in Beirut, the site of the 1983 massacre carried out by Christian Phalanges and supported by the occupying Israeli forces, turned into a symbol of Palestinian suffering, along with the nearby Sabra camp.
11. See the work of Simon Chu and J.J. Downes (2002) in the field of cognitive psychology on how odors can trigger a flood of memories with emotional potency.
12. Hala Sakakini (1987:106) describes the luscious fruit and vegetables brought from the surrounding villages to be sold in Jerusalem. See also the memoirs of Najwa Sheikh in *UNRWA Commemorates 1948: My Father’s Lost Paradise*, available at <http://www.un.org/unrwa/48Commem/LostParadise.html>, accessed 13 September 2009.
13. See Hasan Khader in *al-Ahram*, arguing with the image of the paradise lost: http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/1998/1948/371_khdr.htm, accessed 13 September 2009.
14. Ibtisam Mara’ana’s film *Palestine Lost* (2003) is a pun on the image of Palestine as paradise lost, and also on the name of the director’s village, Faradis, meaning paradise.

15. Elias Khoury (2005) in *Bab al-Shams* approaches the issue from different angles.
16. Interview with Halima in Jenin's refugee camp (Occupied Territories) on 10 May 1997, in Arabic.
17. The Second Intifada broke out in October 2000. The Israeli army entered Jenin's refugee camp for a prolonged operation in April 2002. The Israeli soldiers advanced from one house to the other by destroying internal walls. In the course of this operation 140 houses were demolished. The death toll in this operation was fifty-two Palestinians killed (of whom twenty-two were unarmed civilians) and twenty-three Israeli soldiers. Israel was accused of carrying out a civilian massacre. Muhammad Bakri's film on these events, *Jenin Jenin* (2002), has been subject to ongoing lawsuits. For a film on Jenin's refugee camp and its children's theater see Juliano Mer Khamis's *Arna's Children* (2003).
18. According to the Abu al-Heijas' oral history their ancestor arrived from Kurdistan with Salah ad-Din (Saladin) in the eleventh century and, following the battles for the Holy Land, was given plots (*qita'*) in different regions. Prior to 1948 the Abu al-Heijas were settled in a number of villages such as ar-Ruweis, Sirin, Hadatha, Kaukab, al-Yamoun, 'Ein Hawd, and Sha'ab. The first three were depopulated in 1948.
19. This tendency to open up at the end of the interview, when the tape is about to be turned off, was a recurrent pattern. Some of the most significant stories appeared then.
20. *Kanoun al-awwal* and *kanoun ath-thani*.
21. The term *wa'er* is widely used by the people of the area. It literally means "wild" or "bush." This was the term used to describe the mountainous area of the Carmel, which is covered by natural evergreen dense forest, mostly of low oak and terebinth.
22. The interview with Salwa was conducted in Arabic and Hebrew, on 12 September 1996, at her home in Haifa.
23. There were dozens if not hundreds of such dwellings after 1948. The State of Israel did not recognize them as settlements, and did not grant permission to renovate the homes, so their inhabitants were obliged to move to other recognized villages and towns. This hamlet is one of the few that survived.
24. The small population of Arabs who managed to remain in Haifa and its vicinity after 1948 was heterogeneous – a few former inhabitants of the city with families from the surrounding demolished villages.
25. Such comments were addressed to people in the room. Some of the Palestinian refugees remained within Israel and were offered minimal compensation by the authorities, while their relatives outside of Israel were not. This was a bone of contention within families, as those in exile were generally opposed to taking any compensation while those in Israel were often in need of this money.
26. I do not use quotes as this interview was written down rather than recorded.
27. This meeting in Irbid's refugee camps took place on 1 March 1998, and was conducted in Arabic.

28. The meeting with Umm Samir and her family was primarily in Arabic, but also at times in Hebrew. It was conducted on 30 August 1996.
29. My interviews with Amina were conducted on 25 August 1997 and 3 March 1998. Both were in Arabic at her home in Irbid's refugee camp.

CHAPTER 6: UNDERGROUND MEMORIES

1. *Journal*, IX, 30 August 1856, in Broderick (ed.) 1981:43.
2. Swedenburg (1990) described how the image of the Palestinian peasant became a national symbol. It was mobilized by a leadership of middle-class background who idealized peasant practices and attachment to the land. See Davis (2007:70) for a discussion of this image in the context of village ethnographies.
3. Brad West has written on the liturgical configuration of Australian pilgrimage to Gallipoli, noting that it “provides an intimate and extremely heightened connection to history, a social effervescence which encourages a belief amongst actors that they have witnessed the holy ‘through an undarkened glass’” (2005:4; the latter phrase is borrowed from Clifford Geertz 1968:67).
4. On the bond between remembrance, taste, and smell see Ben-Ze'ev 2004.
5. Elias Khoury is a Lebanese writer who has been closely associated with the Palestinians, having worked as a researcher for the Palestine Liberation Organization and as an editor of Palestinian journal *Shu'un filastiniyya*. His book *Bab al-Shams*, published in Arabic in 1998, in Hebrew in 2002, and in English in 2005, is a bricolage of Palestinian refugee stories.
6. For instance, on the site of the village of al-Faluja, today's Kiryat Gat, there is an Intel factory. This is demonstrated in one of the large Palestinian commemorative websites, Palestine Remembered. See <http://www.palestineremembered.com/Gaza/al-Faluja/Picture1532.html>, accessed 16 September 2009. More on Palestine Remembered at the end of this chapter.
7. Jayyusi (ed.) 1992:106–7.
8. Such a desire has been voiced by other Palestinians, including Abu Mahmoud from Lubya, in a documentary made by Danish television. Certain images, such as living in a tent at the demolished village and dying on its land, take root and circulate among the refugees. Since 1949 there has been a Jewish settlement named Kerem Mahral in Ijzim.
9. Irbid is a northern Jordanian town with a large Palestinian population, which arrived there in the aftermath of 1948.
10. Most Palestinians from Jordan find it difficult to overcome the security measures needed to visit Israel as well as to afford the trip.
11. The interview with Jamal, born in 1969, was in an Irbid café on 14 July 1998. Jamal is an English teacher, and we talked English.
12. The term “internally displaced” is often used for the refugees who remained within Israel. Find expanded discussions on the internally displaced in H. Cohen 2000 and Masalha (ed.) 2005.
13. On the bond between memory and the senses see Seremetakis (ed.) 1994.
14. Our visit to ‘Ein Hawd was on 31 March 1997.

15. I am dealing here with depopulated Muslim villages and therefore relate to Muslim pilgrimage practices. However, it should be noted that many of the Palestinian refugees were Christian, especially those originally from the Galilee. Their pilgrimage is bound to surviving churches and to Christian traditions (see, for example, Magat 2000).
- Mahmoud Darwish, himself a Muslim, uses Christian symbolism in *Memory for Forgetfulness*. He describes an attempt made by a Palestinian refugee to return to his beloved hometown Haifa, known as the white dove. The man takes a boat from Lebanon and rows south. When he sees Haifa in the distance, he is captured by the Israeli coastguard, and they crucify him by nailing him to his boat (Darwish 1995:168–72).
16. Some of these holy Muslim shrines were adopted by Jews and attributed to Jewish ancestors. They are well tended by Jewish patrons, and sometimes sponsored by governmental bodies (such as the Ministry of Religion). Often, Palestinians are prevented from using them after their Judaization.
 17. This kind of activity has evolved into a more institutionalized practice in the last decade, in the form of yearly marches and occasional restoration of mosques and cemeteries (Ben-Ze'ev and Aburaiya 2004).
 18. This short television documentary, prepared by Hen Shalem, was screened in Israel on Channel Three in the early 1990s. In Majed Hamra's home in Haifa, on 30 November 1997, I met the daughter of 'Awad 'Allo, and Majed also provided me with a video copy of the documentary.
 19. Our visits to at-Tireh were on 11 April and on 30 October 1997.
 20. The Druze who lived in the villages of 'Isfiyayah and Daliyat al-Karmil had close contacts with the Jews and were not involved in fighting.
 21. From Israel's point of view, Abu Jum'ah and his mother were infiltrators. After the war, many Palestinians who tried to return home were killed when "infiltrating," while many others were granted permits to stay (H. Cohen 2010). Abu Jum'ah's father could have applied to the Israeli authorities and ask for "family unification." However, since their older children were beyond the age of those entitled to family reunification, the older children would be left outside of Israel, without a parent. Therefore the mother decided to stay in Syria. Abu Jum'ah was still heartbroken fifty years later from what he interpreted as his mother's desertion.
 22. Shortly before this book went into production, I had asked Abu Jum'ah for permission to include his photographs and use his real name. As I translated for him what I had written, he began to cry. He later asked me to allude to another important issue: Because he stayed in Israel as an "internal refugee," the State of Israel took control over his family's property. In the 1960s he was invited to a government office in Haifa, where an official offered him 20 lira, not much for the time, in exchange for signing an agreement to sell his family's property to the State of Israel. Abu Jum'ah replied that even if it meant going naked, he would not sign, to which the official responded with curses, noting that he was bound to lose this property, for the state would take it anyway. And indeed, it did.
 23. Abu Jum'ah's cousin Sa'id, whom I met in Irbid (where he found refuge), visited at-Tireh in the 1970s. While he was visiting the village he witnessed

the destruction of his home, as Jews continued to live in the Arab houses for some decades, until the houses were demolished. This was a painful event for Sa‘id, who abstained from visiting Palestine for the next twenty years.

24. Wadi Fallah is called Nahal Oren in Hebrew.
25. The year 1365 in the *hijri* calendar translates into 1945 in the Gregorian calendar.
26. ‘Issa was Nimr’s eldest son; hence Nimr was nicknamed Abu ‘Issa.
27. There are many accounts of such visits, and often they have been written and filmed. See Sahera Dirbas’s film *Strangers in my Home* (2007). See, for example, a description of such an encounter with the police during a Palestinian visit to the village of Lifta near Jerusalem in Yahya 1999: 53–4.
28. Ra‘anan Alexandrowicz (director), Ra‘ed Andoni (producer), *The Inner Tour* (2002).
29. Meeting with Abu Yusri in his busy restaurant in central Irbid, 15 and 16 July 1998.
30. This practice is a known phenomenon. Coleman and Elsner write: “Some souvenir boxes actually contain material from or even fragments of the pilgrimage site in the form of natural matter to be found there such as water, earth and bits of wood or stone” (1995:100). For examples relating to uprooted Greek Cypriots see Lisa Dikomitis on http://www.dur.ac.uk/anthropology.journal/vol12/iss1/dikomitis/daj12_1_dikomitis.html, accessed 6 February 2009. Winter (1995:65) mentions Italian soldiers in World War I who carried in their pockets soil from a chapel of pilgrimage.
31. The story of these jars was told to me by Mohammad Abu Rashed during an interview on 24 July 1998.
32. In Arabic there are two registers of language: colloquial (*‘āmmiyeh*) and literary (*fusha*). The usage of literary Arabic here signifies an intention to elevate the text.
33. Sahera Dirbas and I have kept in touch since our first meeting in 1996.
34. He noted that he had used only half of the soil. He had saved the rest for himself. Dikomitis discusses such magical usage of remnants among uprooted Greek Cypriots (see reference in note 30): “Sacred soil” is taken back to the graves of the dead who are distant from the place of origin.
35. My first visit to Abu Mahmoud was on 8 July 1998. My next visit was on 4 August 1998, when we were joined by his daughter Sawsan.
36. Find the text on <http://www.palestineremembered.com/Haifa/al-Tira/MessageBoard176.html>. Posted by Mouttaz Ammoura on 26 June 2001. The text was originally posted in English, and I have made some minor editorial corrections. Note that Ammoura is referring to Nimr Abu Rashed’s home, which Abu Jum‘ah also visited.
37. Al-As‘ad’s novel was originally published in Arabic in 1990. For lack of an Arabic edition, I draw the quotes here from the Hebrew translation (2005).
38. Interview conducted on 7 November 1996 in Irbid, in Arabic.

CHAPTER 7: PALMACH FIGHTERS

1. It should be emphasized that the Palmach consisted of *hakhsharot* – training groups – as well as those who joined as individuals (*bodedim*), who were not part of the training groups.
2. When the 1948 clashes began there were 2,100 members of the Palmach, both men and women, along with 1,000 reserve soldiers and 1,800 British-trained guards (*norrim*). Due to accelerated recruitment the number of Palmach soldiers reached 6,000 during the latter part of the war.
3. On the rise and decline of the Israeli 1948 generation see Ben-Ze'ev and Lomsky-Feder 2009.
4. Interview with Gad at his home, 5 June 2004, in Hebrew.
5. Although some instances whereby Palestinian Arabs did fight were famous among the Palmach, such as in the case of al-Qastal and Zir'in.
6. Walid al-Khalidi ([ed.] 1992) writes that over sixty men were massacred.
7. One of those killed was shot by a hunter's rifle. Some of the shooting came from the Jordanian Legion force that was camped outside the village. It seems from the Palmachniks' description as well as the account in *Sefer ha-palmah* that the village was unprepared for the raid and the defense posts were empty.
8. The omission here is due to the bad quality of the recording.
9. Interview with Baruch at his home, 28 December 2004, in Hebrew.
10. Interview with Yoskeh at his home, October 2003 (I failed to note the date on the transcribed interview), in Hebrew.
11. Interview with Assaf at his home, 26 November 2003, in Hebrew.
12. What was said by the company officer in Hebrew was in slang and is difficult to translate. If translated literally it is something like: "Why are you boggling his brain, stop mumbling bullshit."
13. Fifth interview with Giora at his home. September 2003, in Hebrew.
14. First interview with Giora at his home, 11 April 2003, in Hebrew.
15. Not all members of Hakhsharat Rishonim remained in the same military framework throughout 1948, as there were posting changes. Some soldiers were sent on courses and were later posted to other units, while some were killed and replaced. Also, some members who were not originally from the *hakhsharah* were counted among its dead, such as an officer who was attached to them. Therefore, the ratio of deaths is not clear cut.
16. Interview with Baruch at his home, 28 December 2004, in Hebrew.
17. Middle East Centre Archive, Oxford, GB165–0402, p. 6.
18. Interview with Assaf at his home, 26 November 2003, in Hebrew.
19. Avnery was later to become a prominent journalist, a publisher, and a leftist politician and activist. He wrote that being twenty-five, and a bit of an intellectual, he was well read, especially in political theory and war history, mentioning among the books that influenced him those of Machiavelli, Marx, Lenin, Gandhi, Stalin, and Hitler (see his "The other side of the coin" 1950:73).
20. For an extended discussion on Khirbat Hiz'ah see Shapira 2007.
21. The album was prepared following the request of the Association of the Palmach Veterans (Amutat Dor ha-Palmach) (www.palmach.org.il).

Nowadays their large archive is adjacent to the Palmach museum, under the auspices of the Israel Ministry of Defense (see <http://www.mod.gov.il/pages/heritage/palmach.asp>), accessed 8 February 2009.

22. The lyrics of the Palmach anthem were written by Zerubavel Gil'ad and the melody by David Zehavi. The first verse was inscribed on the Palmach service card.

מִסְבֵּב יֹום הַסָּעֵר

אֶיךְ רָאשָׁנוּ לֹא יִשָּׂח

לְפָקוֹדָה –

אָנוּ, אָנוּ הַפְּלִמְחָה

מִסְבֵּב נִדְמָה הַסָּעֵר

וְרָאשָׁנוּ שָׁח

כָּבֵר מָזֵן שְׁכָהָנוּ

אֶת חֲלוֹם תְּשַׁחַת

CHAPTER 8: THE PALMACH WOMEN

1. The number of women in the Palmach reached 1,227 in 1948. See www.palmach.org.il, accessed 4 July 2010.
2. Soviet culture and ideology also dominated texts and songs used in the Palmach.
3. Among Palestinian Arabs the young Jewish women, especially those drafted into the army, were perceived as promiscuous. See, for example, Ibrahim Fawal's (1998) novel describing a Hagannah unit arriving in Ramallah in the 1940s, with its young women in shorts attracting Arab attention.
4. Through the years “the Palmach tents” was a common term to describe the camping, outdoor atmosphere. There is a chapter given this title in the monumental “Book of the Palmach.” See Gil'ad 1955:480–505.
5. The early phase of the Zionist right wing, known as Jabotinsky's revisionist movement, believed in a reconsideration of the mainstream's basic assumptions, and preferred political activism to what they perceived as Haim Weizmann's moderate negotiations.
6. Interview with Herzlia in her home, 12 September 2005, in Hebrew.
7. See www.palmach.org.il.
8. This figure is difficult to verify for two reasons. The main one is that it is a sensitive matter to divide administration from fighting forces in the Palmach (because everyone wants to be counted as a fighter). The second reason is that there was a dramatic expansion of the Palmach toward the summer of 1948. It is the assumption of some of the fighters that I interviewed that during the early months of the war, until June 1948, the rate of death among male fighters was roughly one in three.
9. Ben-Gurion said at the time that different groups within the *yishuv* could claim a right to fame according to the number of their members in cemeteries. See the testimony of Moshe Zvi Neriya in Raz, S. (ed.) 1967. Shalom Karniel: *hayav vmishnato* (Sholom Karniel: his life and teaching). Tel Aviv: Bnei Akira, p. 10.

10. The word *jeda* is originally Arabic, but the plural added here is the Hebrew feminine plural.
11. Ben-Yehudah's trilogy will be discussed further on.
12. The usage of the term *haverah*, the Hebrew parallel to comrade, suggests a reference to the socialist terminology.
13. Ada Sireni is known not merely for her own role in the Palmach, but also as the wife of Encio Sireni, a Hebrew parachutist who landed with a group of Hagannah members in Europe in 1944. The group was caught by the Nazis and executed.
14. The first verse of the Palmach anthem is quoted at the end of the previous chapter.
15. Interview with Rina Dotan, conducted at her home, 6 September 2006, in Hebrew.
16. Feldman is a professor of Hebrew culture and education at New York University.
17. Feldman, too, relates to this declaration. Find her translation and discussion in Feldman 2000:145–6.
18. This information was supplied by one of the key informants of Hakhsharat Rishonim. So far I have not found a written reference to this decision.
19. Kosh's use of the term "a queen within the house" may be a derivation from the Jewish Mishna or of the French "une chatelaine dans son chateau" – mistress of her castle.
20. Interview with Ruti at her home, 16 March 2006, in Hebrew.
21. Interview with Lea at her home, 21 August 2005, in Hebrew.
22. Interview with Me'ira at her home, 13 December 2005, in Hebrew.
23. The foul-up in Latroun refers to the deaths of over seventy soldiers during the attempt to conquer the Jordanian army stronghold. The citation of the incident here is linked to the Palmach's criticism of the event. See A. Shapira's (1994) article on the historiography of the Latroun battles.
24. For a longer discussion of the events in Lydda, written by Israeli historians, see Kadish, Sela, and Golan 2000.
25. The previous chapter supplies some insight into the male soldiers' experience of this expulsion.
26. Interview with Herzlia at her home, 12 September 2005, in Hebrew.
27. Interview with Pnina at her home, 6 September 2005, in Hebrew.
28. Interview with Rivka'leh at her home, December 2005 (I failed to write the exact date), in Hebrew.
29. Hanoch Bartov (2003), one of the leading members of the 1948 generation writers, notes that after some months during the 1948 fighting, and having lost many friends, he and his wife decided to stop attending funerals; it was too much for them.
30. For a study of the military unit that announces the deaths of soldiers to their families in Israel see Vinitzky-Seroussi and Ben-Ari 2000.
31. Interview with Lea at her home, 21 August 2005, in Hebrew.
32. For a literary example see Puchu (Yisrael Visler) 1973.
33. This is not a direct quote but a paraphrase.
34. Interview with Ruti at her home, 16 March 2006, in Hebrew.

35. The Arab Section was a Palmach unit of Arabic speakers.
36. The *hakhsharot* were first sent to an existing kibbutz, called the mother kibbutz, where they went through an apprenticeship period, before establishing their own kibbutz.

CHAPTER 9: CARRYING OUT THE MANDATE

1. GB165–0392. References to the policemen’s interviews follow the catalogue number used at the Middle East Centre Archive in Oxford, where they are kept.
2. This volume found its way to the Israel State Archive in Jerusalem.
3. The interviews range between 6,000 and 20,000 words each. For this chapter I used the transcribed text (rather than the oral recording), and the quotations are borrowed without any alteration. The project was the initiative of Eugene Rogan, head of the Middle East Centre at St. Antony’s, and Debbie Usher, head archivist of the Middle East Centre Archive (MECA). Some of the interviews were conducted by Prof. Rogan, others by the centre’s MA students. Most of the interviews took place in the homes of the ex-policemen (often in the presence of their wives), and a few were conducted at the Middle East Centre itself.
4. See the Palestine Police Old Comrades Association website on: <http://www.wyevalley.worldonline.co.uk/>, accessed 25 September 2009.
5. The questions that the interviewers addressed followed the ex-policemen’s social background, their decision to join the police force, their expectations, their careers and activities within the police, their understanding of its local communities, and the circumstances of their departure.
6. In fact, there was armed Arab resistance against the British prior to 1936, headed by Sheikh ‘Izz al-Din al-Qassam. Al-Qassam was born in Syria, educated at Cairo’s al-Azhar, and escaped Syria in the 1920s after being sentenced to death for organizing resistance against the French. He arrived in Palestine and served as a preacher at Haifa’s al-Istiqlal Mosque. He secretly organized and trained cells to fight British rule and the Jewish settlers, and was killed in an armed encounter with the British police in November 1935 near the village of Ya‘bad. It is said that his martyrdom was one of the incidents that helped inspire the Arab Revolt (Swedenburg 1995:2).
7. While the rural landscape carried the imprint of the Tegarts, the cities and towns had older police stations, often in their midst. For instance, in West Jerusalem the police headquarters and prison were at the Russian compound, within a short distance of the other important administrative buildings. In Jerusalem’s old city, the *kishle* police station was inside the Jaffa Gate. Both buildings have been serving the Israeli Police from 1948 until today (2010).
8. My choice throughout this chapter is to adopt British terminology, and especially the language that was used by the policemen themselves.
9. Etzel is the acronym of the Hebrew Irgun Tzva’i Le’umi (“national military organization”) and the Stern Gang, called after its founder, Yair Stern, known in Hebrew as Lehi, acronym for Lohamei Herut Yisrael (“fighters for the freedom of Israel”).

10. MECA GB165–0404.
11. The transcriber indicates that he may have gotten the name Alexandrou wrong.
12. MECA GB165–0396.
13. MECA GB 165–0393. For a discussion of the creation of the Palestine Police Mobile Force in 1944 see Sinclair 2006a:111.
14. Despite the variety, all the policemen were white. They noted that segregation was enforced on the voyage to Palestine with army units from the colonies.
15. The butler's son was abandoned by his parents at the age of six and grew up in an orphanage.
16. MECA GB165–0390.
17. MECA GB165–0386.
18. Shortly afterward a new arrangement permitted those doing national service to join the Palestine Police. Thus, the force grew to 9,000 men (Horne 1982:311).
19. The largest auxiliary force was the government-financed and uniformed Jewish Settlement Police, responsible for protecting Jewish settlements. It numbered 12,800, grouped in eight companies, each under a British police inspector (Charters 1989:90).
20. MECA GB165–0391.
21. MECA GB165–0396.
22. MECA GB165–0394.
23. Green, in MECA GB165–0404.
24. *Ibid.*
25. MECA GB165–0390.
26. MECA GB165–0413.
27. MECA 165–0412.
28. MECA GB166–0392.
29. The indirectly suggests a comparison between Britain and the Roman Empire.
30. MECA GB165–0404.
31. MECA GB165–0396.
32. MECA GB165–0396.
33. MECA GB165–0403.
34. MECA GB165–0386.
35. In the transcription it says “old little things you were eating,” but I assume that “odd” was mistakenly transcribed as “old.”
36. MECA GB165–0392.
37. MECA GB165–0402.
38. MECA GB165–0402.
39. Many of these couples found it easier to leave Palestine when the Mandate ended rather than staying in Israel. Among the women who married British armed personnel were women from veteran Zionist families such as the sister of Ezer Weizman (who was later to become Israel's president) and the sister of Rehav'am Ze'evi (who was later a right-wing MP and government minister).
40. MECA GB165–0403.

41. MECA GB165–0404.
42. Gerald Green notes that the doctor, Sami Huri [transcription *sic*] of Haifa, fled Haifa along with most of its Arab population in 1948. He qualified as a physician in Scotland and America, and became a famous neurosurgeon in Jordan. See Sami Khouri's memoirs on the internet: <http://www.jerusalemites.org/memoirs/men/6.htm>, accessed 26 September 2009.
43. MECA GB165–0389.
44. MECA GB165–0394.
45. MECA GB165–0392.
46. MECA GB165–0396.
47. MECA GB165–0392.
48. MECA GB165–0386.
49. MECA GB165–0390.
50. MECA GB165–0412.
51. MECA GB165–0390.
52. See on the website <http://www.wyevalley.worldonline.co.uk/whatis.htm>, accessed 26 September 2009.
53. MECA GB165–0396.
54. Duchesne's figures are not accurate. As the last statistics were published in 1945 there are no final figures for 1948, but the estimate is 1.2–1.3 million for the Arab population and 620,000–650,000 for the Jewish population (Morris 2001:191; Kimmerling and Migdal 2003:150). According to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (www.cbs.gov.il) at the end of 2005 Israel's population numbered almost 7 million people, consisting of 5,313,800 Jews, 1,377,100 Arabs, and 299,800 others.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

1. Although the events of 1947 may also have seemed sporadic to the *yishuv*, in January 1948 Ben-Gurion gave a speech in which he defined the events as a war. One may assume that he envisioned and planned a war no less than simply describing it.
2. A Palestinian family from Irbid had asked me to track down their land ownership documents from the Israeli Land Authority (Minhal Mekarke‘ei Yisrael). After a rather thorough search I located the document in a Haifa office, but I was not permitted to make a photocopy. Another form of concealment is evident in the censoring of documents kept in the Israeli army's archives. See the Association for Civil Rights in Israel's appeal to the Supreme Court on that matter: <http://www.acri.org.il/eng/Story.aspx?id=565>, accessed 3 December 2009. Often, there are missing words in documents released to the public. At the IDF archive the word "expulsion" (when relating to the 1948 Arabs) and its derivatives were (and possibly still are) expunged.

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