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Invention, Memory, and Place

Edward W. Said

Over the past decade, there has been a burgeoning interest in two overlapping areas of the humanities and social sciences: memory and geography or, more specifically, the study of human space. Both of them have spawned an extraordinary amount of interesting work, work that has in effect created new fields of study and inquiry. The concern with memory, for example, has branched out to include such increasingly prevalent forms of writing as personal memoirs and autobiography, which nearly every fiction writer of note has attempted, to say nothing of the outpourings of academics, scientists, public figures, and so forth. The national fixation on recollection, confession, and witness has run the whole gamut from public confession—as in the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal—to various studies of the meaning of collective memory, extended reflection and analyses of instances of it, plus numerous chronicles embodying it. I shall have more to say about that later. In addition, and somewhat on the margins, has been a serious, sometimes bitter inquiry into the authenticity of certain memories, as well as, at the other, calmer end of the spectrum, a remarkable academic analysis of the role of invention in such matters as tradition and collective historical experience.

Some examples of intense and even anguished controversy are the following: Was Anne Frank's diary really hers, or was it so altered by publishers, members of her family, or others in its published form so as to conceal the disturbances in her domestic life? In Europe there has been a great and often acerbic debate over the meaning of the Holocaust, with a whole range of opinions as to what happened, why it happened, and

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what it tells us about the nature of Germany, France, and several other involved countries. The celebrated French classicist Pierre Vidal-Naquet wrote a powerful book some years back called *Assassins of Memory* about French deniers of the Holocaust, and more recently the Papon trial in Bordeaux raised uncomfortable questions related not just to memories of the Occupation but the centrality of French collaborators with the Nazis and what it said about French selective memories of the Vichy regime. In Germany of course debate on the testimonials of the death camps and their philosophical as well as political meaning periodically receives new infusions of controversy, fuelled most recently by the publication of the German translation of Daniel Goldhagen's book *Hitler's Willing Executioners*. In the United States consider the anger provoked by representatives of the official culture and members of the government by the Smithsonian Institution—seen correctly as a sort of embodiment of official memory in the country—in its unsuccessful attempts to mount exhibitions, one about the *Enola Gay* and another on the African American experience. Earlier there was a furor over an impressive exhibition at the National Gallery of American Art, *America as West*, which set out to contrast representations of the land, the Indian natives, and the conditions of life in the Western U.S. during the 1860s with the way the land was being forcibly settled and the Indians destroyed, and the transformation of a once peaceful rural environment into a predatory urban one. Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska decried the whole thing as an attack on America even though he avowed that he himself had not seen the exhibit. In any event these controversies raise the question not only of what is remembered but how and in what form. It is an issue about the very fraught nature of representation, not just about content.

Memory and its representations touch very significantly upon questions of identity, of nationalism, of power and authority. Far from being a neutral exercise in facts and basic truths, the study of history, which of course is the underpinning of memory, both in school and university, is to some considerable extent a nationalist effort premised on the need to construct a desirable loyalty to and insider's understanding of one's country, tradition, and faith. As is well known, there's been a robust debate in the U.S. on the matter of national standards in history, in which issues such as whether George Washington or Abraham Lincoln should be allowed more time than they have at present in history curricula have generated very angry arguments. Similarly, as Howard Zinn has suggested in his work, there has been skepticism expressed as to why the study of American history should glorify only the big deeds of big people

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and neglect to mention what happened to the small ones, the people who built railroads, worked the farms, sweated as laborers in the enormous industrial companies that lie at the heart of this country's immense wealth and power. (He redresses this imbalance in his impressive *People's History of the United States*, which has already sold well over half a million copies.)¹ In a recent article he goes even further. Having been asked to participate in a symposium on the Boston Massacre, Zinn reflected to himself that he wanted

to discuss other massacres because it seemed to me that concentrating attention on the Boston Massacre would be a painless exercise in patriotic fervor. There is no surer way to obscure the deep divisions of race and class in American history than by uniting us in support of the American Revolution and all its symbols (like Paul Revere's stark etching of the soldiers shooting into the crowd).

I suggested to the people assembled at Faneuil Hall (the wall around us crowded with portraits of the Founding Fathers and the nation's military heroes) that there were other massacres, forgotten or dimly remembered, that deserved to be recalled. These ignored episodes could tell us much about racial hysteria and class struggle, about shameful moments in our continental and overseas expansion, so that we can see ourselves more clearly, more honestly.²

These remarks immediately transport us to the vexed issue of nationalism and national identity, of how memories of the past are shaped in accordance with a certain notion of what "we" or, for that matter, "they" really are. National identity always involves narratives—of the nation's past, its founding fathers and documents, seminal events, and so on. But these narratives are never undisputed or merely a matter of the neutral recital of facts. In the United States, for example, 1492 was celebrated very differently by people who saw themselves as victims of Columbus's advent—people of color, minorities, members of the working class, people, in a word, who claimed they had a different collective memory of what in most schools was celebrated as a triumph of advancement and the collective march forward of humanity. Because the world has shrunk—for example, communications have been speeded up fantastically—and people find themselves undergoing the most rapid social transformations in history, ours has become an era of a search for roots, of people trying to discover in the collective memory of their race, religion, community, and family a past that is entirely their own, secure from the ravages of history and a turbulent time. But this too has provoked very sharp debate and even bloodshed. In the Islamic world, how one reads the orthodox tradition (*sunnah*) is being debated, as are the questions of

1. See Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York, 1980).

2. Zinn, "The Massacres of History," *The Progressive* 62 (Aug. 1998): 17.

how one interprets stories about the Prophet, which are, basically, memories reconstructed by disciples and friends, and how one can derive an image of contemporary Islamic codes of behavior and law that is consonant and in accordance with those precious, early, in fact aboriginal, memories. Similar questions arise in interpretations of the Christian Gospels, as well as the Judaic prophetic books; these questions have a direct impact on matters of community and politics in the present. Some of this lies behind the much-touted controversy over family values that have been vaunted by political candidates, moral philosophers, and public scolds.

To this whole matter of memory as a social, political, and historical enterprise has been added a complication, to which I referred above, namely, the role of invention. In 1983 two distinguished British historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger edited a book of essays by various other well-known historians entitled *The Invention of Tradition*.³ I won't try to summarize the ideas in this subtle and rich collection except to say that what was being studied was the way rulers—social and political authorities in the period since about 1850—set about creating such supposedly age-old rituals and objects as the Scottish kilt or, in India, the *darbar*, thereby providing a false, that is, invented memory of the past as a way of creating a new sense of identity for ruler and ruled. In India, for example, the *darbar*—whose status as “tradition” was a total fiction—was said to be a great ceremonial pageant designed to be implanted in the Indian memory though it served the British colonial authorities to compel Indians to believe in the age-old history of British imperial rule. “In Africa, too,” writes Ranger, “whites drew on invented tradition in order to derive the authority and confidence that allowed them to act as agents of change. Moreover, insofar as they were consciously applied to Africans, the invented traditions [such as compelling Africans to work as laborers on European gentlemen's farms] of nineteenth-century Europe were seen precisely as agents of ‘modernization.’”⁴ In modern France, according to Hobsbawm, the demise of Napoleon III's empire and the emergence of a politicized working class as evidenced in the Paris Commune convinced the “moderate Republican bourgeoisie” that only it could head off the dangers of revolution by producing a new kind of citizen, “turning peasants into Frenchmen . . . [and] all Frenchmen into good Republicans.” Thus the French revolution was institutionalized in education by developing “a secular equivalent of the church . . . imbued with revolutionary and republican principles and content.” In addition, there was “the invention of public ceremonies. The most important of these, Bastille Day, can be exactly dated in 1880.” Thirdly, there “was the mass production of public monuments,” of two main kinds—images of the Republic itself

3. See *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge, 1983).

4. Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa,” in *ibid.*, p. 220.

such as Marianne—and images of the “bearded civilian figures of whoever local patriotism chose to regard as its notables.”⁵

In other words, the invention of tradition was a practice very much used by authorities as an instrument of rule in mass societies when the bonds of small social units like village and family were dissolving and authorities needed to find other ways of connecting a large number of people to each other. The invention of tradition is a method for using collective memory selectively by manipulating certain bits of the national past, suppressing others, elevating still others in an entirely functional way. Thus memory is not necessarily authentic, but rather useful. The Israeli journalist Tom Segev shows in his book *The Seventh Million* that the Holocaust was consciously used by the Israeli government as a way of consolidating Israeli national identity after years of not paying much attention to it.⁶ Similarly, historian Peter Novick, in a recently published study of the image of the Holocaust amongst American Jews, shows that before the 1967 war and the Israeli victory against the Arab states, American Jews paid very little attention to that appallingly horrible episode (and in fact tried consciously to deemphasize it as a way of avoiding anti-Semitism).⁷ It is a long way from those early attitudes to the construction of the Holocaust Museum in Washington. Similarly the controversy surrounding the memories of the Armenian genocide is fuelled by the Turkish government’s denial of its role.

My point in citing all these cases is to underline the extent to which the art of memory for the modern world is both for historians as well as ordinary citizens and institutions very much something to be used, misused, and exploited, rather than something that sits inertly there for each person to possess and contain. Thus the study and concern with memory or a specifically desirable and recoverable past is a specially freighted late twentieth-century phenomenon that has arisen at a time of bewildering change, of unimaginably large and diffuse mass societies, competing nationalisms, and, most important perhaps, the decreasing efficacy of religious, familial, and dynastic bonds. People now look to this refashioned memory, especially in its collective forms, to give themselves a coherent identity, a national narrative, a place in the world, though, as I have indicated, the processes of memory are frequently, if not always, manipulated and intervened in for sometimes urgent purposes in the present. It’s interesting to contrast this more modern and somehow loosely malleable form of memory with the codified, rigorous art of memory in classical antiquity described by Frances Yates.⁸ Memory for Cicero was something organized and structured. If you wanted to remember something for a

5. Hobsbawm, “Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870–1914,” pp. 271, 272.

6. See Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*, trans. Haim Watzman (New York, 1993).

7. See Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York, 1999), pp. 146–203.

8. See Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago, 1966).

speech you were about to give, you imagined a building with all sorts of rooms and corners, and in your mind's eye you subdivided the parts of the memory you wished to recall and placed them in various sections of the building; as you spoke you walked through the building in your head, so to speak, noting the places and the objects and phrases as you went along. That way order was maintained in the memory. The modern art of memory is much more subject to inventive reordering and redefining than that.

As for geography, or geography as I want to use the word, as a socially constructed and maintained sense of place, a great deal of attention has been paid by modern scholars and critics to the extraordinary constitutive role of space in human affairs. Consider, as an easy instance, the word *globalization*, which is an indispensable concept for modern economics. It is a spatial, geographical designation signifying the global reach of a powerful economic system. Think of geographical designations like Auschwitz, think of what power and resonance they have, over and above a particularly specifiable moment in history or a geographical locale like Poland or France. The same applies to Jerusalem, a city, an idea, an entire history, and of course a specifiable geographical locale often typified by a photograph of the Dome of the Rock, the city walls, and the surrounding houses seen from the Mount of Olives; it too is overdetermined when it comes to memory, as well as all sorts of invented histories and traditions, all of them emanating from it, but most of them in conflict with each other. This conflict is intensified by Jerusalem's mythological—as opposed to actual geographical—location, in which landscape, buildings, streets, and the like are overlain and, I would say, even covered entirely with symbolic associations totally obscuring the existential reality of what as a city and real place Jerusalem is. The same can be said for Palestine, whose landscape functions in the memories of Jews, Muslims, and Christians entirely differently. One of the strangest things for me to grasp is the powerful hold the locale must have had on European crusaders despite their enormous distance from the country. Scenes of the crucifixion and nativity, for instance, appear in European Renaissance paintings as taking place in a sort of denatured Palestine, since none of the artists had ever seen the place. An idealized landscape gradually took shape that sustained the European imagination for hundreds of years. That Bernard of Clairvaux standing in a church in Vézelay, in the heart of Burgundy, could announce a crusade to reclaim Palestine and the holy places from the Muslims never fails to astound me, and that after hundreds of years of living in Europe Zionist Jews could still feel that Palestine had stood still in time and was theirs, again despite millennia of history and the presence of actual inhabitants. This too is also an indication of how geography can be manipulated, invented, characterized quite apart from a site's merely physical reality.

Simon Schama's book *Landscape and Memory* chronicles the to-ing and fro-ing between specific geographical locales and the human imagination. Surely the most compelling aspect of Schama's book is that he shows in dozens of different ways that forests, villages, mountains, and rivers are never coterminous with some stable reality out there that identifies and gives them permanence. On the contrary, as in the example he gives of his family's original village in Lithuania, most of its traces disappeared; he finds instead through the poetry of Adam Mickiewicz how Jews and Poles "were snarled up. . . . in each other's fate" despite his contemporaries' belief that they were "necessarily alien to each other." Geography stimulates not only memory but dreams and fantasies, poetry and painting, philosophy (as in Heidegger's *Holzwege*), fiction (think of Walter Scott's Highland novels), and music (as in Sibelius's *Finlandia* or Copland's *Appalachian Spring*).⁹

But what specially interests me is the hold of both memory and geography on the desire for conquest and domination. Two of my books, *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism*, are based not only on the notion of what I call imaginative geography—the invention and construction of a geographical space called the Orient, for instance, with scant attention paid to the actuality of the geography and its inhabitants—but also on the mapping, conquest, and annexation of territory both in what Conrad called the dark places of the earth and in its most densely inhabited and lived-in places, like India or Palestine. The great voyages of geographical discovery from da Gama to Captain Cook were motivated by curiosity and scientific fervor, but also by a spirit of domination, which becomes immediately evident when white men land in some distant and unknown place and the natives rebel against them. In the modern era Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is the essential parable of how geography and conquest go together, providing an almost eerie prefiguration of historical figures like Clive and Hastings in India, or scientific adventurers and explorers like Murchison in Africa decades and decades later. These experiences enable complicated memories for natives and (in the Indian case) Britishers alike; a similar dialectic of memory over territory animates the relationship of French and Algerian accounts of the 130 years of French rule in North Africa. We should never have left or given up India or Algeria, say some, using strange atavistic sentiments like the Raj revival—a spate of TV shows and films like *The Jewel in the Crown*, *A Passage to India*, *Gandhi*, and the fashion of wearing safari suits, helmets, desert boots—as a way of periodically provoking nostalgia for the good old days of British supremacy in Asia and Africa, whereas most Indians and Algerians would likely say that their liberation came as a result of being able after years of nationalist struggle to take hold of their own affairs, reestablish their

9. Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York, 1995), p. 30.

identity, culture, and language, and, above all, reappropriate their territory from the colonial masters. Hence, to some extent, we witness the remarkable emergence of an Anglo-Indian literature by Anita Desai, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, and many others, reexcavating and recharting the past from a postcolonial point of view, thereby erecting a new postimperial space.

It is easy to see the fact of displacement in the colonial experience, which at bottom is the replacement of one geographical sovereignty, an imperialist one, by another, native force. More subtle and complex is the unending cultural struggle over territory, which necessarily involves overlapping memories, narratives, and physical structures. No one has studied this more powerfully than the late Raymond Williams in his classic book, *The Country and the City*. What he shows is that literary and cultural forms such as the ode, the political pamphlet, and different kinds of novels derive some of their aesthetic rationale from changes taking place in the geography or landscape as the result of a social contest. Let me explain this more concretely. The mid-seventeenth- to eighteenth-century genre of the country-house poem, with its emphasis on the house's calm stateliness and classical proportions—"Heaven's Centre, Nature's Lap"—is not the same thing in Marvell, Ben Jonson, and, later, in Pope. Jonson draws attention to the way the house was won from disturbing, encroaching peasant populations; Marvell in a more complicated way understands the country house as the result of a union between money, property, and politics; in Pope the house has become a sort of moral center; and later in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* it is the very embodiment of all that is benign and actively good in England. Property in all four writers is being consolidated; what we watch is the gradual triumph of a social dialectic celebrating the virtues and necessities of a propertied class, which itself seems to stand for the nation at its best. In each case the writer remembers the past in his or her own way, seeing images that typify that past, preserving one past, sweeping away others. Later writers, say, urban novelists like Dickens and Thackeray, will look back to this period as a sort of rural paradise from which England has fallen; the beauties of the field are replaced by the grimy, dark, sooty, industrial city. Both the retrospective image and the contemporary one, says Williams, are historical constructs, myths of the social geography fashioned in different periods by different classes, different interests, different ideas about the national identity, the polity, the country as a whole, none of it without actual struggle and rhetorical dispute.¹⁰

All of what I have been discussing here—the interplay between geography, memory, and invention, in the sense that invention must occur if there is recollection—is particularly relevant to a twentieth-century example, that of Palestine, which instances an extraordinarily rich and in-

10. See Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London, 1973).

tense conflict of at least two memories, two sorts of historical invention, two sorts of geographical imagination. I want to argue that we can go behind the headlines and the repetitively reductive media accounts of the Middle East conflict and discern there a much more interesting and subtle conflict than what is customarily talked about. Only by understanding that special mix of geography generally and landscape in particular with historical memory and, as I said, an arresting form of invention can we begin to grasp the persistence of conflict and the difficulty of resolving it, a difficulty that is far too complex and grand than the current peace process could possibly envisage, let alone resolve.

Let us juxtapose some relevant dates and events with each other. For Palestinians 1948 is remembered as the year of the *nakba*, or catastrophe, when 750,000 of us who were living there—two-thirds of the population—were driven out, our property taken, hundreds of villages destroyed, an entire society obliterated. For Israelis and many Jews throughout the world 1998 was the fiftieth anniversary of Israel's independence and establishment, a miraculous story of recovery after the Holocaust, of democracy, of making the desert bloom, and so on. Thus, two totally different characterizations of a recollected event have been constructed. What has long struck me about this radical irreconcilability at the origin of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is that it is routinely excluded from considerations of related subjects concerning ethnic or collective memory, geographical analysis, and political reflection. This is most evident in studies of the German catastrophe as well as of ethnic conflicts in former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Ireland, Sri Lanka, South Africa, and elsewhere.

Take Germany first. There is little doubt that it is important to prevent assassins of memory from denying or minimizing the Holocaust; but it is also important not to forget to show the link, well-established in contemporary Jewish consciousness, between the Holocaust and the founding of Israel as a haven for Jews. That this link also meant the disestablishing of the Palestinians from their homes and farms is practically never stated, although for Palestinians it increases the agony of their plight: why, they ask, are we made to pay for what happened to the Jews in Europe by what was in effect a Western Christian genocide? The question never emerges out of the debate in or about Germany, even though it is directly entailed by such facts as the enormous amount of money paid by Germany to Israel in Holocaust reparations and has surfaced again in the claims against Swiss banks. I have no hesitation in saying, yes, Germany and Switzerland ought to pay, but that also means that Palestinians over the past fifty years whose own losses are staggering deserve a hearing, too, especially since to us these payments to Israel go to consolidate Israel's hold not only on what we lost in 1948 but on the territories occupied in 1967. The Palestinians have never received even the slightest official acknowledgement of the massive injustice that was done to them, much less the possibility of staking material claims against Israel

for the property taken, the people killed, the houses demolished, the water taken, the prisoners held, and so forth. There is also the complex, almost equally dense and far-reaching matter of Britain's responsibility. What strikes me as more significant is the refusal in the Israeli official narrative to take account of the state's complicity in and responsibility for the Palestinian dispossession. For years and years an assiduous campaign to maintain a frozen version of Israel's heroic narrative of repatriation and justice obliterated any possibility of a Palestinian narrative, in large part because certain key components of the Israeli story stressed certain geographical characteristics of Palestine itself. Take the key notion of liberation: so strong was the story of Jewish independence and reemergence after the Holocaust that it became virtually impossible to ask the question, Liberation and independence from whom? If the question was asked it was always answered as liberation from British imperialism. Or, as the story got elaborated, it was defense against invading Arab armies that wanted to crush the young state. The Palestinians thus faded into the encircling and menacing obscurity of "the Arabs," the fact that they were actual residents occluded and simultaneously denied.

Perhaps the greatest battle Palestinians have waged as a people has been over the right to a remembered presence and, with that presence, the right to possess and reclaim a collective historical reality, at least since the Zionist movement began its encroachments on the land. A similar battle has been fought by all colonized peoples whose past and present were dominated by outside powers who had first conquered the land and then rewrote history so as to appear in that history as the true owners of that land. Every independent state that emerged after the dismantling of the classical empires in the post-World War Two years felt it necessary to narrate its own history, as much as possible free of the biases and misrepresentations of that history by British, French, Portuguese, Dutch, or other colonial historians.

Yet the fate of Palestinian history has been a sad one, since not only was independence not gained, but there was little collective understanding of the importance of constructing a collective history as a part of trying to gain independence. To become a nation in the formal sense of the word, a people must make itself into something more than a collection of tribes, or political organizations of the kind that since the 1967 war Palestinians have created and supported. With a competitor as formidable as the Zionist movement, the effort to rewrite the history of Palestine so as to exclude the land's peoples had a disastrous effect on the quest for Palestinian self-determination. What we never understood was the power of a narrative history to mobilize people around a common goal. In the case of Israel, the narrative's main point was that Zionism's goal was to restore, reestablish, repatriate, and reconnect a people with its original homeland. It was the genius of Herzl and Weizmann to draft thinkers like Einstein and Buber, as well as financiers like Lord Roth-

schild and Moses Montefiore, into giving their time and effort in support of so important and historically justified a scheme. This narrative of reestablishment and recovery served its purpose not only amongst Jews but also throughout the Western (and even in some parts of the Eastern) world. Because of the power and appeal of the Zionist narrative and idea (which depended on a special reading of the Bible) and because of the collective Palestinian inability as a people to produce a convincing narrative story with a beginning, middle, and end (we were always too disorganized, our leaders were always interested in maintaining their power, most of our intellectuals refused to commit themselves as a group to a common goal, and we too often changed our goals) Palestinians have remained scattered and politically ineffective victims of Zionism, as it continues to take more and more land and history.

Just how deliberate and sustained has been the assault on the history and consequently the dominant public memory of Palestine, and how much attention has been paid over the years to the reconstruction of Jewish history to suit the purposes of Zionism as a political movement, is made stunningly clear by the Scottish historian of the ancient Near East, Keith W. Whitelam, whose book *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* is of paramount importance. Not being myself a scholar of the ancient world generally, nor of ancient Palestine in particular, I cannot make a judgement about every one of the points that Whitelam makes; but I am able to judge what he says about modern scholarship on ancient Israel, and there I was very impressed with his careful, but nevertheless extremely audacious argument. In effect Whitelam is talking about two things: one, the politics of collective memory, and, two, the creation by Zionist scholars and historians of a geographical image of ancient Israel that is shaped by the ideological needs and pressures of the modern Zionist movement.¹¹

As I suggested above, collective memory is not an inert and passive thing, but a field of activity in which past events are selected, reconstructed, maintained, modified, and endowed with political meaning. In her 1995 book *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*, the Israeli-American historian Yael Zerubavel shows how before the late nineteenth century the story of Masada was unknown to most Jews. Then in 1862 a Hebrew translation of the Roman sources of Masada in Josephus's *Wars of the Jews* was published, and in a short time the story was transformed by reconstruction into four important things: "a major turning point in Jewish history, a locus of modern pilgrimage, a famous archeological site, and a contemporary political metaphor."¹²

11. See Keith W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (New York, 1996); hereafter abbreviated *I*.

12. Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago, 1995), p. 63.

When General Yigael Yadin excavated Masada after 1948 the expedition had two complementary aspects: an archeological investigation and “the fulfillment of a national mission.”¹³ In time the actual place was the site of Israeli army ceremonies, a commemoration of Jewish heroism, as well as a commitment to present and future military skill. Thus was a dim, relatively unknown incident in the past reformulated consciously as a major episode in the nationalist program of a modern state; Masada became a potent symbol of the Israeli national narrative of struggle and survival.

Whitelam presents a remarkably analogous picture of how the history of ancient Palestine was gradually replaced by a largely fabricated image of ancient Israel, a political entity that in reality played only a small role in the area of geographical Palestine. According to Whitelam, ancient Palestine was the home of many diverse peoples and histories; it was the place where Jebusites, Israelites, Canaanites, Moabites, Philistines, and others lived and flourished. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, however, this more complex and rich history was silenced, forced aside, in order that the history of invading Israelite tribes, who for a time suppressed and dispossessed the native peoples, became the only narrative worth considering. Thus the extinction of the indigenous population of Palestine in the late Bronze Age became an acceptable and gradually permanent feature of a sort of triumphalist *Jewish* history for scholars like W. F. Albright, the leading historian of ancient Palestine during the early twentieth century, and made it possible to silence native Palestinian history as it was supplanted by the history of the incoming Israelites. Albright goes so far as retrospectively to condone the destruction of the native inhabitants of ancient Palestine in favor of superior people: “From the impartial standpoint of a philosopher of history,” he says, “it often seems necessary that a people of markedly inferior type [that is, the ancient Canaanite Palestinians] should vanish before a people of superior potentialities [the Israelites], since there is a point beyond which racial mixture cannot go without disaster” (quoted in *I*, p. 83).

In its remarkably frank expression of racist attitudes this statement by a supposedly objective scholar, who also happened to be the most influential figure in modern biblical archeology, is chilling. But it suggests how in its desire to overcome obstacles in its path, even to the point of retrospectively condoning dispossession and even genocide, modern Zionism also imposed a sort of teleology retrospectively. Whitelam proceeds to show how scholars like Albright and many others went on in their writing to construct “a large, powerful, sovereign and autonomous . . . state [which was] attributed to its founder David” (*I*, p. 124). Whitelam shows how this state was in effect an invention designed to accompany the Zionist attempt in the twentieth century to gain control over the land of Palestine; thus “biblical scholarship, in its construction of an ancient Israeli

13. *Ibid.*

state, is implicated in contemporary struggles for the land" (*I*, p. 124). Whitlam argues that such a state was far less important than its champions in the present day say it was: The invented ancient Israel "has silenced Palestinian history and obstructed alternative claims to the past" (*I*, p. 124). By inventing an ancient Israeli kingdom that displaced Canaanite Palestinian history, modern scholars have made it nearly impossible for present-day Palestinians to say that their claims to Palestine have any long-term historical validity. Indeed such pro-Zionist scholars have gone on to assert that ancient Israel was qualitatively different from all other forms of government in Palestine, just as modern-day Zionists said that their coming to Palestine turned an "empty" desert land into a garden. The idea in both ancient and modern cases is identical and of course violently contradicts the far more complex, pluricultural identity of the place.

Whitlam is quite right to criticize my own work on the modern struggle for Palestine for not paying any attention to the discourse of biblical studies. This discourse, he says, was really a part of Orientalism, by which Europeans imagined and represented the timeless Orient as they wished to see it, not as it was, or as its natives believed. Thus biblical studies, which created an Israel that was set apart from its environment, and supposedly brought civilization and progress to the region, was reinforced by Zionist ideology and by Europe's interest in the roots of its own past. Yet, he concludes, "this discourse has excluded the vast majority of the population of the region." It is a discourse of power "which has dispossessed Palestinians of a land and a past" (*I*, p. 235).

Whitlam's subject is ancient history and how a purposeful political movement could invent a serviceable past that became a crucial aspect of Israel's modern collective memory. When the mayor of Jerusalem a few years ago proclaimed that the city represented 3,000 years of unbroken Jewish dominance, he was mobilizing an invented story for the political purposes of a modern state still trying to dispossess native Palestinians who are now seen only as barely tolerated aliens.

Along with the idea of Israel as liberation and independence couched in terms of a reestablishment of Jewish sovereignty went an equally basic motif, that of making the desert bloom, the inference being that Palestine was either empty (as in the Zionist slogan, "a land without people for a people without land") or neglected by the nomads and peasants who facelessly lived on it. The main idea was to not only deny the Palestinians a historical presence as a collectivity but also to imply that they were not a people who had a long-standing peoplehood. As late as 1984 a book by a relative unknown called Joan Peters appeared from a major commercial publishing house (Harper and Row) purporting to show that the Palestinians as a people were an ideological, propagandistic fiction; her book *From Time Immemorial* won all sorts of prizes and accolades from well-known personalities like Saul Bellow and Barbara Tuchman, who

admired Peters's "success" in proving that Palestinians were "a fairy tale." Slowly, however, the book lost credibility despite its eight or nine printings, as various critics, Norman Finkelstein principal among them, methodically revealed that the book was a patchwork of lies, distortions, and fabrications, amounting to colossal fraud. The book's brief currency (it has since practically disappeared and is no longer cited) is an indication of how overwhelmingly the Zionist memory had succeeded in emptying Palestine of its inhabitants and history, turning its landscape instead into an empty space that, Peters alleged, was flooded in the middle 1940s with Arab refugees from neighboring countries attracted to the place by the hope of prosperity under Jewish settlers.¹⁴ I remember my rage at reading a book that had the effrontery to tell me that my house and birth in Jerusalem in 1935 (before Peters's flood of "Arab" refugees) to say nothing of the actual existence of my parents, uncles, aunts, grandparents, and my entire extended family in Palestine were in fact not there, had not lived there for generations, had therefore no title to the specific landscape of orange and olive groves that I remembered from my earliest glimmerings of consciousness. I recall also that in 1986 I purposefully published a book of photographs by Jean Mohr, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* for which I wrote an elaborate text whose effect with the interconnected pictures I hoped would be to dispel the myth of an empty landscape and an anonymous, nonexistent people.¹⁵

All along then the Israeli story, buttressed both subliminally and explicitly with memories of the horrors of an anti-Semitism that ironically took place in an entirely different landscape, crowded out the Palestinian history taking place in Palestine and out of it because of Israeli geographical and physical displacement of the people. The justified feeling of "never again," which became the watchword of Jewish consciousness as, for instance, the massively publicized Eichmann trial revealed the scope of the awfulness of the Holocaust, pushed away the deepening sense of the need for Palestinian assertion that was developing in that community. There is something almost tragically ironic about the way in which the 1967 war on the one hand intensified the assertiveness of a triumphal Israeli identity and, on the other, sharpened the need among Palestinians for organized resistance and counterassertion. Only this time Israel had occupied the rest of Palestine and acquired a population of almost two million people that it ruled as a military power (20 percent of Israel's citizens are Palestinians). Newly excavated memories from the Jewish past emerged—the Jew as warrior, militant, vigorous fighter—and replaced the image of the Jew as scholarly, wise, and slightly withdrawn. The

14. See Edward W. Said, "Conspiracy of Praise" and Norman G. Finkelstein, "Disinformation and the Palestine Question: The Not-So-Strange Case of Joan Peters's *From Time Immemorial*," in *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question*, ed. Said and Christopher Hitchens (New York, 1988), pp. 23–31, 33–69.

15. See Said and Jean Mohr, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (New York, 1986).

change in iconography is brilliantly chronicled by Paul Breines in his book *Tough Jews*.¹⁶

With the rise of the PLO, first in Jordan, then after September 1970 in Beirut, a new Palestinian interest arose in the past, as embodied in such disparate activities as organized historical research and the production of poetry and fiction based upon a sense of recovered history, formerly blotted out but now reclaimed in the poetry of Zayyat, Darwish, Hussein, and al-Qassem, in the fiction of Kanafani and Jabra, as well as in painting, sculpture, and historical writing such as Abu Lughod's collection *The Transformation of Palestine*. Later work such as the compilations of Walid Khalidi—*Before Their Diaspora* and *All That Remains*—Rashid Khalidi's study *Palestinian Identity*, Sabry Jiryis's *The Arabs in Israel*, Bayan al Hout's study of the Palestinian elites, Elia Zureik's *The Palestinians in Israel*, and many others, all by Palestinian scholars, gradually established a line of dynastic descent, between the events of 1948 and before and after the catastrophe, that gave substance to the national memory of a Palestinian collective life that persisted, despite the ravages of physical dispossession, military occupation, and Israeli official denials.¹⁷ By the middle of the 1980s, a new direction had begun to appear in Israeli critical histories of the canonized official memories. In my opinion their genesis lay to some considerable extent in the aggravated, but close colonial encounter between Israelis and Palestinians in the occupied territories. Consider that with the accession to power of the right-wing Likud in 1977 these territories were renamed Judea and Samaria; they were onomastically transformed from "Palestinian" to "Jewish" territory, and settlements—whose object from the beginning had been nothing less than the transformation of the landscape by the forcible introduction of European-style mass housing with neither precedent nor basis in the local topography—gradually spread all over the Palestinian areas, starkly challenging the natural and human setting with rude Jewish-only segregations. In my opinion, these settlements, whose number included a huge ring of fortresslike housing projects around the city of Jerusalem, were intended visibly to illustrate Israeli power, additions to the gentle landscape that signified aggression, not accommodation and acculturation.

The new trend in Israeli critical history was inaugurated by the late

16. See Paul Breines, *Tough Jews: Political Fantasies and the Moral Dilemma of American Jewry* (New York, 1990).

17. See *The Transformation of Palestine: Essays on the Origin and Development of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, ed. Abu Lughod (Evanston, Ill., 1971); Walid Khalidi, *Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians* (Washington, D.C., 1984); *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*, ed. Walid Khalidi (Washington, D.C., 1992); Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York, 1997); Sabry Jiryis, *The Arabs in Israel*, trans. Inca Bushnag (New York, 1976); Bayan al Hout, *Political Leadership and Institutions in Palestine, 1917–48* [Arabic] (Beirut, 1984); and Elia Zureik, *The Palestinians in Israel: A Study in Internal Colonialism* (London, 1979).

Simha Flapan, but then continued in controversial scholarly monographs and books by Bennie Morris, Avi Shlaim, Tom Segev, Ilan Pappé, and Beni Beit Halahmi. Much of this work I believe was fuelled by the Palestinian *intifada*, which laid to rest the idea of Palestinian silence and absence. For the first time a systematic critique of the official version programmatically revealed the crucial role played by invention in a collective memory that had ossified into unyielding, almost sacralized, and, with regard to Palestinians, dehumanized representation. Far from Palestinians having left or run away because they were told to do so by their leaders (this had been the prevalent argument for the suddenly depopulated landscape in 1948), these historians showed that according to Zionist military archives there had been a cold-blooded plan to disperse and exclude the native population, spiriting them away so that Palestinians would not clutter Israel with their non-Jewish presence. Far from the Jewish forces having been a small, outnumbered, and truly threatened population, it was shown that these forces were greater in number than the combined Arab armies, they were better armed, and they had a common set of objectives entirely lacking among their opponents. As for the Palestinians, they were effectively leaderless, unarmed, and in places like Jerusalem—which I recall vividly myself, since I was twelve at the time—completely at the mercy of the Hagganah and the Irgun, whose undeviated purpose was to clear them out unequivocally, as we were indeed. And far from there being a policy of “purity of arms,” the stock-in-trade phrase for Israeli military policy, there was a series of massacres and atrocities designed specifically to terrorize the greatly disadvantaged Palestinians into flight and/or nonresistance.

More recently, the distinguished Israeli social historian Zeev Sternhell has revisited the official state archives to show with extraordinary force that what was presented to the world as a socialist democracy was not in fact that at all, but what he himself calls a nationalist socialism designed above all to create a new community of blood, to redeem the land by conquest, and to submit the Jewish individual to a collectivity of almost messianic fervency.¹⁸ Thus in fact Israel was profoundly antisocialist and, rather than encouraging individual rights and an egalitarian concept of citizenship, in fact created a theocracy with a rigorous limit to what the individual was and could expect from the state. The Kibbutzim—long heralded as a unique social experiment in egalitarianism and innovative sharing—were, says Sternhell, window-dressing, extremely limited and circumscribed in their membership (no Arabs were ever allowed to be members). Israel is now the only state in the world that is not the state of its citizens but of the whole Jewish people wherever they may be. Not only has it never had until the present any international

18. See Zeev Sternhell, *The Founding Myths of Israel: Nationalism, Socialism, and the Making of the Jewish State*, trans. David Maisel (Princeton, N.J., 1998).

boundaries, Israel also has no constitution, but a set of Basic Laws, one of which, the Law of Return, entitles any Jew anywhere the right to immediate Israeli citizenship, whereas Palestinians whose families were driven out in 1948 are allowed no such right at all. Ninety-two percent of the land is held in trust by an agency for the Jewish people; this means that non-Jews, especially Palestinian citizens of Israel who constitute a population of one million people and are almost 20 percent of the state, are simply forbidden to buy, lease, or sell land. One can imagine the outcry in the United States if land was only permitted to Christian whites, for example, and not to Jews or nonwhites.

Thus the dominant pattern in thought about the geography of Palestine, for a millennium and a half inhabited by an overwhelming majority of non-Jews, has been the idea of return: to return to Israel for Jews who have never been there was to return to Zion and an earlier state from which Jews had been exiled. Carol Bardenstein notes in a sensitive study the way the same images of prickly pears, oranges, trees, and return thread their way into discourses of memory for both Jews and Palestinians. But the Jewish discourse eliminates from the landscape the former Palestinian presence:

I had the opportunity to visit a number of sites of former Palestinian villages that have been variously reshaped through tree-planting and related JNF projects, in ways that would appear to promote "collective," if selective, forgetting. If one visits the site of the destroyed village of Ghabsiyah in the Galilee, for example, upon closer scrutiny the trees and landscape themselves yield two very different and contesting narratives converging on the same site. One has to rely on landscape readings, because little else remains. What is most readily visible to the first-time visitor are the JNF trees planted on the site—the recognizable combination of pine and other trees that have grown over the past four decades in a manner that makes it seem as if perhaps that is all that was ever there.¹⁹

Let me note in a very brief conclusion what the interplay among memory, place, and invention can do if it is not to be used for the purposes of exclusion, that is, if it is to be used for liberation and coexistence between societies whose adjacency requires a tolerable form of sustained reconciliation. Again I want to use the Palestinian issue as my concrete example. Israelis and Palestinians are now so intertwined through history, geography, and political actuality that it seems to me absolute folly to try and plan the *future* of one without that of the other. The problem with the American-sponsored Oslo process was that it was premised on a notion of partition and separation, whereas everywhere one looks in the

19. Carol Bardenstein, "Threads of Memory and Discourses of Rootedness: Of Trees, Oranges, and the Prickly Pear Cactus in Israel/Palestine," *Edebiyât* 8, no. 1 (1998): 9.

territory of historical Palestine, Jews and Palestinians live together. This notion of separation has also closed these two unequal communities of suffering to each other. Most Palestinians are indifferent to and often angered by stories of Jewish suffering since it seems to them that as subjects of Israeli military power anti-Semitism seems remote and irrelevant while their land is taken and homes are being bulldozed. Conversely most Israelis refuse to concede that Israel is built on the ruins of Palestinian society, and that for them the catastrophe of 1948 continues until the present. Yet there can be no possible reconciliation, no possible solution unless these two communities confront each's experience in the light of the other. It seems to me essential that there can be no hope of peace unless the stronger community, the Israeli Jews, acknowledges the most powerful memory for Palestinians, namely, the dispossession of an entire people. As the weaker party Palestinians must also face the fact that Israeli Jews see themselves as survivors of the Holocaust, even though that tragedy cannot be allowed to justify Palestinian dispossession. Perhaps in today's inflamed atmosphere of military occupation and injustice it is perhaps too much to expect these acknowledgements and recognitions to take place. But, as I have argued elsewhere, at some point they must.