



Ghosts in the archive: The palestinian villages and the Decolonial archives

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Abstract The article drives from the Israeli colonial archives and seeks to crack their structure, foundations and imagination. It wishes to establish a *counter* postcolonial/decolonial archive, based on colonial sources, while taking into consideration the specific condition of the Israeli colonialism and settler colonialism, and mainly the repressive administration of the colonial archives. While colonial bodies and archives erase the indigenous history and past, the counter archive aims to return them to their original population and to the public-sphere, calling for democratization processes. It will be established on the ruins of the Israeli colonial archive, will tell the story of the Palestinian villages that their population was uprooted and exiled (before and after exile), the story of the Palestinian population who remained in Palestine under military regime, strangers in the house; the erasure and attempt to control Palestinian historiography and culture to support official Israeli narrative. The decolonial archive will also gather indigenous materials in colonial archives, point out the physical and interpretative forces exerted on

them, cleanse them of their biased interpretation and focus on structuring a reading that differs from the original colonial designation. It will restore them to indigenous history, enabling the construction of an alternative multi-layered database, different from the one-sided characteristic of colonial archives. The proposal then is to turn the Israeli colonial archive—corrupt, oppressive and destructive, into a more autonomous site—not only the materials themselves but also the way they are contextualized, read and interpreted.

Introduction

The article is a call to action. It derives from the Israeli colonial archives and seeks to rethink their structure, foundations, and imagination. It wishes to establish a decolonial archive, based on colonial sources, while taking into consideration the specific condition of the Israeli colonialism and settler colonialism (Zureik 2015), and mainly the repressive administration of the colonial archives. While colonial bodies and archives erase the indigenous history and past, the decolonial archive aims to return them to their original population and to the public sphere, to enlighten the blind spots, to form Archive Partisans and call for democratization that tackles the state 'in its own house'" (Hegasy 2019, 261).

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Over the years, there have been various studies calling to challenge colonial archives and their interpretation and to build postcolonial/decolonial models (Stoler 2002; McEwan 2003; Feldman 2008; Steele 2010; Caswell 2011; Weld 2014; Sela 2009a, b; Elkins 2015; Karabinos 2015; Sela 2015, 2018a, b; Seikaly 2018; Hegasy 2019).¹ This anti-colonialist discourse requires, “an alternative set of questions, techniques and strategies in order to construct it” (Bhabha 1990, 75), while locating the spurious tainted evidences of colonialism and rereading them in a radical way (Guha 1998). These processes call for an oppositional force to the repressive official actions and efforts to govern, modify or conceal the past, control the narration of history and rebuild memory. Such archives should be built on behalf of the persecuted or the ‘marginalized’ (Montgomery 2004, 25) by using textual and visual documents, testimonies, records or forensic evidence (ibid, 34–46) from official, community, foreign and alternative sources.

Furthermore, I argue that utilizing official records that are at the core of this article requires reading through the colonial archive’s multiple overt and covert layers, neutralizing its colonial biases, and exposing information that often contradicts and challenges its official goals, illuminating the blind spots. It alters our knowledge about the past, providing new tools to confront the present, an “archival turn” (Stoler 2002). Human rights NGOs strive to establish a variety of fact-finding techniques while relying on a wide range of oral and written sources to overcome fact-finding difficulties (Montgomery 2004, 32), and other vital factors. Participatory/community archives put efforts into building alternative methods and sources that enable decentralized, radical orientation, and broader contextualization of records management (Huvila 2008). Descriptive practices might be expanded, approached differently, or completely rethought in order to respond to the challenges and changes necessary to mobilize records through value-added description for human rights purposes (Wood, Carbone, Cifor, Gilliland and Punzalan 2014, 398–399).

¹ Re alternative Palestinian/Israeli discourse see Robinson 2003.

Historical background

Since late 1910s, Jewish forces started to gather information about Palestinians for colonial purposes using a variety of intelligence means in many ways, an activity that was intensified in 1920s (Black and Morris 1991; Gelber 1992; Benvenisti, 2002; Solomon 2005; Pappé 2006; Sela 2009a; Ben-Ze’ev 2011; Sela 2011, 2013a; Zureik 2015; Jawad 2016; Sela 2018b).² These activities intensified in early 1940s and their main goals were to learn about the Palestinian population, villages and towns for future occupation and control. During the 1948 war, known as the War of Independence by Israelis and Nakba (Catastrophe) by Palestinians, more than 750,000 Palestinians were expelled and became refugees; the State of Israel was established in May of that year. Ethnic cleansing was put into effect through systematic expulsions of hundreds of Palestinian villages, as well as Jewish terrorist attacks against the civilian population (Morris 1988; Pappé 1992, 2006). The new Israeli state closed its borders to the Palestinians and expropriated their houses in towns and villages (ibid), as well as cultural and historical assets and archives (Amit 2014; Sela 2009a, b; Masalha 2012; Sela 2017, 2018a, b). It used these premises to house the many Jewish immigrants and needed housing, and others were destroyed in order to prevent the return of Palestinians (Golan 1992; Shai 2002).

In March 1950, Israel regulated this land grab in the framework of the *Absentee Property Law* designed to prevent Palestinian refugees from claiming their lands, houses, and property.³ It replaced the emergency ordinances that regulated this process since the second half of 1948. The properties passed into the hands of the Custodian of Absentee Property according to Sect. 4 of the Law. The Palestinian refugee houses and lands became, according to Israeli

² Margalit Shilo shows that Arthur Ruppin was familiar with the Arab press, through a special Zionist clerk, that translate the Jewish material they printed (1984, 56). However, she doesn’t indicate when it started. It might be in 1910 as Etan Bloom demonstrates (2008, 366). In addition, it is not clear if the clerk also translated Palestinian material. If not, the practice of collecting intelligence about the Palestinians for colonial purposes started towards the end of WW1 and after (Gelber 1992, 11–13).

³ https://www.knesset.gov.il/review/data/heb/law/kns1_property.pdf (all web sites were accessed on February 10, 2020).

law, 'absentee property.' Furthermore, Palestinians who remained to live in Israel in their homes (or in new places where they have been forcibly transferred by the Israeli state) were ruled by a military governor for almost two decades (1948–1966), controlling all aspects of their life in repressive strict colonial ways (Jiryis 1966; Amitai 1998; Bäuml 2011, 2017; Sa'di 2016). Israel has systematically stolen Palestinian lands, depopulated Palestinians, racialized the daily life of its colonial subjects, demolished Palestinian homes and farms, and consistently sought to dismantle the very social basis of a civic life, in effect seeking to erase Palestinians from their own homeland.

The decolonial visual archive

Israeli archives are ruled according to a repressive and colonial system and are subjugated to restrictive laws and regulations (Cohen 2004; Robinson 2003; Feldman 2008; Sela 2009a; Ben Artzi 2011; Sela 2017, 2018a, b, 2019). Israel's colonial archives not only remain in control of Israeli historiography but also control Palestinian cultural treasures and writing of the past, showing how patterns of action, administrative procedures, norms and worldviews imprison knowledge. Palestinian archives, collections, images and treasures—visual, written and others— are subject to Israeli colonial mechanisms. First, there is a long history of seizure from 1930s up to date by Jewish and Israeli forces in an organized manner from public and private sources (Sela 2009a, 2017, 2018a, b; Masalha 2012; Amit 2014; Sleiman 2016). At the same time soldiers and civilians, who internalized the official codes of power and acted on their own, looted property and cultural and historical materials from homes, individuals, entities or from the battlefield (Sela 2000, 2009a, 2018b, 2019, Raz 2020). Both looted and seized archives/items, and materials documented by Jewish/Israeli forces and have importance in Palestinian history, are governed by a system of colonial administration in Israeli archives. My studies over the years demonstrate how Israel conceals Palestinian treasures and materials describing the Palestinian past not only by physical means (seizing of booty, looting or destruction of materials), but also by a strict system of management, control and “knowledge production”—laws, rules, norms,

methods and archive procedures such as censorship, restricted study, access prohibition/limitation, control over what is declassified (to whom and to what extent), cataloging, labeling and interpretation according to Zionist codes and terminology that differ from the original Palestinian terminology and signify Israeli ownership over the material. Thus, Israeli control takes place not only in the geographical sphere—ethnic cleansing, control and oppression of the population in the occupied territories, or a policy of exclusion and discrimination against the Palestinian residents of the State of Israel—but also in the realm of consciousness, identity, memory, culture and history. The State Controller wrote: “The need for authorization and conditions for authorization raise concerns of discrimination towards those interested in access to materials, contrary to prevailing standards in scientific research.”⁴

While states centralize their power through the use of records and power is repressed over the way memory is constructed, and colonial and national archives are involve in procedures of exclusion (Feldman 2008, 34), radical destruction of the archive can be “reinvested” (Derrida 1995, 15) and meaning and use can be to liberated (Sekula 2003, 444; see also Duff and Harris 2002). Colonial archives are not only sites of knowledge and fact production (Stoler 2002), sites where power is contested and confirmed (Elkins 2015, 853), but also reflect the link between the accumulation of information and the control of a population (Karabinos 2015).

Colonial archives function above all as machines of erasure and destruction (Sela 2000, 2009a, b, 2015, 2017, 2018a, b, 2019; Shepard 2015; Rawlings 2015). “Gaping holes became an imperial legacy in postcolonial archives”, enabling those responsible to escape the scene of the crime (Elkins 2015, 852–854). Therefore, and in order to activate the archive as a site of resistance (Sela 2009a, 2018a, b), alternative modes and processes require not only to find substitute sources to a different narration (Caswell 2014b), but also to use and read differently the existed official ones (Comar-off 1992; Sela 2009a, b, 2015, 2017, 2018a, b). Two aspects of power are thus embedded within the colonial archives. The first, documents depicting the

⁴ State Controller's Report 50b: <http://www.acri.org.il/he/1940>. See also Forte 2003, Hazkani 2019.

oppression, usually hidden, buried or distorted, reflecting the power the colonizer imposes over the colonized and over a history of oppression (Caswell 2011; Karabinos 2015). This power is constructed to tell one story, the story of the colonizer, while putting huge efforts to hide the history of oppression.

The second aspect is that the archives contain evidence that enables to gain freedom (Karabinos 2015, 387), to return the history to the oppressed indigenous population. If archives are powerful in one direction, they must be equally powerful in the opposite direction (ibid.). Constructing an alternative database founded on a use of materials contradictory to that of the colonizer's archives challenges their one-sided worldview and enables to democratize it (McEvan 2003; Steele 2010; Jacobs 2013; Shepard 2015; Karabinos 2015; Tsuruta 2017).

My proposal is, thus, to construct a decolonial archive based on Israeli origins, founded on two major sources. The first, archives that reveal Palestinian cultural and historical archives, collections, images, documents or items looted or seized by Jewish and Israeli organizations, civilians and soldiers since the beginning of the twentieth century (Sela 2000, 2009a, 2017, 2018a, b, 2019). While in other colonial states the colonized cultural treasures are usually stored, controlled and exposed to the public in the colonizers' art museums (Sauvage 2010; Small 2011; Edwards and Mead 2013), in Israel, they are stored in the colonizers' archives,⁵ treated as enemy materials and censored for at least five decades.⁶ Besides two precedents, they are never returned to their owners (Sela 2019). The second main source, at the core of this article, is archives that contain materials, documents and images that depict the preparation for occupation and settler colonization, and the colonial historiography—all of which have been documented by the colonial regime.

⁵ Except of the Museum of Israeli Intelligence Heritage and Communication Center that shows weapons alongside cultural artefacts and present them in a biased manner as material confiscated from terrorists: <https://www.terrorism-info.org.il/he/%d7%a1%d7%99%d7%95%d7%a8-%d7%95%d7%99%d7%a8%d7%98%d7%95%d7%90%d7%9c%d7%99/>.

⁶ "Rules, Orders and Instructions:" <http://www.archives.mod.gov.il/about/Pages/hukimtkanot.aspx>. At the same time, museums are too ruled and expose material according to colonial norms.

This decolonial Archive starts at an early point in time—before the Nakba, the disaster, when the indigenous Palestinian has not yet become a refugee. This is a time the refugee pines for: a time of utopia, before the trauma, a time seen as innocent and idyllic; a period of unity, and homogeneity of the lost landscape and identity (Gertz and Khleifi 2006, 9), a time of emotional escape from life's current difficulties, from suffering and distress—a magical time that was stolen, yet left real in the mind. In the words of Elias Khoury, this is the memory exiled from the map, the time of Yunis the hero of *Bab Al-Shams*, a refugee from the village of Sha'ab exiled to Lebanon from Palestine in the 1948 war. He established political and military cells from remnants of the men seeking a way to return to their land (Khoury 2002, 404), while his family was forced to reside in in Deir Al-Asad. Yunis himself, prevented from returning to his land, is driven by his dream of bringing life back to what it was before.

This is also the time of the demon Margarosh from the stories of Maged Khamra (his family origin is from Kufur Lam), who seeks to preserve the Nakba in memory: Whoever thinks I have died is wrong. Here I stand before you, tall and proud, in spite of my diminutive demon height [...] [and] warning you not to write banalities about the Nakba, not to bargain over, change or demean it or turn it into a product to be marketed. You have been warned.⁷ Or the time for soul searching by those who caused the trauma, as Marzuq Al-Halabi, a poet, demanded and pointed out: [...] every time the same wound, constitutive event, the Nakba and its aftermath are spoken of, I am aware of the account still open between me and those who have not taken responsibility for what took place.⁸

Various projects were established to collect testimonies given by Palestinian about lives before the exile, such as the Nakba Archive and Al-Nakba's Oral History Project of Palestine Remembered.⁹ They represent the shift in the archival paradigm in recent years with a focus on community archiving (e.g.

⁷ <https://sipurheifai.wordpress.com/2013/10/01/%d7%9d-%d7%9c-%d7%98-%d7%95-%d7%90-%d7%99-%d7%98-%d7%95-%d7%90-%d7%9c-%d7%99/>.

⁸ Correspondence with Al-Halabi 26.9.16.

⁹ The Nakba Archive was established in 2002: http://nakba-archive.org/?page_id=956.

Palestine Remembered was established in 2003: <https://www.palestineremembered.com>.

McKemmish, Gilliland-Swetland, and Ketelaar 2005; Flinn 2007; Bastian and Alexander 2009; Flinn 2007; Flinn and Stevens 2009; Cook 2012; Caswell 2014a, b), especially in light of the digital and social media platforms (Yaqub 2015). This may include elements of nostalgia and the construction of a shared collective identity associated with a particular history of oppression and injustice and leading to activism (ibid). Communities are encouraged to conserve materials and collect information and evidence to serve their own needs. By sharing expertise and knowledge they serve society's interests in having expanded, vibrant, usable, and contextualized records (Cook 2012, 115) and launch their own archival projects as means of self-representation, identity construction, and empowerment.

Constructing a decolonial archive out of official Israeli colonial archives requires a set of alternatives tools, among them neutralizing the oppressive colonial contents of the archive. Directing these sources into a new channel that counters their original goal and restores them to indigenous Palestinian history makes it possible to learn about the life before the catastrophe, about settler colonialism and ethnic cleansing, about the destruction of villages and places, about encounter with the new Jewish settlers who toured the remains of villages or were housed on the land and settled in the homes of the original Palestinian owners (Sela 2009b), and about the oppressive regime faced by the Palestinian population that remained in Israel in 1948 (Jiryis 1966; Amitai 1998; Bäuml 2011, 2017; Sa'di 2016; Zureik 2016). This alternative database, based on materials from the colonizer's archives, challenges their one-sided worldview (Caswell 2014b; Sela 2009a, 2015, 2018a, b) and teaches about Palestinian civilian life before the Nakba, about the traces left in the geographical landscape after the fracture, about the tragedy experienced by the Palestinian population, and about the traces of refugeehood and destruction left in its wake when the colonizer took possession and ownership of the refugee's property (and his cultural treasures), erasing all traces of their original identity. It will also tell about the colonial oppressive regime during the military governance faced by the Palestinians. Hence the daydreams that have absorbed my life return [Yunis's] (Khoury 2002, 411), awakening those ghosts that were left behind those to which the refugee longs to return. The focus

is thus placed on opening up data, making the archives' contents available, exposing illegal destruction of records, fighting to return archives to a suppressed community and using their contents for legal and other human rights activities such as replevin and tribunals (Wood, Carbone, Cifor, Gilliland and Punzalan 2014, 413; see also Corti 2000; Thomson 2005). These official colonial archives hold crucial information that previously have been ignored, concealed, misrepresented or marginalized by the colonizer (Guha 1983; McKemmish, Gilliland-Swetland and Ketelaar 2005; Flinn 2007; Bastian and Alexander 2009; Flinn and Stevens 2009; Cook 2012; Caswell 2014a, b; Hegasy 2019). At the same time, it enables to open for discussion issues of identity, human rights, and social justice by struggling for accountability, transparency and accessibility (Cook 2012).

On the ruins of the Israeli colonial archive

The decolonial archive, established on the ruins of the Israeli colonial archive,¹⁰ will tell the story of a population that suffered a process of ethnic cleansing continuous oppression and colonial Zionist/Israeli domination through a sophisticated system of repression. It will tell the story of the villages whose population was uprooted and exiled (before and after the exile), the story of the Palestinian population that remained in Palestine under military regime, strangers in the house (Jiryis 1966, 108–109; Shehadeh 2002) and the erasure of Palestinian history and culture and the attempt to control them to support the official Israeli narrative (Sela 2009a, b, 2018b; Zureik 2015).

The decolonial archive will also gather indigenous materials in colonial archives, point out the physical and interpretative forces exerted on them, cleanse them of their biased interpretation and focus on structuring a reading that differs from the original

¹⁰ Akevot-Institute for Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Research was established in 2015 following a lecture I gave in Zochrot in 2013. It collects information in Israeli archives that deal with black holes- such as the kidnap of Yemenite children and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Although it researches within Israeli archives, it doesn't define itself as a postcolonial/ decolonial archive and doesn't collect information from a Palestinian perspective.

colonial designation. It will restore them to indigenous history, enabling the construction of an alternative multilayered database, different from the one-sided view characteristic of colonial archives. The proposal then is to turn the Israeli colonial archive—corrupt, oppressive and destructive—into a more democratic and autonomous site, not only the materials themselves but also the way they are contextualized, read and interpreted. This article will focus on the villages that were ethnically cleansed and on the documentation of the colonial enterprise.

A comprehensive study of Palestinian villages that existed prior to 1948 and those that were ethnically cleansed has already been published (Khalidi 1992; Abu-Sitta 2004), but seem to rely only partly (or not at all) on Jewish information collected prior to 1948.¹¹ They also contain little visual historical data, except in the case of maps.¹²

The article focuses on Israeli sources, while other sources Palestinian, foreign and alternatives, should be also included in the future (Stoler 2018). In addition, it does not deal with Palestinians in exile, the military regime in Israel and the cultural assets that were taken by force, all of which should be also included in the decolonial archive.

Before the nakba: preparation for the colonial enterprise

Israel's colonial archives contain much information about Palestinian villages before 1948, especially intelligence materials collected for the purpose of occupying, controlling and managing the villages and their inhabitants and preparing for war. This intelligence activity, carried out by Jewish scouts, soldiers and pilots, began in the late 1920s, became

institutionalized and organized in the 1940s also in the field of photography, and included the Village Files project. Scouts from the Haganah, a pre-state armed organization, were employed to gather intelligence about Palestinian villages and urban neighborhoods in preparation for a future conflict and occupation, and as part of a more general project of creating files on target sites. They systematically built up a database of geographical, topographical and planning information about Palestinian the villages and population centers. This included detailed descriptions of roads, neighborhoods, houses, public buildings, objects, wells, caves, wadis, and so forth (Figs. 1 and 2). Aerial photographs of Palestinian communities from the end of 1946, were largely part of the Village Files, helping identify the terrain and build topographical maps for future military purposes, and allowing control over areas otherwise inaccessible (Fig. 3). These were complemented by in-depth surveys about Palestinian communities by the Haganah Intelligence Service (known by its Hebrew acronym SHAI).

The surveys (APPENDIX 1) included comprehensive and detailed information about the villages and their inhabitants: historical, demographic—including the structure of families and clans—architectural, agricultural, means of transport, military, social, educational, economic and commercial, as well as information on major roads leading to the village, the village topography, water supply and more. Unlike the Village Files, the surveys contained, in addition to information of a military, geographic and topographic

¹¹ I suggested to use the materials taken by Jewish forces—such as Village Files, aerial photographs and surveys—by neutralizing their biased contents and transformed them into a vital source of information in Sela 2009a, b, 2011, 2013a, 2015, 2018a, b.

¹² A proposal to build a postcolonial archive of the villages was submitted, with no success, to various institutions: to Zochrot in January 2010, to School of Architecture, Tel Aviv University in October 2010, to Van Leer Institute in November 2010, to the Truman Institute in February 2012, to Palestinian Internally Displaced Committee in 2014; and also presented at several conferences.



Fig. 1 Gathering information about Ras Al-'ain, on the left, Eli Duvdevani, 1945 Courtesy of Eli Duvdevani

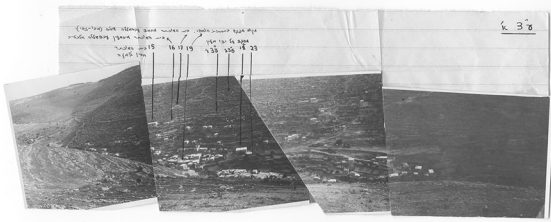


Fig. 2 Palmach Scouts in collaboration with the Technical Department, Khulldah, 1947. 15- The House of the Mukhtar Hassan Juma'a. 16- The House of the Mukhtar Ismail Abdullah Al-Khatib. 17- The House of the Mukhtar Muhammad Abdullah Sheikh (Abu Zaki) 18- A Mosque by a Fountain. 19- Meeting Place at the Bottom of the Wadi. The photograph was taken from the village file of Khulda as part of intelligence gathering, and for surveillance, control and occupation purposes. The photograph was received by the archive from Hillel Birger and was "examined and made public by the opening material team. Classified: g, date opened: 29.2.2001." IDF Archive, Originally published in Sela 2009



Fig. 3 Palmach Squadron in collaboration with the Technical Department, Al-Zib, aerial photograph, 1947. Haganah History Archive

nature, extensive civilian information—historical, social, demographic and economic data that today awakens the ghosts of Palestinian life with its unique texture.¹³ This information helps envision the nature of social life—the social dynamics surrounding springs and water sources, orchards, fields, shady groves, family life, youth, romantic hiding places, commercial centers, agricultural life, proximity to transportation aiding in the development of education, and more.¹⁴

Although this informative database of photographs and surveys was sometimes dry in character, it enables to learn about the relationships between the different social forces in the village, and with the British and Jews. It served a military-operational

¹³ Earliest studies do not distinguish between the two methods and relate to the Surveys as Village Files (Black & Morris 1991, 24–25, 129; Benvenisti 2002, 70–71; Pappé 2006, 17–22). Yoav Gelber was the first to set apart the two different methods of information gathering. However he wrote that they were both initiated by the Information Service and attached only initial and general information about the Village Files (Gelber 1992, 329–31, 526–527; see also Ben-Ze'ev 2011, 51–55), while studies from the beginning of the millennium showed that these were different methods and expanded the research (Salomon 2001, 2005; Sela 2009a).

I allocate a lot of room to the visual aspects of the Village Files (photography from the ground and from the air, maps, sketches (Sela 2009a, 2011, 2013a, 2018b; later also Salomon 2010, 2018), while others studies dealt mainly with different (non-visual) aspects. Ben Ze'ev too relates to the cartographic aspect and photography from the air, but do not discuss other means (Ben-Ze'ev 2011, 51–55).

¹⁴ It is also important to note that for many years hundreds of Surveys were not open to researchers and to the public. Although they do not have the potential to harm Israeli national security or foreign relations or privacy (the cause to restrict material according to *The Freedom of Information Law*, 1998 paragraph 9a), they were closed in the office of the deputy manager of the Haganah Archive who himself wrote about them (Salomon 2001, 2005). Furthermore, he analyzed the activities of intelligence bodies who were active before 1948 from an official Israeli perspective and deleted, from his publications, studies that challenge the official narrative. With regards to the Village Files, many of them have been lost, destroyed, burned or hidden by intelligence after the establishment of the State of Israel; only a small number is available (Sela 2009a, 2011, 2013a, 2018b). Salomon testified: There is no doubt that quite a few files survived the war. What became of them? I imagine that most of them were cleared out by intelligence officers (ibid). In addition, aerial photographs that I saw prior the publication of my first book on the subject (2009), were declassified and closed later. However, as photography is a medium that enables to duplicate images, I found them in another place (ibid, 50).

purpose, before and after the 1948 war, to control the Palestinian population during military rule. Now it may help restore lost knowledge and the flavor of life to villages and cities. Aerial photographs also allow us to learn about architectural, agricultural and geographical features such as density, height, and types of construction, the relationship between buildings, the village's main institutions, roads, types of agriculture, etc. Military photographs taken after the occupation, for example in Majdal Yaba (Fig. 4), can teach about the urban fabric of the village, when it was still intact. Paradoxically, although photographed by Israeli military bodies to serve aggressive Zionist colonial goals, and despite their biased Zionist terminology, today they provide a great deal of information and an updated picture of the life of Palestinian society, its character and uniqueness, which the refugee longs to return to, before the destruction of the Palestinian entity. The fact that Jewish military elements collected this information torpedoes possible claims of Palestinian bias. For example, if a Jewish scout collected intelligence information about a village and wrote that it was established 900 years ago (the village Danil, Haganah Historical Archive [hereafter, Haganah Archive] 379/105), it is hard to argue that the Palestinians were not indigenous, as Zionist propaganda sought to show, or that information the Palestinians publish about the villages is erroneous.



Fig. 4 Unknown Photographer, Majdal Yaba (Majdal Tsadek) after the Occupation, 1948. IDF Archives

Occupation, expulsion, physical cleansing—the Palestinian population

In this section, I choose to focus on two types of human portraits of Palestinians in Israeli military archives—those active in Al-Najjadah Gaza (Figs. 5–7) and those who wished to return to their homes and were faced with a bureaucratic colonial apparatus after infiltrating (in Israeli terminology), probably at the start of the military regime (Fig. 8). The first type, images that were produced by Al-Najjadah Palestinian resistance organization in Gaza in 1940s, contain information about Al-Najjadah members (member cards). The second type is photographs produced by Israeli intelligence in late 1940s. Both were used for intelligence and surveillance purposes by the Israeli military regime and are stored at the Haganah Archive. Both enable to chart the way the colonial regime collected information about Palestinians, makes it possible to restore to the public sphere knowledge about people involved in the Palestinian struggle and about Al-Najjadah

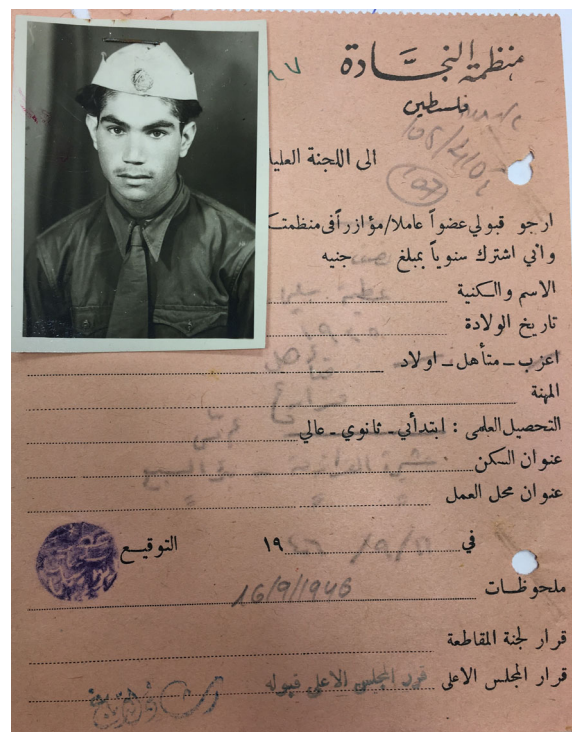


Fig. 5 Al- Najjadah Gaza, Member Card, September 16, 1946. [ʿzim Sliman? from Bi'r As-Sab', born 1925]. Haganah History Archive

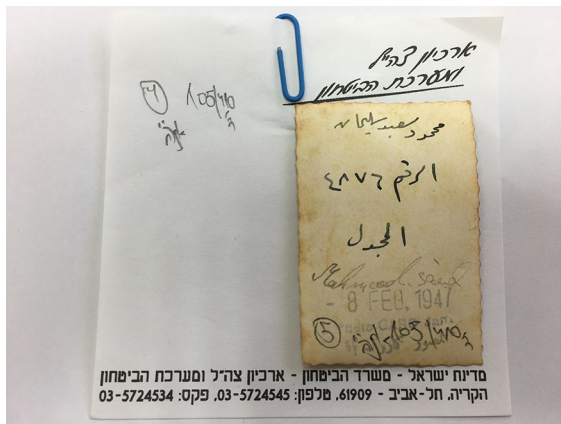


Fig. 6 The image of Mahmud Sa'id from Al-Majdal was photographed by Garo (Jaffa), February 8, 1947



Fig. 7 Al- Najjadah Gaza, Member Card, September 16,1946. The image of Mahmud Sa'id from Al-Majdal was photographed by Garo (Jaffa), February 8, 1947

organization, at the same time about people who were exiled and struggled to return, as Khoury described (2002). The first group belongs to a wider archive of Al-Najjadah Gaza that was confiscated (documents, correspondence, bills, activities), making it possible to rehabilitate knowledge about Palestinian society before 1948.

The second group includes hundreds, possibly thousands, of Palestinian portrait photographs taken from SHAI files¹⁵ and catalogued as Pictures of Arabs, with the word *remez* (lit. clue) on the back, code for infiltrators. The word infiltrator is a Zionist

term, presenting Palestinians who tried to return to their homes without legal documentation (Sela 2009a, 2018b), or as border brokers (Cohen 2006, 85). This group depicts the people who were part of a society before the trauma, and therefore their encounter with a photographer was not a threatening, but a normative procedure. It presents the way the beholder looked at those who experienced the tragedy, forcing her/him to look into the face of a person expelled from her/his home, to read the portrait of one who has undergone suffering (Barthes [1980] 1982; Sontag 2003) and now stands before the colonial bureaucratic apparatus, opposite to a clerk who has to decide whether to allow him/her to return. The question who sits in front of the photographer is reflected in the faces of the photographed. Another group of portraits (as well as surveys) belongs to soldiers or civilians involved in military resistance and photographed for surveillance purposes.

A first glance at the second group of photographs, organized and sorted in the archive in a supervised format and catalogued by ethnic differentiation, leaves a sense of discomfort. It is not known whether these portraits were originally listed as Pictures of Arabs but their ethnic characterization is reminiscent of the way criminals were catalogued in police archives in the nineteenth century. Allan Sekula (1992) studied this type of portraiture and the attempt to characterize the generic, typological look of the photographed human portrait. He shows that the photographic act becomes an act of repression, a social mark of control made complete by the archive catalog (see also Tamburn and Courtois 2010), illuminating those moments, certainly lonely, etched in the minds of the 'infiltrators' when confronted the bureaucratic apparatus and its representative—the act of photography. Presumably, the infiltrator—someone who was forced to flee and wanted to return home—was photographed by the colonial system when he was apprehended. Was he photographed by a professional photographer, or amateur, or by a colonial clerk? Was the photographer aware of the photograph's purpose and required to follow a uniform format? Can an identical performative testimony compel the contemporary viewer to face the act of expulsion when confronted with the mute figure of the refugee?

The indexing method used to catalog the Palestinian portraits; the quasi-scientific military labeling;

¹⁵ Probably from the latest days of the SHAI. It was closed and moved to IDF in June30, 1948.

the grid arrangement, frontal position and distance from the camera, similar to photographs taken for police and prison purposes; and the attempted visual uniformity to facilitate charting, supervision, and control—these too become part of an oppressive process made active by the archival process (Sekula 1992; Henning 2000, 2009).

The villages after the nakba: documentation of the colonial enterprise

Documentation of Jewish settlement in Palestinian villages in photographs, maps and documents (Sela 2009b, 2018b) attests to the colonial mechanism of transforming Palestinian into Jewish villages. Also included is written and visual documentation of the military regime imposed on the population remaining in the country (Jiryis 1962; Benzamin and Mansour 1992; Sa'di 1996; Stendel 1996; Bäuml 2002, 2007, 2011; Osatsky-Lazar 2002; Zoabi 2017). Photographic documentation of Israel's colonial settlement enterprise in Palestinian villages is the last testimony to their existence immediately after their physical and legal appropriation, and before losing their Palestinian identity (Fig. 9). Although the original inhabitants have already been exiled and the documents carry no direct evidence of the physical violence used against them, the fact that in many of these photographs entire villages remain untouched reveals what was suppressed in the Israeli collective memory: the tragedy suffered by the Palestinian population and the mechanism of the colonial enterprise. The photographs depict the integration of Jewish immigrants in the new state on the ruins of the Palestinian entity, thus presenting two different ethnic and geographical features: on one hand, the missing Palestinian entity symbolized by the Palestinian village with its particular characteristics, style and ways of cultivating the land, and on the other, the new settlers, engaged in their daily activities—sewing, embroidery, study, yard work (Fig. 10; Sela 2009b), representing the supposed normality of Zionist settlement. Were the Jewish refugees distressed by settling in the homes of other refugees? Did they empathize with them in any way? The photographs reveal nothing in this regard, and the Israeli establishment has suppressed this way of thinking.



Fig. 8 Pictures of Arabs, undated (circa 1949–1950). The photographs were removed from SHAI (National Information Service) files. Haganah History Archive. The photographs apparently dealt with Palestinians who wanted to return to live in their homes and land in Palestine after the 1948 war, “infiltrators” according to Zionist terminology. The back of photograph 13008 reads: “Hussein Naif Nasr Al-Din from the village of Daliyat Al-Karmel, received ‘hint’ No. 2205”. The back of photograph 13010 reads: “Hussein ‘Abdallah was expelled from Furidis, received hint no. 2213 ”. The word “hint” is a military code for “infiltrators.” The contents of the files were reorganized by the archive in the 1990s. It is not clear what was the structure of the original files and their scope. Originally published in Sela 2009



Fig. 9 Zoltan Kluger, “New Immigrants temporarily Settled in Abandoned Arab Houses at Tarshiha Village in the Galilee,” May 5, 1949. The text above reads: “For building he homeland, for a socialist society today in Israel, for peace!”. The Israeli Government Press Office

These photographs were created as part of Zionist settlement propaganda that sought to portray the spread of Jewish settlement in the country as a continuation of the pre-state Zionist ethos of land redemption, and also to bypass UN Resolution 191

requiring the return of Palestinian refugees to their homes. However, in practice, these photographs show the process of settler colonization and the physical capture and appropriation of Palestinian villages—people cultivating the land, preparing the village for Jewish settlement with construction work and allocation of houses. Originally, these images, made for propaganda purposes, sought to show the so-called moral aspects of the colonial enterprise. A photograph depicting the settlement of Tarshiha shows a paradoxical sign (in Hebrew and Arabic): “To Building the National Homeland, a Socialist Society in Our Days, in Israel, for Peace!”.

Another source of information describing Israel’s colonial settlement enterprise on the ruins of Palestinian villages are maps and correspondence, such as from the District Planning Bureau, found in Zionist archives in Jerusalem. For example, there are many maps of the Habonim settlement, built on lands of Kufur (village) Lam, which reveal the planning process of colonial appropriation. A comparison between these maps and early maps of the village in the archive (maps from 1907—Fig. 11, 1932 and 1953), adds much valuable information regarding the history of the village and how its infrastructure used in building the Jewish settlement (Fig. 12). Supplementing this information is correspondence in the Planning Department archives describing the process of colonial settlement on indigenous land and the nature of this settlement. For instance, aerial photographs of Palestinian villages taken before 1948 for occupation purposes were also used immediately after the ethnic cleaning to planning the repopulation

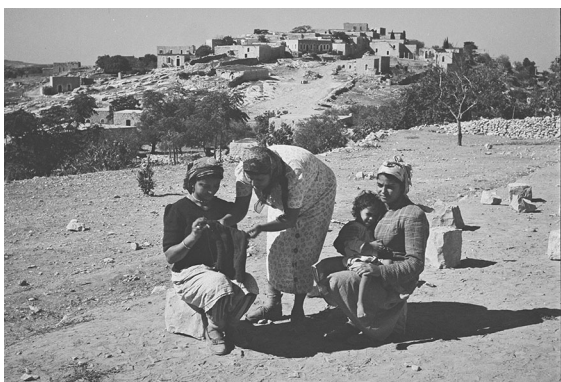


Fig. 10 Zoltan Kluger, “Immigrants from Kurdistan at the Elkosh Village in the Upper Galilee,” July 1, 1949. The Israeli Government Press Office

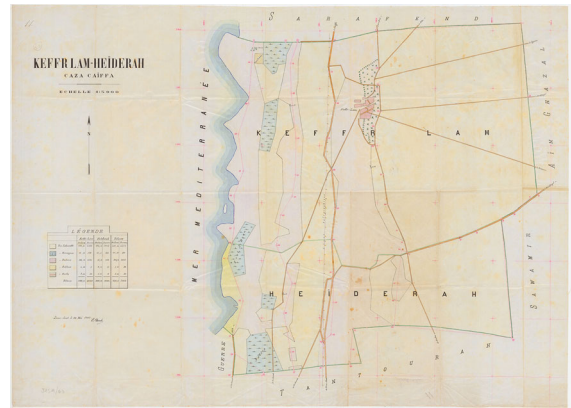


Fig. 11 Kufur Lam, Map (1:5000), 1907. Produced by PIKA (Palestine Jewish Colonization Association). The division in the map is according to the quality of the land (swamps, rocks, etc.). The map also indicates the built-up area of Kufur Lam and its roads. Central Zionist Archive

of Jewish immigrants on Palestinian lands. Thus, Michael Shaviv, who worked for various projects with the District Planning Office at the time, marked on the aerial photograph of Kufur Lam its borders while planning the Jewish Settlement Habonim (Fig. 13).

Architect A. (apparently Arie) Sharon, who headed the Planning Division at the Prime Minister’s Office between the years 1949–1953, complains in a letter to the Settlement Division that in economic terms it is much better to improve existing buildings [Palestinian] that are solid with thick walls and give good protection against the harsh climate [...] than destroy completely [...]. The plan is inconsistent with the existence of good, strong buildings in a place well exploited by the settlers, and by doing so is not prudent or economical and would cause an unnecessary waste of economic means (CZA S15-9077, August 31, 1950). Sharon’s position reflects the plan that developed over time as part of the massive population transfer scheme that ended in settling the Jewish population in Palestinian homes. The so-called economic justifications—their restoration was faster, more durable, and cheaper than building a completely new settlement (or tin shacks and tents, under difficult living conditions), and solved complex logistical problems (Morris 1997)—hints at a wider political strategy of ethnic cleansing (Pappé 2006; Zureik 2015).



Fig. 12 Habonim(Kufur Lam), Tsrufa ([Al-]Sarafend), Map (1:10,000), 1953. The Israeli Survey Department. Central Zionist Archive. The Israeli Moshav Tsrufa was established on the lands of the Palestinian village Al-Sarafend, and Habonim on the land of Kufur Lam

The ethno-oriental gaze and colonial excursions in occupied villages after the establishment of the state of Israel

Tours conducted in Palestinian villages and areas after the 1948 occupation add another layer of knowledge to how colonial perspectives and ethno-oriental gaze permeated the collective Israeli consciousness. Many images of this type are found on the site Israel Revealed to the Eye of the Yad Yitzhak

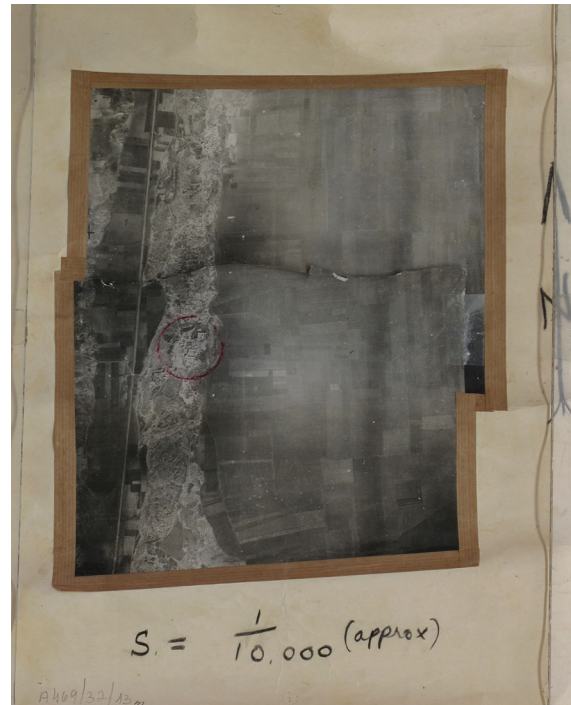


Fig. 13 Kufur Lam, late 1940s. Aerial Photograph Central. Zionist Archives

Ben-Zvi Archives or Nostalgia Online of the Council for the Advancement of Israeli Heritage.¹⁶ Like previously mentioned mechanisms, they were born out of purely Zionist intentions, described euphemistically as nostalgia, but between the layers lies knowledge that can be extracted about Palestinian history, missing from Israeli consciousness, and which Israel endeavors to conceal both physically and consciously. I will focus here on the photographed images of tours to villages after 1948 and up until the 1967 war, which reflects an oriental fascination with the remains of the destroyed past and romanticism.

The trips to the villages or, in Zionist terminology to the ruins, hinted that if there was life here, it existed a long time ago, with no connection to the visitor's current and imminent reality. They created a kind of distance of time, political and conscious, a removal of responsibility when faced with the visible landscape, connecting to a seemingly magical past.

¹⁶ Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi Archives: <http://www.israelalbum.org.il/>.

Nostalgia Online: <http://www.nostal.co.il/#>.

For example, the website has many images of travelers to Majdal Sadeq (Yaba), many photographed from below at an angle that intensifies the images, heightening the sense of ownership over the land. Another image is of Ovadia Argash in a swimsuit (Fig. 14) posing for a photo as defined by the website, on the ruins of Sidna Ali, Herzliya. Sidna Ali is the mosque of the Palestinian village Al-Haram (Fig. 15), today located in the northern part of Herzliya Beach, near the Nof-Yam neighborhood that was established on the lands of the Palestinian village. The figure of Argash, photographed from below in the tradition of Soviet-inspired Zionist photographs, sought to emphasize the magnificent and well-built image of the 'New Jew' in the Land of Israel (Almog 2000; Sela 2000), his steadfastness and superiority declaring ownership. The young man, eastern in appearance and name, adopted the same Zionist stance devoted mainly to portraying the Ashkenazi white population. The remains of the village/mosque described as ruins—terminology that as noted, cleanses them of the catastrophe—serve as a backdrop for the embellishment of Argash's proud figure, emphasizing possession of the land.

Similarly, on a trip to Tarshiha immediately after the war, a group of Israelis stands photographed against a mosque. There is dissonance between the stream of visitors, mainly women and children, dressed in Western clothes in an atmosphere of summer lightness, and the destroyed buildings in the

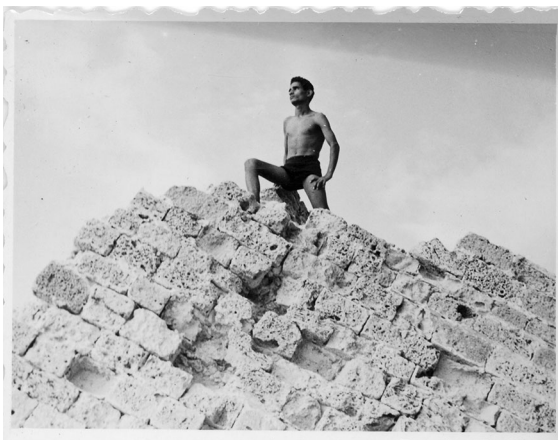


Fig. 14 “Ovadia Argash posing for a photo in Sidna Ali, Herzliya,” Israel Revealed to the Eye of the Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi Archives, Ovadia and Shoshana Argash Album, Rosh HaAyin, Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi Archive

background hinting at the catastrophic reality experienced by the village (YBZ.0565.259). Thus, the tour becomes another site of the Oriental grip on the landscape, detached from the landscape itself. This, a continuation of the tour model embedded in the Hebrew educational and cultural environment in the first half of the twentieth century, was part of the propaganda apparatus and building of Zionist identity, whose purpose was knowledge of the land and connection to the Zionist enterprise—encountering the country's history, archeology and geography through one's feet (Dror 2011; Avisar 2011; Ben-Yosef 2011).

The tours which became a symbol of ownership over the land, were transformed in the last fifteen year to acts of resistance. These tours aim to return the Palestinian history to the public sphere such as Zochrot's tours (Stein 2010, 12–14), the project *A'inak Ala Haifa* (Your Eye on Haifa)—urban tours in Arabic presenting Haifa's heritage and history, uploaded to the Internet (Sela 2013b, 227)¹⁷; the tours arranged by Sami Abu-Shehada in Jaffa and those arranged by an artist-conceptual framework such as *Bus Route* (05.01.2008) by the Palestinian director Scandar Copti and Israeli-Jewish artist Yochai Avrahami (both activists). The bus tour participants were given a fictitious account about the various sites they passed while Copti and Avrahami reinvented the history of the city prior to 1948, in order to expose the blindness of the Israeli society to the Palestinian past (ibid, 240–241).

Many, as mentioned, identified Palestinian spaces, urban and rural, as having a unique and oriental charm. Marcel Janco, an artist who worked in the Research and Survey Department of the Planning Division was among the few who recognized the priceless architectural and historical inheritance remaining in these places and in vernacular Palestinian architecture, and was outraged by the approach that championed destroying the area.¹⁸ He was one of the leaders in embedding the ethno-oriental gaze in public consciousness and struggled to preserve the ancient cities and buildings of architectural, historical and cultural values in Akka (Acre), A-Ramlah (Ramla), Beisan (Beit Shean), Safad (Safed),

¹⁷ From the Facebook page of A'inak Ala Haifa.

¹⁸ http://www.jancodada.co.il/?page_id=1263&lang=en.

Tabariyyah (Tiberias) and Yaffa (Jaffa). He sought to preserve the heritage of Arab construction and opposed the destruction of the old cities (see also Paz 1998). Janco, together with the painter Reuven Rubin, sat on the committee that reviewed and evaluated Palestinian buildings before their demolition (January 22, 1951). Beyond citing the value of preserving the architectural heritage and culture of construction, the committee emphasized economic and tourism motives “for tourist entities to join the demand for the preservation of Jaffa and the creation and cultivation of a major tourist center out of economic motives. ...A similar problem will also arise in Safed, Acre, Lod and others” (ibid, 112). Janco also established a village Ein Hod for artists in the Palestinian village 'Ayn Hawd on this basis.¹⁹ All these actions, while taking into consideration values of conservation, aesthetics and culture, failed to address the moral and human component, the ethnic cleansing and expulsion of the local residents whose heritage they wished to preserve. Furthermore, his paintings and those of his contemporaries, tending to the abstract and the lyrical, were yet another layer in the aesthetic and ideological apparatus of repression, blindness and camouflage (Levin 2014).

Shoshana Heimann's modernist style wood sculpture of a nude woman and a dove (Fig. 16) was also similarly placed to merge with nature and the landscape, and the ruins of 'Ayn Hawd served as a perfect backdrop. For the artist, one of the founders of the artist village, the arches of Arab-Eastern architecture provided a unique and magical environment, contributing to the modernist nature of the sculpture. Heimann photographed the sculpture, the Palestinian village houses in the background, just a year after the artist village was established and a few years after the original inhabitants were prevented from returning. She sought to show how Israeli art and culture blended with the local architectural characteristics. However, she was herself blind to the population who had lived in the village and was prohibited from returning.

¹⁹ See the film *500 Dunam on the Moon* (2002, directed by Rachel Leah Jones) that narrates the tragedy of 'Ayn Hawd occupied and depopulated by Israelis. See also *House* (1980, directed by Amos Gitai), depicting a residence in Jerusalem's German Colony which belonged to Palestinian doctor Mahmoud Dajani captured and expropriated by Israeli immigrants.



Fig. 15 Palmach Squadron in collaboration with the Technical Department, Sidna Ali (Al-Haram), 1947. Aerial photograph. Palmach Archive

Honida Ghanem discussed at length the concept of the ruin. She views it as the autobiographical story of a Hebrew generation who spent part of its youth walking through ruins, oblivious to the native inhabitants who once lived there before they became ruins. According to her, when the existent inhabitants become non-existent—exiles—their shadow no longer accompanies them but to a degree becomes the shadow of the shadow. This followed the destruction of the houses and villages by the Zionist Israeli state, who replaced the names with ancient Hebrew biblical names (Ghanem 2014), landscapes that came to stand for an ancient and now reborn Eretz Yisrael (Land of Israel), specific locales through which a cohesive, historical narrative for the land was given empirical form (Abu El-Haj 2003, 155–156). Anne Laura Stoler (2008) also shows that ruins reveal the visible and camouflaged destruction etched in landscapes under colonial rule. Stoler suggests neutralizing them by pointing to the forces that produce them for political interests. Thus, the Palestinian landscape was arbitrarily and aggressively erased and was replacement in consciousness by a Jewish-Israeli landscape (Benvenisti 2002; Sela 2009a, b).

Over the years, there was growing colonial interest in authentic (in oriental terminology) Arab properties in cities such as Yaffa, Hayfa (Haifa), and Akka.²⁰ Real-estate developers and interested parties began acquiring properties with these Oriental characteristics. The properties, often handed over by the state to Jewish immigrants for free, became the goose that

²⁰ See also Stein 2010, 10.



Fig. 16 Shoshana Heimann's modernist style wood sculpture at Ein Hod ('Ayn Hawd). Israeli Press Office

laid the golden egg. Slowly the original Palestinian residents and local migrants were expelled, and right-wing organizations such as Ayalim or wealthy Yuppies moved in to take their place. Over the past two decades the gentrification process has gained momentum (Sela 2013b).

Israel's archives also contain visual representation of Palestinian villages destroyed by the Israeli State. Already during the 1948 war, the army demolished various villages as part of a trend of state and security officials to keep the remaining situation and not allow the return of their residents (Golan 1992), defined as transfer post-factum by various researchers (such as Golan 1992, 123–131; and Paz 1998, 100). The army also destroyed extensive sections of the Old City of Tabariyyah in Palestinian neighborhoods that underwent ethnic cleansing after the war. Until the mid-1960s, the IDF used these uninhabited villages to train for urban warfare (Fig. 17). Villages vibrant with life before 1948 thus served as a training ground for future military confrontation in villages having similar architectural characteristics. This military activity, using live weapons and explosives, scarred the built and open landscape, leaving very little of the original texture of the villages. During the period between 1965 and until after the Six Day War, villages that were not resettled were completely destroyed, including those used previously for training purposes. These villages were wiped off the landscape to erase them from public consciousness, to suppress their memory and to prevent the possibility of their residents returning (Shai 2002; Sela 2009b).

On the margins of the archive: From ethnic cleansing to social discrimination

Over the years, Israel and its pre-state and state public, military, national, and private archives became an important reservoir of information about the Palestinians in the twentieth century. Furthermore, the fact that the occupying Israeli society preserves parts of Palestinian historiography—visual and written—shows that the control is not only geographical, but extends also to awareness, identity, memory, as well as cultural and historical spheres. The dependence of the colonized on the powerful for writing their history, and the sophisticated methods used by the occupiers to push their materials to the margins, or to veil or hide them, are some of the mechanisms that need to be deconstructed in order to form this understanding. Moreover, the release of photographs, maps and documents makes it possible for the absentee to become visible, the missing to become present, and the forgotten to become speakers of memory, restoring to life the map of Palestine and its Palestinian inhabitants prior to the Nakba.

Thus, for example, parts of the Palestinian village Lifta²¹ was destroyed by Israeli soldiers but much documentation of the village exists in various archives. These chart life in the village since the first decade of the twentieth century, making it possible to tell the village's history/story. The early images describe the life of the population and show how the village was constructed—geographically and typographically. A survey conducted by the Haganah in 1944 enables us to learn about the village founded almost four hundred years ago: the roads leading to the village, the groves, the wadis, the land and its owners, the estate owners, as well as its demographic, religious and educational aspects. For example, it shows that the village had a large school built by the villagers themselves and that a number of teachers were employed there. It also tells us about the wealth of the village and the large number of artisans who worked there—stonecutters and carpenters as well as

²¹ Reading a Visual Archive, Lifta as a Case Study, *Save Lifta* conference, July 25, 2013: <http://savelifta.org/article/%D7%9C%D7%A7%D7%A8%D7%95%D7%90-%D7%90%D7%A8%D7%9B%D7%99%D7%95%D7%9F-%D7%97%D7%96%D7%95%D7%AA%D7%99-%D7%9C%D7%99%D7%A4%D7%AA%D7%90-%D7%9B%D7%9E%D7%A7%D7%A8%D7%94-%D7%91%D7%95%D7%97%D7%9F-%D7%93>.



Fig. 17 Unknown Photographer, “Fortified Target” (Israeli soldiers training in urban warfare in one of the occupied and destroyed Palestinian villages), June 1958 Bamahane Collection, IDF Archive



Fig. 18 Unknown Photographer, “The visit of Israeli president Yitzhak Ben-Zvi and his wife Rachel Yanait Ben-Zvi to ‘lower Lifta’,” May 9, 1961. Together with Ben-Zvi couple, the Mayor of Jerusalem, Mordechai Ish-Shalom, also visits the village. Yad Yitzhak Ben Zvi Archive.

municipal and court clerks and police officers. The expulsion of the village residents is not documented in photographs. However, contrary to customary practice, an official sign hung in the Romema neighborhood of nearby Jerusalem shows that in January 1948, Lehi fighters expelled the residents of Lifta, and that the Eldad military camp was built inside the village. There is extensive visual documentation of the camp’s establishment and the settlement of Jewish immigrants from Yemen and Kurdistan in the village houses (Fig. 18). However, these immigrants suffered many years of neglect and discrimination on the part of the state, which failed to

build infrastructure or to invest in the village, causing its condition to deteriorate and creating a considerable distress for the new residents.

Various researchers show that the population of immigrants from Asian and African countries (Mizrahim) somewhat disrupted the logic of imagining a new homogenous Jewish nation. Many of them were Arabic speakers and connected to the Islamic Middle East in their customs, way of life and dress, characteristics that blurred the difference between Jews and Arabs. This threatened to some degree the cohesion of Israeli society, which viewed itself as Western and sought to disengage from the Arab region it dwelt in by denying it (Shenhav 2003, 151–152). Adriana Kemp shows how the State of Israel viewed these immigrants as raw material through which it could Judaize occupied Arab areas in the framework of a population dispersal policy. The state forced various policies on Arab Jews that confined them to former Arab areas without the choice to resist or object. According to Kemp, they had the peripheral role of pioneers against their will (2003, 39).

What is interesting is how Mizrahi residents themselves quickly adopted the oriental gaze, which at the time characterized government policy and its aggressive control of land (Kemp 2003; Nurieli 2005). While official Israel referred condescendingly in colonial terms to Jews who had emigrated from Arab countries, describing them as backward or even “unclean”, Yemenite Jews who were settled in Lifta adopted the same arrogant view concerning the inhabitants of the region. This included their Kurdish neighbors, and the Palestinians—described as infiltrators as if they have no connection to the land, or as demonic enemies. In a letter of complaint sent by Haim Sa’idi Yitzhak and Saa’dna Bussi on behalf of the Yemenite committee of the Lower Lifta neighborhood to Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion on November 2, 1952, they complained they had been deceived. Instead of sending them to Jerusalem, the state housed them in the abandoned (in Zionist terminology) Arab village, throwing them into a place of dogs, of darkness and shadow, a place of emptiness and desolation, of ascending and descending, a place eternally hopeless, a place of wild animals and infiltrators, a place bordered by enemies. They complained that the state had forsaken them, without guard and security, in a lawless place, fearful of enemies and infiltrators... we were as sheep and

lost, and yet have been granted neither haven nor certainty.

Such activist resistance of citizens against government authorities probably arose out of opposition to the mechanisms of oppression. This protest joins with the “thousands of microscopic and individual calls for resistance by immigrants that failed to crystallize into a unified and collective vocal protest, and as result are not included in the history of resistance in Israel. These calls however did not publicly challenge the country’s ideological scaffolding, nor did they seek to confront it directly. However, in actuality they undermined... the state’s authority to direct the immigrants’ existence, to decide where they live and their way of life, and in so doing pushing them into the peripheral status of a ‘Second Israel,’ formed in those very days” (Kemp 2003, 65).

Reference to the ancient Hebrew past and erasure of the centuries-old history of Palestinian settlement seeks to manufacture historical justification for the land grab and is present already before the Nakba. For example, in a photograph by Jacov Rosner from 1945, the JNF archive named the Palestinian village of Lifta Mei Naftoah, after the biblical settlement mentioned as a border between the tribes of Judah and Benjamin (Joshua 18: 20; El-Haj 2001, Masalha 2007). In so doing, the archive erased the Palestinian village and its population still living there in 1945. This indicates the conscious concealment of Palestinian settlement, perhaps hinting at the intentions of Zionist institutions with relation to it.

This conscious erasure intensified after 1948. For example, in an image titled “Celebration of the First Fruits in the Groves of Emek ha-Arazim” (Government Press Office, GPO) which includes part of Lifta’s lands, a sign reads To the redemption of the wilderness and fruitfulness of the mountain (July 1957) as if there were have never been people or a fertile agricultural settlement there at all. Ze’ev Tur-Sinai (Turchiner), the son of linguist Moshe Turchiner, received land from the state on the western outskirts of Jerusalem in the early 1950s, where he planted cherries and peaches. The photograph depicts the celebration of the first fruits, highlighting the settlers’ Zionist spirit. The farm’s website mentions nothing about sitting on Palestinian land and places an emphasis on the Zionist vision: When Zionism was not a vulgar word and building of the land was a vision and a necessity, Sima and Ze’ev Tur Sinai

established in the Arazim Valley on the western outskirts of Jerusalem, the Arazim Valley Orchards.²²

It is interesting to compare two photographs from the GPO—by Teddy Brauner (1950) and by Einat Anker (1998). In Brauner’s image, most of the village, its Palestinian planning, architectural and agricultural characteristics, still exists. They also exist in an untitled 1967 film from the Spielberg Film Archive. In Anker’s image, taken five decades later, the village is disintegrating, resulting in part from Israel’s neglect and denial of the Palestinian narrative and history, but many of the architectural features still remain, making it possible to imagine what was lost.

Embedded in Lifta, as in other villages, are layers of exclusion and erasure. Lifta, a rich and vibrant Palestinian village, was ethnically cleansed, its residents expelled, and a disadvantaged Jewish population from Arab countries, who suffered exclusion and discrimination in its new home, was settled in their place. Over the years, it became a deprived and impoverished neighborhood of Jerusalem with no infrastructure, becoming largely deserted. However, unlike most Palestinian villages that lost their Palestinian characteristics and identity, Lifta to this day has retained its planning and architectural features, and some buildings have survived destruction, erasure and neglect. Constructing a *counter-archive* (Holton 2007) to colonial archives means organizing it according to a different logic, charting the blind spots of the archive or *measuring the silence* (Spivak 1988, 92). Reviving Lifta by gathering testimonies, documents, facts, maps, images, films, memories, archival items, and consumable narratives (Holton 2007, 230) and by cross-referencing them, or by tracing remains in geographical spheres, construct a discursive space outside the national narrative (ibid, 236), creating current or future logic of the past (Derrida 1995).

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²² www.tursinai-organi.co.il.

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