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NAKBA MEMORICIDE: GENOCIDE STUDIES AND THE ZIONIST/ISRAELI GENOCIDE OF PALESTINE

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ABSTRACT

This essay furthers the debate on the Palestinian case as it relates to Genocide Studies, questioning the lack of substantive discussion of this case to date in traditional Genocide Studies fora. It reemphasises the importance of the settler-colonial dimension to Zionist settlement in Palestine, which, it argues, has so far not been explored sufficiently. The paper suggests that the 'Nakba' of 1948, which was based on appropriation of the land of Palestine without its people, comprising massacres, physical destruction of villages, appropriation of land, property and culture, can be seen as an ongoing process and not merely a historical event.

In positivist mode, Kiernan brings order to his world-historical mass of data by means of four criteria that he finds characteristically present when genocides are being perpetrated. These criteria are: a preoccupation with agriculture, an identification with antiquity, a climate of racism and a program of territorial expansion. . . [Yet Kiernan] overlooks situations that match his criteria, even where genocide has been alleged. Among others, for instance, the prominent Israeli historian Ilan Pappé has asserted that Israel's behaviour in Gaza has been genocidal. Given its national preoccupations with agricultural regeneration, biblical antiquity, ethnic exclusiveness and expansion into the Occupied Territories, Israel could hardly exemplify Kiernan's four criteria more squarely, yet he does not even ask the question. (Patrick Wolfe 2008a)

Genocide Studies is haunted by an absence and a fear. The absence is of any sustained continuing discussion of Zionist Israel as a possible example of a nation founded on genocide, to deploy a perspective of Tony Barta concerning settler colonial societies across the world (Barta 1987: 237–251). The fear is of becoming another victim of Zionist intimidation and retaliatory attacks if there were to be such discussion. In Foucault's terms, Genocide Studies is uneasily aware that Zionism, as a worldwide movement with a vigilant scholarly and ideological wing, is a panopticon. Genocide Studies knows it is being watched and can be threatened with vilification at any moment, even in a preemptive gratuitous way. To fend off such attacks, it has chosen to be intellectually submissive; that is, to suppress a key (Socratic) foundation of intellectual life, to follow inquiry wherever it may lead. In particular, Genocide Studies is haunted by the fear that the historical analysis of settler colonialism, based on Raphaël Lemkin's definitional linking of settler colonialism with genocide, may lead to recognition of Zionist Israel as a genocidal settler colonial state. The concept that the Zionist project is a settler-colonial one has been fundamental to Arab and Palestinian critical thought since the Nakba in 1948 and has been increasingly and more widely explored in recent years,¹ even occasionally branching out of the academic arena and into the political.²

In this essay, in terms of the sociology of knowledge, we investigate why and in what manner Genocide Studies, as an institutional academic

1 For an interesting analysis of the Zionist settler colonial project and its two outcomes (successful in Israel proper, unsuccessful in the West Bank and Gaza) see Veracini (2013). See also Rodinson, (1973), Ram (1999), Kimmerling (2003), Gregory (2004), Massad (2006), Veracini (2006), Pappé (2008), Piterberg (2008), Collins (2011) and Masalha (2012).

2 In October 2013 Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat and a second negotiator, Mohammed Ishtayeh, tendered their resignation. Their statement explained that they were "motivated by a number of factors, including an unprecedented escalation of colonization and oppression against Palestine and the Palestinian people by the State of Israel" (Yaakov 2013).

discipline in its various manifestations, in single authored books, in collections of essays, and its key journal, *Journal of Genocide Research*, is structured around a mode of silence on two related questions. Did Zionist Israel perpetrate in the Nakba of 1948 genocide against Palestinian society? Is it still perpetrating genocide, incrementally but relentlessly, on the Palestinian people?

Nakba Studies, Genocide Studies, and Settler Colonialism

Foucault once asked historians to make clear their preferences in a controversy, which we shall now do.³ In two separate essays, John Docker in May 2012 in an essay in *Holy Land Studies* entitled 'Instrumentalising the Holocaust: Israel, Settler-Colonialism, Genocide (Creating a Conversation between Raphaël Lemkin and Ilan Pappé)' (Docker 2012a), and Haifa Rashed and Damien Short in December 2012 in an essay in *The International Journal of Human Rights* entitled 'Genocide and settler colonialism: can a Lemkin-inspired genocide perspective aid our understanding of the Palestinian situation?' (Rashed and Short 2012), called for a dialogic exchange between Genocide Studies and Nakba Studies; an exchange that could be enabled by exploring the implications of Raphaël Lemkin's originating definition of genocide in his 1944 *Axis Rule of Occupied Europe* where he links genocide and colonialism. Our verdicts are clear. There is a very strong argument that Zionist Israel has committed, and continues to commit, genocide against Palestine and the Palestinians in terms of Lemkin's famous passage on the opening page of chapter nine of *Axis Rule*, which we separately quote in our essays:

Genocide has two phases: one, destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group; the other, the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor. This imposition, in turn, may be made upon the oppressed population which is allowed to remain, or upon the territory alone, after removal of the population and the colonization of the area by the oppressor's own nationals.

(Lemkin 1944: 79, quoted in Docker 2012a: 8, Rashed and Short 2012: 1143).

Two years before, Martin Shaw had published in *Holy Land Studies* an essay, 'Palestine in an International Historical Perspective on Genocide', where he writes of 'Israel's destruction of the larger part of Palestinian Arab society in 1948', the 'genocide of 1948' that Israel has since sought in a slow-motion way continuously to extend and consolidate (Shaw 2010: 21). In his 2012 *Holy Land Studies* essay, John Docker saluted the power and suggestiveness of Shaw's argument, especially in its linking of

3 Cf. Ann Curthoys and John Docker, *Is History Fiction?* (UNSW Press, Sydney, 2010), 184.

a genocidal mentality, revealed in Zionist and Israeli plans and practices of transfer or deportation of the Palestinians, to early twentieth century plans and practices of removing unwanted populations by nationalist elites in eastern and south eastern Europe, from the late nineteenth century to the Second World War (Docker 2012a: 4).

In his 2010 *Holy Land Studies* essay Shaw critiqued the unreflective use of the term 'ethnic cleansing' in Ilan Pappé's 2006 *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. Shaw contended that 'ethnic cleansing' cannot be considered as an alternative to 'genocide', since the practices of expulsion of populations in 'ethnic cleansing' were clearly designed to destroy ethnic and national communities and so fell within the ambit of genocide as Lemkin had defined it in *Axis Rule* as well as within the terms of the 1948 UN Convention on genocide. Shaw also considered that the term unacceptably incorporates the perpetrator idea of 'cleansing', and therefore 'has no place in social science or history' (Shaw 2010: 15–20; Docker 2012: 4–5).⁴

Docker agreed with Shaw's critique of the concept, and wrote that on the basis of that critique he decided to discuss *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* by translating 'ethnic cleansing' as 'genocide' in terms of his own explorations of Lemkin's published and unpublished writings on settler colonialism (Docker 2008b). Shaw is also critical of leading genocide scholar Mark Levene's 2007 review of Pappé's book in *Journal of Genocide Research* for its use of the concept of 'ethnic cleansing' (Docker 2012a: 4–5). More on both Pappé's book and Levene's review in a moment; they are important for our story.

Nonetheless, Docker's essay had a reservation, suggesting that while Shaw's *Holy Land Studies* essay acknowledges colonization as a factor in genocide, the essay focusses far more on the context of twentieth century exclusive nationalisms in Europe, with settler colonialism remaining 'rather gestural' (Docker 2012a: 5). Shaw quotes from chapter nine of *Axis Rule* where Lemkin argues that genocide aims at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves as groups (Lemkin 1944: 79). Yet Shaw's essay stops short of quoting the pivotal passage that follows in Lemkin's chapter nine, on genocide as a two-phase process of destruction and replacement, of destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group and the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor group. It is that passage that has, since Tony Barta's innovative essays in the middle 1980s, 'After the Holocaust: Consciousness of Genocide in Australia' (1984) and 'Relations of Genocide: Land and Lives in the Colonization of Australia' (1987), been so influential and formative in

4 Shaw also critiques the term in *What is Genocide?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007): 49–53.

theories of colonial genocide. In their historiographical essay 'Defining Genocide', Ann Curthoys and John Docker suggest that Barta's essays of the middle 1980s prefigured a major interest in the late 1990s and early 2000s in investigating genocide in relation to European settler colonialism worldwide and the possible relevance of such settler colonialism to Nazism and World War II (Curthoys and Docker 2010: 33–34).

In 2013, however, Shaw returned to these issues in another essay in *Holy Land Studies* entitled, 'Palestine and Genocide: an International Historical Perspective Revisited'. This time he directly questioned the merits of our 'heavily dependent' Lemkinian analysis, in particular our use of Lemkin's work as a 'benchmark of genocide analysis' (Shaw 2013: 3) and the colonial 'two phase' formulation. Shaw (Shaw 2013: 3) argued that Lemkin's ideas, 'while seminal, need considerable development if they are to be the basis of a contemporary approach to genocide', and yet he offered no reasons as to why. Recent nuanced analysis of Lemkin's work identified potential problems such as a perceived overly nationalistic understanding of the 'genos' and a somewhat 'static' view of culture, which he saw as providing the glue that binds individuals into a 'genos'; the genos exists by virtue of its common culture (see Moses 2008: 6). Certainly Moses made important points in this regard, but it is not a difficult task to update Lemkin with a liberal *intentional* reading of his work combined with key insights from sociology and philosophy.

To that end, Short (2010: 841) has invoked Powell's description of the genos as a 'social figuration' (as opposed to structure), arguing if we take a genos to be a continuous changing and transforming social figuration 'the effect of genocide is to disrupt that process... a living, breathing social figuration (as it were) decays and grows at the same time, producing new ideas, new institutions, new practices', from which emerge the 'future contributions to the world' that Lemkin wrote of. Genocide violently interrupts this process. We may count among the means by which genocide may be committed the measures that interrupt the reproduction of the figuration over time, the passing on of culture to children, the renewal of social institutions, and also the measures that prevent change, through the silencing of innovation in thought, art, technology, everyday practice, or through forcible confinement to a fossilised 'tradition' that is not allowed to be transformed. Contrary to Shaw's (2013: 3) suggestion that Lemkin confused *destructive*, i.e. genocidal, and *repressive*, or non-genocidal policies—if one understands that it is 'culture' that animates the 'genos' in genocide, as Lemkin did, one can understand how *repressive* policies of colonial power structures are frequently experienced by indigenes as culturally, socially and ultimately physically *destructive* and *genocidal* (see Short 2010; Huseman and Short; 2012; Crook and Short 2014).

Regarding the specific characteristics of a 'genos', Rashed and Short (2012: 1147) utilised philosopher Mohamed Abed's work to articulate the characteristics groups need to display to be logically and ethically susceptible to the peculiar harm that is genocide; when 'the members of a group consent to a life in common, the culture of the group is comprehensive, and the social structure of the group makes leaving it arduous, then its social vitality (or lack thereof) will have profound and far-reaching effects on the well-being of its individual members'. Clearly this formulation will cover many more groups than those imagined 'national' communities, but their cultural life and vitality would be capable of producing the 'future contributions to the world' that the concept of genocide was designed to protect (Short 2010: 835). We therefore suggest that, even all these years later, formulating an understanding of genocide without Lemkin's work as a 'benchmark' is a mistake. Indeed, as Dirk Moses (2010: 3) suggests, the extraordinary implication for those that do is 'that Lemkin did not properly understand genocide, despite the fact that he invented the term and went to great trouble to explain its meaning. Instead, most scholars presume to instruct Lemkin, retrospectively, about his concept, although they are in fact proposing a different concept, usually mass murder'.

These definitional points aside, the more important point for this essay is that none of these interventions, by Shaw in 2010, 2013 and Docker and Rashed and Short in 2012, were published in Genocide Studies venues.

Memoricide in Genocide Studies

Ilan Pappé in *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* brilliantly deploys the notion of 'memoricide', which Pappé defines in terms of the leitmotif of his book, the execution of Ben-Gurion's 'master plan of expulsion and destruction' and then replacement, of de-Arabisation and Judaisation; memoricide is the 'erasure of the history of one people in order to write that of another people's over it', the continuous imposition of a Zionist layer and national pattern over everything that had been Palestinian (Pappé 2006: 231). In his 2012 *Holy Land Studies* essay Docker suggests that memoricide is a term that is in alliance with genocide, indeed is an aspect of cultural genocide; it can also be related to supersessionism, itself an aspect of settler colonialism, the destructive belief in world history that some peoples can be erased or removed or superseded by other peoples and groups, who see themselves as history's true heirs (Docker 2012a: 24–27; Docker 2008a: 6).

We wish here to extend the notion of memoricide to Genocide Studies itself. If we look at the publications of Genocide Studies, year after year Zionist Israel as a possible case study is an egregious absence. Let's sample some canonical essay collections in the field.

In Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan's 2003 collection *The Specter of Genocide*, the cases of genocide discussed in separate chapters focus on Wilhelminian German colonies, Indonesian occupation of East Timor, the Armenian Genocide, the Soviet Union 1937–1938, the Holocaust, Indonesia in 1965, Cambodia and Ethiopia, Rwanda, Guatemala 1981–1983, the former Yugoslavia 1991–1999 (Gellately and Kiernan 2003). In Adam Jones' 2004 collection *Genocide, War Crimes and the West: History and Complicity*, the case studies concerning genocide focus on the Herero of Southern Africa, North American Indian Residential Schools, the American War in Vietnam, the Rwanda Genocide, US Policy and Iraq (Jones 2004). Kiernan introduces his essay 'Serial Colonialism and Genocide in Nineteenth-Century Cambodia' in A. Dirk Moses' 2008 collection *Empire, Colony, Genocide* by stating that genocidal thinking 'usually includes expansionist or irredentist territorial demands, an agrarian ideology vaunting superior land use, and a cult of antiquity envisaging return to a pristine era of ethnic purity, military superiority, or cultural dominance', making 'colonial conquest a common context for genocide' (Kiernan 2008: 205). Kiernan's footnote to this statement refers readers to his 2007 book *Blood and Soil*, and, as we can see from our opening epigraph, Patrick Wolfe wonders, aptly in our view, why such criteria don't lead Kiernan directly to the history of post-1948 Zionist Israel. There are no index references in *Blood and Soil* to Palestine, Israel or Zionism, and the cases of genocide focused on in its section on Settler Colonialism are the English conquest of Ireland 1565–1603, colonial North America 1600–1776, nineteenth-century Australia, the United States, Africa 1830–1910. In the section on Twentieth-Century Genocides, there are chapters on the Armenian Genocide, the Nazi Genocide, Japan and East Asia, Soviet Terror and Agriculture, Maoism in China, and genocide in Cambodia and Rwanda (Kiernan 2007).

Dirk Moses' collection *Empire, Colony Genocide*—in which Docker has a chapter entitled 'Are Settler-Colonies Inherently Genocidal? Re-reading Lemkin' in its opening section on intellectual history and conceptual questions (Docker 2008b)—does have penetrating comments on Zionism, Israel and the Palestinians by Patrick Wolfe in his essay 'Structure and Event: Settler Colonialism, Time, and the Question of Genocide', especially in the essay's extensive scholia (Wolfe 2008b: 122, and endnotes 6, 69, 81). (It is also of interest that in an early endnote Wolfe reflects that his 'approach' to settler colonization as genocide 'shares ground with Raphael Lemkin's two phases of genocide' definition in *Axis Rule*, Wolfe then quoting the passage.) In Section II: Empire, Colonization, and Genocide, there are chapters devoted to Cambodia, Tasmania, Nineteenth-Century America and Australia, Canada, German Southwest Africa and East Africa, the Armenian Genocide, Imperial

Russia, Nazi-occupied Poland and Ukraine. In the Case Studies section of the collection edited by Dan Stone, *The Historiography of Genocide*, first published in 2008, there are chapters on genocide in the Americas, Australian historians and the recovery of genocide, the Herero and Nama War (1904–8) in German South West Africa, the Armenian Genocide, the Holocaust, the Stalin Regime, the 1947 partition of India, Mao's China, Cambodia, Bosnia 1941–5 and 1992–5, Rwanda, Guatemala, and a final chapter on genocide of Indigenous peoples that does not mention Palestine (Stone 2010). In *Genocide: Truth, Memory, and Representation* (2009), edited by Alexander Laban Hinton and Kevin Lewis O'Neill, there are case studies focusing on Guatemala, Sudan, Rwanda, post-1965 Bali, post-Holocaust Germany, Indonesia and East Timor, Northern Nigeria. In Donald Bloxham and A. Dirk Moses' *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies* (2010) the case studies in the section on Genocide in the Late Modern World focus on Africa in the Colonial Period, the Ottoman Empire, the later Russian Empire and the USSR, the Nazi Empire, twentieth-century China, postcolonial Asia, Latin America, post-communist Eastern Europe, North-East Africa, and Africa's Great Lakes since Independence (Bloxham and Moses 2010).

In neither *The Meaning of Genocide* nor *The Rise of the West and the Coming of Genocide*, the two volumes that compose Mark Levene's *Genocide in the Age of the Nation-State*, is there any discussion of Zionism and Israel in relation to the Nakba (Levene 2005). Recall the longstanding Zionist desire from the late nineteenth century onwards, so well-known from Nur Masalha's writings, to form a nation state by deportation (transfer) of the Palestinians, which was enacted initially in the Zionist movement in Mandatory Palestine forming a state in waiting and then in the declaration of statehood in 1948, with its ideal of an ethnically and religiously homogenous state and society. Such a desire, to secure homogeneity in a nation state by deportation, is surely relevant to Levene's theoretical and historical concerns.

In our view, taken together, these canonical collections and books on genocide in Genocide Studies represent an archive of Nakba denial. Our concern is not so much that Israel is not classed as a case of genocide, but that it is never substantively discussed, even though there are good clear reasons for doing so.

Implications for Genocide Studies: Mark Levene's Review of Ilan Pappé

Ilan Pappé's landmark *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* was published in 2006. Its detailed evocation of the devastating Zionist and Israeli assault on the Palestinians during 1948 has been one reason why – alongside and

building on the historiography of Palestinian scholars like Walid Khalidi, Edward W. Said, Nur Masalha and Saree Makdisi (Docker 2012: 28)–Zionist Israel is rapidly losing the discursive war of legitimacy in world opinion compared to rising concern for the rights of the Palestinians.⁵

In 2007, Pappé's book was reviewed by Mark Levene in *Journal of Genocide Research* (Levene 2007: 675–681). The review makes fascinating reading for its implications for Genocide Studies. The review has a kind of wave-like rhythm, with 'cavils' (676) throughout yet building to a climax of anger, that he shares with Pappé, at what he refers to as 'the injustice of the Nakba' (680). In terms of cavils, Levene finds, for example, 'Pappé's broad sweep through pre-state Yishuv and Israeli history to be one-dimensional and often unsatisfactory' (675). Pappé draws too 'straight' a line from 'Herzl through Ben-Gurion, to Sharon and beyond, accusing them of aiming to get rid of the Palestinians', hence eliding 'all manner of Zionist thinking and practice' that were more cautious and circumspect and often working for a 'Zionist-Arab relationship' in which the two peoples might live together (676). Pappé underplays the importance of voices and efforts amongst Zionists who struck nonaggression pacts with neighbouring Arab villages or tried to put a brake on the 'surge towards *tihur*' (678), the enforced transfer of the Palestinians. However, Levene then states: 'The great tragedy is that once the leadership had committed to its agenda, these voices, and efforts, fell silent, were marginalized, or were co-opted' (678). The story of the 'Zionist takeover of Arab land' as revealed by Pappé, Levene observes, is 'shocking' and 'sickening' (678).

Levene says that it is 'difficult to fault the main thrust' of Pappé's 'argument' concerning the events of 1948. He finds it 'convincing and compelling, and absolutely demands the attention of readers and researchers engaged with the subject of genocide and its suboptimal variants' (676). A little later, Levene again says that Pappé's work is 'an extremely important book for genocide scholars' (677).

What, then, are the implications for genocide scholars that Levene's review suggests? For our purposes here, what is significant is that Levene acknowledges but is not interested in pursuing Pappé's situating of Zionism and Israel within a comparative international approach of settler colonialism. As Martin Shaw in his 2010 *Holy Land Studies* essay points out, Levene shares Pappé's judgement that what occurred in the Nakba of 1948 was 'ethnic cleansing', that is, not genocide: 'only one verdict is available, and that is the one Pappé uses: ethnic cleansing' (Levene 680). As an account of Israel's 'ethnic cleansing' in 1948, Levene by the end

5 Indeed, according to a speech 'On the Palestinian Struggle' on 19 September 2013 at the University of Sydney by Richard Falk, UN Special Rapporteur on Palestinian human rights, Israel has already lost the war of legitimacy over Palestine.

finds Pappé argument, for all his objections on particular points, powerful, and he becomes as passionate as the book he is reviewing:

Nevertheless, the core of his argument cannot be gainsaid. At the very centre of it is the single-minded determination of Ben-Gurion to hebraicize Palestine, and of the troops on the ground, the Carmeli brigade in particular, to act out his command. So much so that he was having to rein in the savagery he set in motion by the beginning of July, as reports mounted of his soldiery's looting and rape. With at least 5,000 men, women, and children slaughtered in the massacres, 531 villages and 11 major towns destroyed and up to 800,000 folk uprooted, mostly into exile, the point of Pappé's effort can only be affirmed. The injustice of the Nakba, all these years on, is of ongoing relevance—just as much as the Armenian genocide ... (Levene 2007: 680)

In our view, Levene's review presents Genocide Studies with a signal, if ambiguous and confusing, challenge. Levene agrees with Pappé that what occurred in 1948 was 'ethnic cleansing', and he follows Pappé in suggesting that 'the ethnic cleansing of Palestine is comparable to other such cases, and indeed can only be properly seen and understood within the wider pattern', the wider pattern not being settler colonialism, as Levene makes clear, but other instances of 'ethnic cleansing', as in 'Serbian actions' in the 'course of the 1990s struggles for Yugoslavia' (677). Levene contents himself with saying that 'Zionism may have been, and continue to be, a colonial project of sorts—albeit a rather peculiar one—begging many definitional and other questions' (676).

It appears, then, that what genocide scholars are to learn from Levene's review concerning the 'injustice of the Nakba' is that what occurred is 'ethnic cleansing', which is not 'genocide', both Pappé in his book and Levene in his review observing a commonly made distinction. However, Levene also refers the Nakba to 'the Armenian genocide' for its 'ongoing relevance', and of course the Armenian Genocide is one of modern history's iconic genocides. In our view, Levene here is presenting Genocide Studies with an urgent question: how can it not, after Pappé's book, become fully interested in the Nakba if it is comparable in terms of historical importance to the Armenian Genocide?

Furthermore, after Martin Shaw's trenchant criticisms of the distinction between ethnic cleansing and genocide, Levene's invocation of the Armenian Genocide in relation to the Nakba gains immensely added force.

More Nakba Denial: The Memoricide of Massacre Studies

Levene's review of *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* refers to the many Zionist/Israeli massacres perpetrated against the Palestinians, including

the ‘infamous massacre’ of Dayr Yasin in April 1948 (677–678). The ‘standard operating procedure’ of Zionist troops was to surround a village, and even though the villagers might surrender, ‘able men and boys were lined up, and sometimes shot’, and in the worst cases ‘a more general massacre ensued’ (678). A ‘particularly appalling case study’ of how these operations were extended to towns is revealed in the ‘assault on Arab Haifa’ (678). Levene refers to ‘incursions onto Lebanese soil’ by Israeli troops, where they committed ‘two of the war’s final massacres’ (679). And we have already quoted the long passage where, following Pappé, Levene summarises that ‘at least 5,000 men, women, and children [were] slaughtered in the massacres’ (680).

Levene’s review here has implications for the still fledgling but fast developing field of Massacre Studies, which is increasingly associated with, been taken under the wing of, Genocide Studies. In pointing to the extent, ferocity and horror of the Zionist/Israeli massacres during the Nakba, Levene’s review also makes one reflect on the refusal of Massacre Studies to include chapter-length case studies on the Nakba in its essay collections.

We can start with the 1999 collection of essays *The Massacre in History* edited by Levene and Penny Roberts, which helped launch the contemporary scholarly interest in massacres. In their Preface and Acknowledgements, Levene and Roberts confess that with only ‘thirteen essays to juggle with there were inevitably some losers, one geographical casualty being the Middle East’; rather the focus would be on the Americas, Africa, the Caucasus, China and South East Asia, the British Isles and Western Europe (Levene and Roberts 1999: xiv). No reason is given why massacres in the Middle East have been excluded, except for considerations of space, but then why couldn’t another geographical area have been dropped to make way for the Middle East? In the Introduction, written by Levene, there is mention of the killing by Baruch Goldstein of ‘twenty-nine Palestinian Muslim worshippers’ in Israeli-occupied Hebron, in February 1994, and some reflections on Dayr Yasin as well as the Sabra-Shatila massacre in Beirut in 1982 (Levene and Roberts 1999: 5, 27–28). The chapters are very interesting, ranging in time from the medieval to modernity, including a chapter on the extermination of the wolf in US history. Yet in not including a case-study chapter on a Zionist-Israeli massacre, for example Dayr Yasin, there is a danger that the collection was setting out a template of exclusion for the future of Massacre Studies.

Exclusion of the Middle East as an area of interest is also evident in *Theatres of Violence: Massacre, Mass Killing and Atrocity throughout History*, published in 2012 and edited by Philip G. Dwyer and Lyndall Ryan. Docker has a conceptual chapter ‘The Origins of Massacres’ at the beginning of the volume; near the end of the essay he explores the

thought that ‘massacres may have remarkable effects on intellectual life itself, concerned with fundamental questions of humanity, honour, and violence’. He points out that Judith Butler, in an online essay entitled ‘Jews and the Bi-National Vision’, highlights Primo Levi’s passionate response to the Sabra and Shatila massacre, Levi saying that after Sabra and Shatila the Israeli state had become morally unacceptable to anyone who survived the Nazi genocide (Docker 2012b: 12–13). Despite the 31 massacres perpetrated by Zionist forces in the Nakba (Pappé 2006: 258), in the twenty chapters of *Theatres of Violence* there are no chapters on the Middle East and certainly no case-study devoted to the Zionist/Israeli massacres during the Nakba, not only in 1947–49 but continuing, as in the 2009 assault on Gaza.

In our view, the expanding field of Massacre Studies needs to be wary of perpetrating Nakba denial, massacre memoricide. Too close an association with Genocide Studies can potentially lead to the exclusion of the Nakba from comparative Massacre Studies, even though the existence of massacres in the Nakba is undeniable.

Nakba Studies and Genocide

We are not looking back to dig up the evidence of a past crime, for the Nakba is an extended present that promises to continue in the future. (Darwish 2001)

The Nakba has a dual meaning today. On one hand, it is about the hundreds of villages that were razed in 1948 and the hundreds of thousands of refugees who lost their homes. On the other hand, Palestinians continue to suffer the Nakba daily – the separation of families, continuous confiscations of land and settlements choking every Palestinian village and town. (Abu Sarah 2012)

The concept of an ‘ongoing’ Nakba is not a new one for Palestinians,⁶ yet despite the Nakba being central to Palestinian identity, history and memory, relatively few Palestinian scholars have examined its causes. This is of particular relevance when viewing the Palestinian case through the paradigm of a struggle against ongoing Zionist settler-colonialism in historic Palestine, as when considered from this perspective, the opposing historical narratives can be perceived as that of coloniser and colonised. This is perhaps reflected in the fact that ‘Nakba Studies’ and the Palestinian

6 See e.g. Ali (2013). See also Massad (2008), ‘I submit, therefore, that this year is not the 60th anniversary of the Nakba at all, but rather one more year of enduring its brutality; that the history of the Nakba has never been a history of the past but decidedly a history of the present’ and Masalha (2012: 254), ‘While the Holocaust is an event in the past, the Nakba did not end in 1948. For Palestinians, mourning sixty-three years of al-Nakba is not just about remembering the “ethnic cleansing” of 1948, it is also about marking the ongoing dispossession and dislocation’.

historical narrative were not widely recognised in Western academic circles until the 1990s when the revisionist Israeli ‘New Historians’,⁷ including Ilan Pappé, challenged the dominant narrative of their country’s establishment.⁸ Pappé’s reference to the ethnic cleansing of Palestine during the Nakba of 1948 has gained wider attention and recognition.⁹ The University of Oxford’s first professor of Israel Studies Derek Penslar recently stated that pro-Israelis needed to catch up with the past 30 years of academic scholarship that has accepted the ‘vast bulk of findings’ by the New Historians regarding the Nakba. He said: ‘what happened to the Palestinians, the Nakba, was not a genocide. It was horrible, but it was not a genocide. Genocide means that you wipe out a people. It wasn’t a genocide. It was ethnic cleansing’ (Kalmus 2013).

That Penslar mistakenly interprets the concept of genocide is perhaps not surprising. As Docker indicates, the ‘conjunction of genocide studies and the history of Palestine-Israel conceived as genocidal, has grave implications for international law’ (2012, 29). In line with the common misinterpretation of genocide equalling mass murder of a group, debates surrounding whether Israeli policies towards the Palestinians can be described as ‘genocidal’ have, other than the essays previously mentioned, been limited to pro-Palestinian activist groups and alternative online media,¹⁰ with few exceptions.¹¹ International lawyer Francis Boyle has long contended that Israel has violated Article II a, b and c of the Genocide Convention,¹² describing how Israel has:

...ruthlessly implemented a systematic and comprehensive military, political, and economic campaign with the intent to destroy in substantial part the national, ethnic, racial and different religious (Muslim & Christian) group known as the Palestinian People. (2003: 159)

Two recent international ‘citizens’ tribunals’ have come to different conclusions about what term best depicts the Palestinian experience. The first, the Russell Tribunal on Palestine, concluded that ‘sociocide’ is taking place against the Palestinian people. It considered that ‘the systematic destruction of the essence of a social group, i.e. of all the elements that make a group more than the sum of its members, will inevitably result in the destruction of the group itself even though its members are, for the most part, still physically unscathed’. (Russell Tribunal on Palestine

7 See e.g. Morris (2004), Pappé (2006), Shlaim (2000)

8 For more on this see Masalha (2011).

9 See e.g. Benvenisti (2000), Kovel (2007) and White (2009).

10 See particularly W.A. Cook, *The Plight of the Palestinians*, which is a collection of articles relating to Palestine and genocide. See also Bahour and Dahan (2004) and Lendman (2008).

11 See Ahmed (2009); Brandabur (2008); and Davidson (2012).

12 See Boyle (2003, 2009, 2013).

2013). In our view, this ‘social death’ (Card 2003) is what makes the acts genocidal (Abed 2006: 236). A Lemkin-inspired understanding of genocide would certainly consider political and cultural destruction as techniques of genocide, not as a separate concept. Taking a different approach, the Kuala Lumpur War Crimes Tribunal recently found Israel guilty of genocide and concluded that acts committed by the State against the Palestinian people for the last 67 years amounted to genocide. The Tribunal agreed with the prosecution’s argument that allegations in relation to the charge of genocide against Israel be placed in a more general historical context (KLFCW 2013). The prosecution ruled that:

the destruction had cumulative effects of cultural and religious destruction, renaming villages and destruction of places of worship, troubled economic and physical effects, severe restricted freedom of movement, scarcity and control of water, adverse conditions of life and the impact of the 2006 attacks and the usage of White phosphorus ammunitions in 2009 on the reproductive health of the Gaza population. Basically, the harsh conditions of life were deliberately inflicted to destroy a group and the acts are equivalent to those of war with a genocidal intent. (KLFCW 2013)

This conclusion encompasses both Lemkin’s different techniques of genocide¹³ and the fact that this destruction is part of a continual structural process – a settler colonial one in our view. As Rashed and Short note, the settler-colonial logic of expulsion and elimination is apparent in the case of Israel, most famously in Israel Zangwill’s declaration ‘a land without a people for a people without a land’ and Golda Meir’s 1969 statement to *The Sunday Times* that ‘there were no such thing as Palestinians. . . It is not as though there was a Palestinian people in Palestine considering itself as a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They didn’t exist’ (cited in Cook, J. 2010a: 18). These statements are reflective of the Zionist narrative surrounding the creation of the State of Israel, a narrative that was largely unquestioned in Western academic circles until the work of the Israeli New Historians gave credence to the Palestinian historical narrative of Nakba. Despite these efforts, in mainstream Israeli society the Nakba is not so openly discussed, and commemorations of it on Israel’s ‘Independence’ Day have even been criminalised (more on this later). Israeli politicians are propagating the ‘land without a people for a people without a land’ narrative to this day. On the eve of Israel’s Independence Day in May 2013, the Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres delivered this speech:

I remember how it all began. The whole state of Israel is a millimeter of the whole Middle East. A statistical error, barren and disappointing land, swamps in the north, desert in the south, two lakes, one dead and an overrated river.

13 See Rashed and Short (2012) for more on this.

No natural resource apart from malaria. There was nothing here. And we now have the best agriculture in the world? This is a miracle: a land built by people. (*Ma'ariv*, 14 April 2013, cited by Pappé 2013)

That this narrative of denial is ongoing threatens hope for a just and peaceful resolution to the 'conflict', as the rights of millions of Palestinian refugees, 'present absentees' and others cannot be upheld if their existence is not recognised. For Pappé this discourse of elimination 'is the point where ethnic cleansing becomes genocidal. When you are eliminated from the history book and the discourse of the top politicians, there is always a danger that the next attempt would be your physical elimination' (2013). Yet as we have seen Palestinians have for a long time been eliminated from Zionist discourse.

The enduring, and contemporary, genocidal nature of the settler colonial structural relationship in this case is the main reason why, in our previous works, we emphasised it over and above other causal elements involved in the Nakba, as a periodised phenomenon of 1948, such as those that Shaw (2013: 5) cites – European nationalism and conflicts of decolonisation. Regarding the events of 1948 Shaw (2013: 4) is perhaps correct to suggest that the lens of settler colonialism alone is 'insufficient' as a causal explanation, but much of Shaw's analysis (in both his 2010 and 2013 essays) concerns that specific period in history with little attention to the ongoing settler colonial relationship and its economic, physical, cultural, religious and environmentally destructive genocidal dimensions as discussed by Rashed and Short (2012).

Fragmenting the genos – the 'Israeli Arabs'

Even more important in a way is the fact that the crime continues. Israel has pursued a policy of ethnic cleansing by other means ever since 1948 and continues to execute such policies as these words are written. The treatment of the Palestinian minority that remained after the 1948 ethnic cleansing is a first chapter in this trajectory. (Pappé 2012: 24)

In their 2012 article, Rashed and Short defined the 'genos' in the Palestinian case as all Palestinian Arabs and their descendents, regardless of where they currently reside. Shaw challenged this by stating 'the problem with the majority population was not that they were "Palestinians" ... but that they were not Jews' (2013: 4). It is certainly the case that in the structural process of settler-colonisation (see Wolfe 2006), the settlers are more often *not* actively targeting a specific group purely because of who they are. The argument that genocide is a function of settler-colonialism means that in the process of colonising the land, the settlers' 'intention to destroy' is directed at those who are in the way, and as Rose stated in relation to settler-colonialism, 'People got in the way just by staying at

home' (1991: 46) The native indigenous population is thus targeted for removal and/or destruction regardless of any homogeneity, self-affirmed national or group identity or indeed a collective identity that is widely accepted by outsiders.

It again raises the question – who defines the genos? The *genocidaires*? Or their victims?¹⁴ By defining the 'genos' in the Palestinian case we reaffirm that we are examining the *ongoing* genocide against *all* Palestinians – not just Palestinians residing in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza (the Occupied Palestinian Territories) but also Palestinian citizens of Israel and diaspora Palestinians, including Palestinian refugees, who are the single largest component of the Palestinian people.¹⁵ Shaw contends that:

Genocide has long been overall a subordinate theme in the Palestine-Israel conflict. Inside Israel, rule has been more repressive than genocidal. The Israeli right wing has had to content itself with accentuating the racially Jewish character built into the state since its foundation, rather than removing the remaining Israeli Arabs. (2013)

The use of the term 'Israeli Arabs' is symptomatic of how Israeli nationality and identity was formed at the expense of Palestinian nationality and identity, as Rogan explains:

In 1948 the Jews of Palestine took on a national identity as Israelis, whereas the Palestinian Arabs remained just 'Arabs' – either 'Israeli Arabs'... or 'Arab refugees'... As far as Western public opinion was concerned, the displaced Arabs of Palestine were no different than Arabs in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan or Egypt and would be absorbed by their host communities in due course. (2009: 342)

In the Israeli education system for Palestinian citizens, 'the development of identification with the Palestinian Arab peoples is suppressed' (Abu-Saad 2008: 39). One such method of suppression is through Nakba denial – in 2009, the Israeli Ministry of Education ordered the term 'Nakba' to be removed from a textbook for Palestinian children (Black: 2009). The textbooks used by nearly one million Palestinian citizens of Israel are in Arabic but issued and written by the Israeli Ministry of Education. Abu-Saad argues that 'the on-going resistance of the Ministry of Education to making substantive changes in the history curriculum for Palestinian students parallels the approach other settler colonial states have taken toward teaching history to their majority and indigenous populations' (2008). The Nakba denial extends beyond the classroom – the

14 Both Lemkin and the Genocide Convention refer to groups as though their existence were objective fact, although in reality group identity is not so clear-cut.

15 Note, for example our reference to the Sabra and Shatila massacre of 1982 as an example of a genocidal massacre – one not carried out in Israel or even explicitly by Israeli forces.

‘Budget Foundation Law’ or ‘Nakba law’ authorises the Finance Minister to reduce or eliminate all state funding to any institute that holds an activity contradicting the definition of the State of Israel as a ‘Jewish and democratic’ state, or that marks the Israeli day of Independence as a day of mourning (Adalah 2011). This law violates the rights of Palestinians living in Israel to preserve their history, culture and identity.

Whilst the daily living reality for a Palestinian citizen of Israel inevitably differs from a Palestinian living in the West Bank, Gaza or the diaspora, the underlying techniques employed by the Israeli government *are the same*. ‘Ethnic cleansing’ has become the latest buzzword used by activists, journalists and politicians to describe these discriminatory policies, including the demolition of Palestinian houses.¹⁶ Whilst such demolitions are usually associated with the West Bank and East Jerusalem¹⁷ they also take place within Israel itself.¹⁸ The intention of these policies was clearly stated by Ariel Sharon in an interview in 1988: ‘You don’t simply bundle people on to trucks and drive them away. . . I prefer to advocate a positive policy. . . to create, in effect, a condition that in a positive way will induce people to leave’ (Bernstein 1988, cited by Masalha 2000).

In September 2011, the Israeli government formulated the ‘Bill on the Arrangement of Bedouin Settlement in the Negev’ or ‘Praver Plan’, which aimed to evacuate and dispossess all of the 35 unrecognised villages of the Naqab/Negev in Southern Israel. Despite the presence of Palestinian Bedouins¹⁹ in this area and beyond for centuries, these villages are not connected to mains water or electricity as they are built on ‘state land’. Discriminatory land and planning policies have made it virtually impossible for the Bedouin people to build legally (Human Rights Watch 2008). Palestinian Bedouins in al-‘Araqib, a village that has been demolished over fifty times in the last three years (Amara 2013: 27), have termed recent events ‘the new Nakba’ (Rego 2012). Fortunately at the time of writing, the Israeli Knesset has suspended the bill, however it remains to be seen what further efforts will be made. Israeli politicians have in recent years also referred to the transfer of Israeli Palestinian citizens to the proposed future Palestinian state, and it has been reported that the Israeli security forces have carried out practice drills to prepare themselves for riots in response to their attempts to remove forcibly Israeli Palestinians from the Israeli State in what they term a ‘population exchange’ (Cook, J. 2010).

16 See Ross (2013), UN News Centre (2013).

17 See e.g. Newman (2009), Fisk (2010), Houk (2011) Levy (2011), Associated Press (2012), Cook J. (2013), Institute for Middle East Understanding (2013), Lynfield (2013) and War on Want (2013).

18 See e.g. Cook J. (2013), Institute for Middle East Understanding (2013), Kestler-DAmours (2011), Palestine Solidarity Campaign (2013).

19 It is worth noting the argument that the term ‘Bedouin’ is denationalising and divisive to the Palestinian collective. See Amara (2013).

The fact that these Palestinians are Israeli citizens means that we could view these policies from a minority rights perspective, as the acts of a selectively 'repressive' government. This does not preclude individual victims experiencing this as genocidal. Indeed, if we take the view that the Nakba—including the 'transfer', denial, elimination and discrimination against Palestinians—is still taking place as part of a process of settler colonialism, the relevance to Genocide Studies cannot be ignored.

Conclusion

In Genocide Studies, international Zionism has achieved one of its most successful scholarly-ideological victories. In its silent refusal to entertain substantive studies of the Nakba, without any self-reflexive discussion, Genocide Studies is on ethically dangerous ground. Because the field fears Zionist intimidation and *ad hominem* attack, it judges that a determined disinclination to pursue critical scrutiny of the Nakba as genocide serves its self-interest as a growing discipline. Genocide Studies is now on the edge of an ethical precipice, a crisis of intellectual bad faith, claiming to be making scholarly choices only, when those choices are subtended by political considerations.

This essay calls for further research and discussion on this particular case study, which has thus far been sorely neglected in Genocide Studies. When reviewing the Palestinian case, it would be too easy to focus solely on whether or not the 'ethnic cleansing' of 1948 constituted a genocide and whether the massacres that took place during this time can be construed as genocidal. Yet it is apparent to Palestinians in different contexts experiencing discriminatory policies intended to drive them away from their land that the 'Nakba' of 1948 did not end in that era and is an ongoing process. Thus in this essay we have re-emphasised the possibility of viewing the Zionist project as a structural settler-colonial genocide against the Palestinian people, one that started with early Zionist colonisation and that continues until the present day.

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