

Tom Pessah participated in the discussion on The Nakba Map in Hebrew. He's a sociologist who studies ethnic cleansing in settler societies, including the Nakba. The title of his talk is

The 1948 Expulsion as an Overall Event

I'll talk about the Nakba map, but at the end. I want to begin from stating that what's written today about 1948 is very different than in the past. There are new works by Morris, Zochrot, De-Colonizer and many others that teach us new things. Even the hegemonic texts that discuss 1948 today are not like they used to be.

There is a concept often used in these discussions, which is the Narrative. So according to the Palestinian Narrative, 750,000 people were expelled and hundreds of villages and towns were destroyed. On the other hand there is the Israeli Narrative, which claims the Arab states told the Palestinians to leave, so that they left voluntarily, or because of the war. There is a grain of truth in describing these narratives in this way: already in 1948 there were editorials in Hebrew newspapers where these defensive claims appeared, about how the Arabs left because they were told to do so. But this is only part of the story, because answering the question "why did they leave" doesn't include all what happened in the country in 1948.

The most common way in which Israelis spoke of what happened almost ignored, or marginalized, the refugee issue. The most common way was to say "there was a conventional war here." There were reports about battles, and at the bottom they mentioned that the residents of areas that were conquered left, or even that they were evacuated.

I read Abba Kovner's battle missives of 1948. This was the education officer of the Givati Brigade. His role was to preserve the fighters' morale and keep them informed. A lot of his writing is about the Egyptians, because the Givati Brigade fought them in the south. He used biblical metaphors, like the ten plagues that Egyptians suffered at the hand of our

soldiers. Parenthetically, he also mentioned names of villages that were conquered. Of course, these were not Egyptian villages but Palestinian ones. In other words, the story of the Palestinian expulsion was swallowed up by the story of the difficult, heroic battles with the Egyptians.

My research included 28 interviews with Israeli fighters from 1948. I asked them to tell me about the war, about their experiences, and they did. The interviews usually lasted an hour. They told me what happened to them, chronologically, focusing on hard battles with the Egyptians or the Jordanians, events that deeply impacted them. They spoke of friends who had been killed. Some recounted how they were wounded and left the battlefield. In between, they added, laconically, "then we conquered a village." I asked "what does that mean?" They said "we conquered them." I asked "how?" "We shot, and the Arabs left." I tried to get more information, but they had nothing more to tell, as if this wasn't a worthwhile story. They were surprised I was making a fuss about this, because for them it wasn't that important. It didn't involve a serious battle, so it wasn't a big deal. They shot, the Arabs left, it took a few hours, it was dark. There was no one left there, and they moved on.

So when people talk about a narrative – this is a narrative. They tell the specific story that happened to them. Their unit didn't go around the country and empty all the villages and towns. They were in a specific place, and they had a big battle which was a serious story for them, and they were also wounded, and on the way they went through a village and shot a bit and no one was left there. That part didn't leave a lot of traces, not for them, not for those who reported it in the newspapers, not in the battle missives, and not when they started writing history. For instance, Netanel Lorch wrote the History of the War of Independence based on the army's materials. He describes 1948 as battles and military operations. The expulsion of the Palestinians was discarded. That is also a form of narrative.

So what is the Nakba Map? It isn't exactly a single narrative, because it has many elements that are presented simultaneously, on one page. We can identify multiple narratives in it. It tells an entire history, as Eitan described, not just from 1948 but from

1882. In it we can see the accumulation of the destruction and all the expulsions. Not from the point of view of a specific soldier that went through some village, conquered it and left no people there. In the map we can see the entire pattern. We can also see how the form of settlement that the Zionists employed long before 1948 was of competing with the local residents: establishing settlements that will employ Jews and won't employ Palestinians, which made the Palestinians redundant. Once the land was bought, they were expelled.

This form of settlement blended in well with what happened in 1948: the conquest of entire sectors through indiscriminate attacks. From 1948 many places were bombarded indiscriminately by mortars, and as a result the residents left, and the lands became Jewish.

This map is a good image for our need, and our ability, to free ourselves from the narrative approach, and to look at the overall picture of what happened: the overall picture that emerges from the map of expulsion.