

A dialogue about the Nakba
Book review by Dominique Vidal

There used to be in France, at every crossing, a sign warning pedestrians and motorists: « One train can hide another ». Anyone interested in Eléonore and Eitan Bronstein's last book, "Nakba. Pour une reconnaissance de la tragédie palestinienne en Israël" (Published by Omniscience) should be warned too: "one book can hide another one". Because this work is far from the austere manifesto its title suggests. On the contrary it is a living dialogue, rich and warm, between a man and a woman who form a couple, in private and in public. Indeed, both have been advocating, for years, to raise awareness on the Palestinian catastrophe – from 1948 until today – amongst the Israeli public. And this exchange between them goes, as it should, from the particular to the general. Eitan Bronstein Aparacio arrived from Argentina at the age of 5: since his mother was not Jewish, he had to convert to enter the kibbutz the family applied to live in and became an exemplary member. But, quickly, he will engage in a "dezionisation" process based on his military experience leading him, in 1987, to leave his kibbutz.

The dialogue features high on the creation and development of the Zochrot association with which, Eitan and his comrades aim, as of 2001, in reviving the expulsion of Palestinians and the destruction of their towns and villages by the Israeli army. Describing the following as an easy task would not do them justice: bringing back to life, in the streets of Israel, the memory of the Nakba, often leads to strong reactions but also to a certain curiosity and sometimes even sympathy. This certainly explains why Benjamin Netanyahu and his allies-rivals had a freedom-destroying law voted by the Knesset: anyone who commemorates it on the Israeli Independence Day shall see its funding cut off – including the municipalities...

However, censorship required only a minor trigger: when the Ministry of Culture, Miri Regev, tried to ban the public presentation of the book, the justice disallowed her : the event would not take place on the Independence Day!

This hypothesis of a higher than foreseen sensitivity of the Israeli Jewish opinion finds, in another chapter, an astonishing confirmation. Upon request of the authors, the first ever survey on the Nakba indeed shows that the proportion of Israeli Jews who admits the responsibility of the State in the exodus of the Palestinians and, hence, accepts their right of return is much more important than one would have thought.

Most Israeli Jews know the word Nakba and 19,5% define it as an « expulsion » by the Israeli armed forces, 34,5% of which think Palestinians left “by fear” and that “Israel prevented them from coming back”. Regarding the right of return, 27,2% are in favor while 60,8% are opposed to it.

Until now, the leaders of the Palmah had most of the time simply denied or minimized their crimes. But recently appeared a database that contains a large number of testimonies from members of the militia. It is even online! Only condition to consult it: no information should be published! Eleonore and Eitan Bronstein have, of course, bypassed this censorship.

17.11.2018

Translation to English: Mélanie Hostaux