

TRANSCRIPTION OF THE WEBINAR ON MAPPING THE NAKBA HELD ON 20th MAY
2023 BY THE MOVEMENT FOR LIBERATION FROM NAKBA

2023
WEBINAR ON
MAPPING THE
NAKBA
Tracing Settler-Colonialism

MLN MOVEMENT FOR LIBERATION FROM NAKBA

Dr. Rona Sela is a curator, researcher and film-director focusing on visual aspects of Israeli Zionist/Israeli settler-colonialism, its oppressive mechanism and on knowledge production and erasure.

Dr. Heba Yazbak is a Palestinian politician, sociologist and academic, Former Member of the Knesset, representing NDA, Joint party. Her researches focus on Palestinian society in Israel, displacement, space and gender issues.

Dr. Salman Abu Sitta is a Palestinian researcher. He is most known for mapping Palestine and developing a practical plan for implementing the right of return of Palestinian refugees.

Moderator: Prof. Ilan Pappé is an expatriate Israeli historian and socialist activist. He is a professor with the College of Social Sciences and International Studies at the University of Exeter in the United Kingdom.

SAT
20th MAY

Malaysia 300 pm; India 1230 pm; UK 800 am; Aotearoa 700 pm; South Africa 900 am; Palestine 1000 am

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Hassanal: So, I would like to welcome everyone to the MLN webinar Mapping the Nakba, tracing settler colonialism. I'm sure it'll be a very engaging and interesting look into the history of the nakba and to what the term will mean within the contemporary setting. I'm not going to take too much time, so I would like to pass the floor to our moderator today, Professor Ilan Pappé, Professor Pappé.

Prof Pappé: Thank you very much. Before we begin, I will congratulate and welcome everyone. One of our speakers had some technical issue Dr. Heba Yazbak, so she will join us as the last speaker if that's okay and if Dr Salman and Dr Rona don't mind to be pushed

ahead, if you're already. I really appreciate your cooperation on this and I'm sorry that this is the kind of a last moment bureaucratic administrative thing.

Welcome everyone, good morning, good afternoon, good night, wherever you are. The Movement for Liberation from Nakba covers such a huge geographical span that we need to do all these congratulations and blessings from morning to night. We are a group of Human Rights activists and organisations who particularly focus on Asia, Australia, New Zealand, Africa, in order to disseminate information and knowledge both about the nakba, the catastrophe of 1948, but also about the ongoing catastrophe in Palestine. Unlike the United Nations, we don't only commemorate the nakba one day in a year, we commemorate and talk about it almost every day, every year because we believe that this is something that should be acknowledged, recognized and more important than anything else rectified. We have been doing some excellent webinars in the past and we still hope to do webinars like this in the future.

Before I present to you our speakers, I would like to say a few words for those who are less familiar with the term all the events. Although I'm sure many of our viewers would know quite a lot about the events of 1948. So what I'm going to do in very few minutes. Because I don't want to take too much time out of the valuable time of our guests, it's just to draw in very general lines what happened in 1948. I also want to mention that we will devote the whole year for webinars on the Nakba, this is the first one out of others to come, that will cover different aspects, both of the catastrophe itself and the the ongoing catastrophe, but also on the resistance to the catastrophe, what we call the ongoing intifada, next to the ongoing Nakba.

So when Britain left Palestine in May 1948 it was already a city, a period in which hundreds of thousands of Palestinians became refugees as a result of an ethnic cleansing operation carried out by the Zionist forces. This is an important chronological fact that usually is misrepresented and fabricated by the Israeli propaganda, namely before Britain left Palestine and before any Arab soldier entered Palestine in an attempt to save the Palestinians. Before that happened the Zionist forces already carried out the massive ethnic cleansing operation especially in the towns of Palestine and in the mixed towns of Palestine and it was this ethnic cleansing operation that pushed a public opinion in the Arab world to pressure their governments to do something and when they did it was too late and too little. Within nine months, from February 1948 until the end of that year, the Zionist forces destroyed half of Palestine's villages, more than 530 Villages, de-arabized, depopulated most of the Palestinian towns and made half of Palestine's population refugees. On the ruins of the Palestinian Villages and neighbourhoods the Zionist State either built colonies or planted recreational parks. This was a crime against humanity that was witnessed by the world. There were a lot of emissaries and representatives of the International Community on the ground, journalists, representatives of the International Red Cross, United Nations and other organisations and in fact as an historian I know that I can use some of this material to reconstruct what happened in 1948. The management, the editorial bosses, the directorships of all these organisations, which had representatives on the ground that witnessed with their own eyes the ethnic cleansing of Palestine. All these bosses, if you want these organisations, decided knowingly not to publicise what their people on the ground were sending to them. Unfortunately this is still goes on, if you read the reports of the consulates in East Jerusalem or the legations in Ramallah, you can see that many countries

in the world received quite accurate reports what goes on in the West Bank inside the 48 Palestine or in the Gaza Strip, but these reports never make it to the mainstream media or mainstream politics in the west. So this is a structural attempt to deny the criminal policies on the ground.

But the Nakba was not just the destruction of villages and towns and the Israeli project of erasing any memory of any remnant of the existence of Palestine before 1948. The Nakba is also the destruction of careers of people who would rebuild their life later on and will become the human capital that helped neighbouring Arab countries and as far as the Gulf countries to rebuild new countries, new Educational Systems, the financial systems, cultural system; this human capital that could have been invested in a free and liberated Palestine in 1948 benefited many countries in the Arab world. But the human capital of Palestine is still there even 75 years after the nakba and when in webinars like this we are not just lamenting what happened and we have of course committed to tell accurately what had been done to the Palestinians in 1948, but we are also celebrating the Palestinian resilience, resistance and determination to continue the struggle for Liberation and one that hopefully when it succeeds and unfolds would rectify whatever can still be rectified of the disaster inflicted upon the Palestinians by the Zionist movement in 1948.

In this webinar we are talking to people who used different materials in order to reconstruct what happened in the Nakba, because it has to be understood that although Palestinians of course were very much aware of what happened in 1948 and many people in the Arab world knew what happened in 1948, there was a campaign of denial in the rest of the world and not enough people knew what happened not only that they were misled by a counter narrative that actually denied the catastrophe and blamed the Palestinians for their own suffering. It is the work of historians human rights activists that used archival material, oral history testimonies, maps, clips and everything they could put their hand on that enabled us not just to talk about Justice for Palestine but also to show professionally and accurately that what happened in 48, the magnitude of the disaster and unfold and exposed the picture in its full in clear colours, if you want in high definition, so that nobody can go on and deny that within nine months in 1948, Palestine was exposed to a cruel campaign of ethnic cleansing.

I would end by saying that the Zionist movement, as a settler Colonial movement, in fact already started the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in the 1920s. When the Zionist movement both land in Palestine, from mostly absentee landlords who lived in Beirut, they already asked and succeeded convincing the British government to expel villagers from various parts of Palestine where the Zionist movement was able to purchase in the 1920s and after 1948 because the ethnic cleansing was incomplete, it continued between 48 and 1966 within what became the state of Israel, where dozens of villages were ethnically cleansed in that period. It continued during the June '67 war when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were ethnically cleansed from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and it continued ever since then until today with an incremental ethnic cleansing and I think some of you are particularly aware of the campaigns of ethnic cleansing in the greater Jerusalem area, in the Jordan Valley, in the Nakba and in the south of Mount Hebron.

With this I would now move to our speakers and I think if I'm right about the order, I think we have Dr Salman first and then maybe Rona and we'll put Hiba in the end if that's okay. So I'm very happy that we have my dear friend for more than 25 years, Dr Salman Abu Sitta, a

Palestinian researcher and most known for mapping Palestine. Many of you, I'm sure, have his Nakba map with all the destroyed villages on it, either in Arabic or in English. Salman Abu Sitta developed a practical plan for implementing the right of Return of the Palestinian refugee, which you can see in various places including in his own website and he also created a new centre in the American University in Beirut that would continue the sacred work that he has done on mapping both cartographically and humanly, demographically, economically and culturally Palestine before 1948, during 1948 and he leaves us with great hope of how Palestine would look like when it will be liberated, inshallah, as soon as possible.

Salman, thank you very much for joining us. I know you're a very busy man and I know this is morning for you, so thank you again and the floor is yours and I'm looking forward to hearing you with all the rest of us.

Dr. Salman Abu Sitta: Thank you very much my dear friend Ilan, thank you so much for this introduction and thanks to our friends Hassan al Noor, and those East to Palestine all the way from here to Pakistan, Malaysia, East India and as far as in New Zealand and Australia, which I visited for a long time in 2019. Thank you all very much because the East of Palestine is very important, as you know Ilan and all of us, has been a great source in the United Nations to support the rights of Palestinians and thank you Ilan once again for the introduction, you saved me a bit of my time to do that so I'll not repeat what you have said, is all very correct and very eloquent, but I just need to say that Nakba, as we all know is ongoing, not only for 75 years but also for 27000 days and nights and I count these because these are the times the nights I did not sleep in my bed in my birthplace, I became a refugee for this period of time, exactly on that day because in the 14th of May 1948, we were surprised in my birthplace called al-main by a 24 armored vehicles who came to our place and they destroyed everything, they destroyed houses, they killed people, they destroyed particularly the school which my father built in 1920 and as a child I saw the debris and the smoking remains of the village after and the next morning when we were hiding in a valley and I as a child, I said who are these people, I never saw a Jew in my life before, they told us they came from different countries and they speak different languages and their aim is to destroy us, so it was my mission like many Palestinians now, there are nine million Palestinian refugees today is to strive all my life to return to my birth place, which I am sure is inevitable.

But let us look at the current history, there is nothing like a nakba in colonial history. A country like Palestine, ancient country, older actually than many European countries, located in the heart of the Arab and the Muslim world and they was invaded and occupied and emptied of its people, who were driven into refugee camps, its physical and cultural landmarks were obliterated, it's geography taking over and renamed as the history is erased and claimed to be the invader's own history. The heritage expropriated and the destruction hailed in the western world as a miraculous Act of God and a victory for few writers over the savage many. All done according to a premeditated plan patched outside the country, meticulously executed, supported by the same old colonial powers, armed with an array of historical and geographical falsehoods, where the word of truth, the voice of the victim and the glaring facts of the crime are silenced and silenced, criminalised and forbidden dubbed as the punishable curse of anti-Semitism, all this is maintained not for a period of a brief war, but for seven decades and still counting, there is nothing like that in history whatsoever and

as my friend Ilan indicated, the Zionist invasion of Palestine started actually before it was creation, before the British left and before any Arab soldier came to rescue Palestinians and 220 Villages including 11 main cities in Palestine were depopulated before something called Israel was declared. So in the six weeks from April to 14th of May they conquered all these cities and 22 massacres took place, that is what triggered the Arab people's reaction and these demonstrations and Arab capitals against the massacre of the area scene. But it was only one of them. The tragic story of the massacres as a weapon of ethnic cleansing is striking, we made a detailed study of the correlation between the massacres, the place of massacres, the time of the massacres, the brigade which took it, and even sometimes at night in the names of officers with the population it was absolutely correlated. Take a simple example: the blood of the victims in the massacres of Abu Shusha and borea on the 13th of May, their blood did not dry; we've been guardians standing in Tel Aviv and claiming to declare the state of Israel. Ironically he's calling upon Palestinians and this declaration to resort to peace and quietness and not to attack the new settlers. Who is attacking the blood of these victims, was not dry when he was speaking these words. But we are here 75 years of nakba, people say it's a very long time you have to reconcile yourself with it, one would say the opposite, it is really 75 years of resilience and your position and as you can see, last May when the Israelis attacked Gaza for umpteen times, six times in six years, people in Jerusalem was agitating and in the West Bank and even in Ramle on family they were agitating and so Israel did not really have the deed of surrender by Palestinians, not at all, but we look forward to the future. As an engineer and planner we have to think of ways to remedy this calamity. Well, first of all we have international law on our side. Resolution 194 was affirmed 135 times in the United Nations. The longer history and the longer resolution in the history of the United Nations which makes this a cardinal principle of the United Nations.

But we don't need these resolutions to tell our people that this is their country. We know we are connected with it in every possible way. What we have done in mapping of Palestine we have recreated every single place in Palestine before its destruction, every single place. Our maps and atlases are in English, Arabic, and Spanish and very soon will be in Russian as well. They describe 50000 locations in Palestine, whether they are religious, cities or valleys or Hills or places or fields or whatever it is, 55000 names carved by the people themselves, out of their life, out of their history, this is the Garden Olive Garden of Sheikh Ali, this is the pigeons Valley, this is the hill of whatever it is historical and so on. These people, I call these names birth certificates, on certificates of existence in the country. Now all these names have been obliterated, removed and in July 1949 when the guardian gathered his officers and experts of the Old Testament of geography and told them now sit down, erase these names and create names for us, for the new Israel. They sat and created, not really built, not really created on a piece of paper, 6800 only instead of 50000 names and these names are artificial like for example, horizon mountain or Ben Gurion Street or whatever like that Ben Gurion airport all these names are carved by a committee who are sitting on a table, trying to create an artificial country and the Heart of the Arab and Muslim world and an integral part of Asia they did that and they created this geography of Israel. But we did not stop there, we have data for all the Palestinians in every village we know their names, we know their families, we know what land they own, we know their history, we have 400 books written by people all of the village, each Village written about its own people, we know they're custom they know their family branches and Bermudas and so on and we also know where they are today we know in which refugee camp we can plot on a screen any Village and we tell you where the people of that village are in which refugee camps, whether in Lebanon, Syria,

Jordan, Palestine, West Bank and Gaza we know that. We in reverse also can know if we look at al-bakar refugee camp, we know where these people come from, we can't plot them in the map when we plot the routes of return, and it's amazing. It's amazing the longest distance will be around 40 kilometres but there are distances which are zero distances like the distance of refugees in Gaza they could actually walk back to home actually walk they don't need ships, they don't need operational Moses, they don't need that they can just walk back. And why is Gaza very densely populated, why because they are the people of 247 villages in the south of Palestine. They have been attacked and depopulated through several, at least a dozen or two massacres and pushed into the Gaza strip. What is their home place? Their home place is half of Palestine, Southern Palestine - 50 percent of Palestine and now they are living in 1.3 percent of Palestine. This concentration camp is alive today; you don't need to read history books, alive today where the people in southern Palestine, 50 percent, are crammed into 1.3 percent. But we don't even cry about that.

Let me just add one point at this point when they return they will return to approximately an empty land. All the settlers in southern Palestine who took their land are only 62000 people, which is less than one refugee camp in Gaza so when the people in Gaza return, they will be affecting only 62000 settlers. In that I am excluding here Palestinian Village cities which have totally become totally Jewish namely Sheba and ascalan. We don't stop like at this point, we plan for the return and we when Palestinians return, as I said we know their routes, we know which road they are following, sometimes we know how many buses they need, if they don't work but when they come home they find a deserted place, a demolished place. As my friend Ilan said Jewish National Fund is hiding the debris of these destroyed villages by parks named after Western politicians, who supported the destruction of Palestine. But that is no problem for us at all because we have that we have 10 files for each village and we know that aerial photographs, we know the maps they have, so what we did in the last seven years every year we started a new competition between our amongst Palestinian young archives for their graduation to get a degree in architecture we said your graduation project is to select a village in Palestine and design it and here is the data for what it was and here is the data for what we expect it to be 10 times more population, now with internet with electricity with all that here it is go and design it and we have a British jury of Architects, distinguished architects, who receive these applications each year and they declare the first three winners. You have no idea how much the British jury, architectural jury are amazed at the brilliance, inventiveness of these young Palestinian artists. They recreated the village in the same place for the same people but of course larger and more modern like that and we have very touching stories like that the people who won the ata village which is in Galilee, are a group of young men and women in Gaza University in Gaza. They have never seen Galilee but their design was absolutely amazing and when that happened we actually let the winning team meet the people of shamata. Thanks to the new technology we Gather people of shamata, not only mainly in Lebanon but some of them are in Denmark and in Canada and they meet and the young people tell them how they built their Village and the elders in this Village are amazing to say here is madafa here, is a murtar house, here is the Moscow, church or something. It's really amazing experience we have so far amassed 270 student Architects working on this, we almost completed the construction or reconstruction of 50 to 60 Villages but we divided them geographically because they what we call the vernacular architecture because some of them are in the high Galilee where they have stones and some in the coastal strip where they have materials which are not Stone materials maybe ground and Earth material and so we divided this into 10 vernacular architectural areas and

we have samples of each one of them and by the way, just I want to conclude, when this happens it's very easy we have enough Engineers, enough labour, qualified they build similar even bigger projects in the Gulf, so they can build the destroyed villages in we plan four to six years and the cost of that is minimal cost and I think if people can take care of that without outside help but the reparations which are due according to seven articles the United Nations from Israel by the destruction is more than enough to cover the cost of construction. And by the way if I am an American citizen I would be very glad because it will be cheaper for an American taxpayer to give us this amount for one year instead of the amount America paid to Israel every year. So, in summary the right of return is sacred, legal and possible and it can be done without detriment to the Jewish citizens now, who wish to live in a free Democratic country. There is no problem, the space is enough and we have shown there will be minimum displacement of Israeli Jews to want to remain in Palestine. There is one condition which is not negotiable: no Zionism, no apartheid, and no racism, nothing of that kind. This is the only recipe for the future. Thank you very much.

Prof Ilan: Thank you so much Salman, telling us exactly how to fight erasure and denial. The project that you mentioned in the second half of your talk really makes it clear to us that the future generations will not forget what happened and would have an infrastructure on which to build the continued struggle or repatriation, return and compensation and it's incredible to hear how many young people, even in places such as Gaza, are involved in such a project that gives us hope and it shows us, as I was trying to say in the introduction, that the nakba on the one hand is a story of destruction, but it is also on the other hand a story of resilience and resistance, and Palestinians were not just victims there were also people who are under the most impossible conditions, rebuilt their life and continued the struggle to get back what was taken from them unlawfully and by force in 1948 and even before 1948. Thank you so much Dr Salman Abu Sitta for sharing with us. What we'll do now is show a clip which was prepared by Dr Rona Sela and others and she will say some few words on it later. The importance of this clip is it really complements what Dr Abu Sitta was talking about. One way of reconstructing the past and understanding is of course the physical building of models of villages that were destroyed and accumulating information about them in order to dehumanize the story of the refugees and the destroyed villages and neighborhoods. One of an additional means of doing it is going through the archives and going through the archives of the ethnic cleansing it. If you want the coloniser there is no better expert in the world than Dr Rona Sela for guiding us on how you use the archives of the coloniser in order to better understand the full picture of what happened in 1948 and after 1948.

So we will show a clip now and then Dr Rona Sela will address this and other issues that she prepared for us and we will finish with Dr Heba Yazbak. Let me just introduce Dr Rona Sela right now so that we can immediately go to her after the clip. Dr Sela is a curator, a researcher and film director, focusing on visual aspects of Zionist, the Israeli settler colonialism, its oppressive mechanism and on knowledge production and erasure. She also deals with a message to correct colonial patterns such as building posts and decolonial archives all through activism by Civil Society agents. So Hassanal I think we are ready for the clip.

[Screening the Clip](#)

Prof Ilan: Thank you Hassanal, thank you for showing us, as you can see it takes five to six years to destroy the heritage of one village, so deep and profound was the Palestinian presence on Palestine that you need years in order to erase one Village and that's why thinking about Dr Abu Sitta's work with the students so on, you cannot remove Palestine from the Palestinians from Palestine and you will never succeed and Dr Rona thank you for your patience and thank you so much for being with us and the floor is yours.

Dr. Rona Sela: First of all I would like to thank the organisers, Hassanal and Ranjan for the invitation to speak today and for screening the film. Second, I want to thank Dana Dura. I hope she's still here teaching today but I hope she's still here for the remarkable editing and animation into a meaningful sound. Thank you so much for your inspiring work. Dana, your peacefulness and creativity contributed essentially to this film. Over the years, Ilan Pappé and I had conversations about the archives and its role and what was already founded would be established in terms of content, sources and concepts and one day I received a message from Ilan Pappé, join me to establish the Palestinian archive. Thank you Ilan for the trust and cooperation, for giving me the opportunity and necessary space to create the film. Originally the film aimed to assist in raising money for the Palestinian archive and in reaching the young generation in the public in large, discussing the importance of the archive in the life of the community. I believe today as the film essay and I call it today film essay and we will speak about it later. I think today it stands for itself. So thank you Ilan for your generosity and for the inspiration to establish the archive.

Since 2009 when we first published the book made public, I have dealt with Palestinian sources in Israeli archives. I show that Israel and its archives became a major source of information about the Palestinians in various ways. The first way discussed in my previous film *Looted and hidden deals* with the seizure and looting of Palestinian archives, cultural treasures and historical sources throughout the 20th century and the power exerted over them in the Israeli archive. I show all these materials were not only captured and taken by force usually in a deliberate way by diligent bodies but also controlled in Israeli archives. Their meaning was altered, rewritten, manipulated, concealed, erased and censored. I deal with the regime of knowledge, how it was produced or erased for colonial purposes.

The second way discussed in this film deals with knowledge that was actively gathered by Israeli colonial bodies, soldiers, scouts, officials and alchemists who collected information about the Palestinians in Palestine before, during and shortly after the nakba. This knowledge production starts with the gathering of information about the Palestinian villages and cities, village files, aerial photographs, textual surveys, reports and information on Palestinian residents. It was collected by Jewish military forces before the nakba for the purpose of occupation, control and surveillance. The film also deals with the way the federal colonial machine was activated; it describes the collaboration between many of the Israeli bodies, how they operated, destructing the Palestinian villages, allocating their lands to Israeli settlements, and transforming the Palestinian villages into Israeli ones. So in the first part of the film I use intelligence information, carried out by Jewish scouts, soldiers and pilots. The aerial photographs of the Palestinian villages for instance were taken by the Jewish from the end of 1946 they helped in identifying the terrain and in building topographical maps of future military objectives, thus allowing control over areas that have no other means of access. This survey included comprehensive and detailed information about the villages and their inhabitants, historical, demographical, including the structural,

families and plants as well as architectural, agricultural means of transport, military, social, educational, economic and commercial as well as information on main major roads leading to the village. As we go into the film the village topography, water supply and war. The survey contained two extensive civilian information, historical, social, demographic and economic data. Today awakens the ghost of the Palestinian life. This information helps in imagining the nature of social life. The dynamics surrounding springs and sources of water, the orchards, fields, shady groves, family life, romantic hiding places, agricultural life, transportation and more. Also, this informative database of photographs and surveys was dry in character and served a military operational purpose before and after the Nakba. Today they provide a great deal of information in an updated picture of the life of Palestinian society before the catastrophe. Thus they suggest reading them on bottom up or against the brain, as unplug restore defined, creating new archival tools to confront the present. So in my film I use settler colonial sources which were created via mechanisms of erasure and concealment. I propose to challenge the moods of reading the practices by neutralising their oppressive colonial contents and meaning and directing them into a new channel that counter the original goals and return them to indigenous Palestinian history. This is an alternative database, structured on material from the coloniser archives challenging the one-sided worldview. I must emphasise that this is only a portion of the knowledge available about the Palestinian life and in history and will join material from Palestinian sources and by Palestinian researchers and others as we have seen in the marvelous talk by Professor Salman Abu Sitta. I focus on colonial archives; I show how they try to erase history. I want to show how these archives, their aim was to erase history, but I want to show that history cannot be erased. They too teach these colonial social features about Palestinian civilian life before the nakba, about the tragedy experienced, about the Palestinian population, about the traces of destruction left in its way when the colonisers took possession and ownership of the indigenous property and its cultural treasures, erasing all traces of the original identity. This is an archival model that starts at a different point in time while their refugee is not yet a refugee. Some people would say a time of utopia. By taking action this counter archive aims to restore the lost archive, real and emotional and in the world of Elias rule this is the memory of those who were exiled from the map and I will repeat it, this is the memory of those who were exiled from the map. This is the time of Eunice, the hero of shams, the refugee from shaib, exiled to Lebanon from Palestine during the Nakba. Established sails of men seeking a way to return to the land, while his wife, children, father and mother were forced to live in houses of another Palestinian refugee. To finalize the archival resources discussed here, the materials from the coloniser archives that served as a weapon against the Palestinian as well as diluted materials by Israel should be returned to the Palestinians and become a site of resistance. They should be organised according to a different indigenous logic, charting the blind spot of the settler colonial archive or measure the silence as Diva Gayatri showed. These anti-colonialist discourses required according to Baba an alternative set of questions, tactics and strategies locating this various painting evidence of colonialism. However at the same time we have to bear in mind that this is a long work process as we don't know exactly what Israel holds and as much and as long material is still closed and censored in Israeli archives. Materials that may be censored for an unlimited period of time according to Israeli law. Thank you.

Prof Pappé: Thank you so much Rona, thank you very much. Yes, I guess catching up and dog-tailing on you in your last sentence, I think some researchers estimated that the Israeli archive has declassified only two percent of the 1948 documentation and we especially are

still covering up atrocities, war crimes and so on which they themselves documented. A lot of countries and organisations that commit crimes against humanity have a tendency to document what they are doing. We know it from the past from different places so this documentation is there. It's declassified, hopefully not destroyed but I think it's very important to decolonize knowledge, to decolonize the archives and together jointly continue to reconstruct what happened in 1948, to reconstruct life before the nakba and also reconstruct the way Palestinians rebuilt their life and began the struggle after 1948. A very important part of this kind of reconstruction is our testimonies and oral histories and a lot of Palestinians have been recently involved in great projects of oral history and no less important is the voices of women that are such an important part of the story of the nakba not only as victims but also as members of family who in many ways led the resilience, after the dispossession and the destruction and we have no better person to talk about these aspects of reconstructing the nakba and descending its memory than our last guest Dr. Heba Yazbak, who is a Palestinian politician, sociologist and academic. She's a former member of the Knesset representing the ballad party and also a member of the Joint list party. Her research focuses on Palestinian society in Israel, this displacement space and gender issue. I'm very happy to have you with us, Heba, thank you so much for joining us on a Saturday. I know you have your children as well to deal with but we will be your listeners and make sure that you can go back to your family as soon as you can. Thank you so much the floor is yours

[Dr Heba Yazbak](#): Thank you Ilan and then thanks to the organisers for the invitation and actually I thank you all for having me in this important webinar to talk about Palestinian women and oral history issues and documentation.

The Nakba events and the establishment of the State of Israel have resulted in a fragmented Palestinian society. The Palestinian exodus began with the acceptance of the UN Partition Plan on November 29, 1947. The 1948 Nakba turned about 750,000 Palestinians into refugees, leaving only some 150,000 Palestinians in their homeland, which became Israel, and another 25,000-40,000 internally displaced persons, homeless within it. These are the subjects of my recent research that I'm sharing some of my insights with you today.

I propose to understand the displacement as part of an ongoing settler-colonial structure that has developed mainly since the beginning of the Nakba. For the displaced, this has been a traumatic experience involving murder and death, uprooting, house demolition and the destruction of entire villages and neighbourhoods, followed by state oppression and movement restrictions. The displaced have lost their lands, homes and often family members. Their voice has been silenced, their history marginalised. Adopted by many other groups victimised by colonialism, one way of addressing their exclusion from mainstream historiography is to document their oral history.

The war and Nakba have severely affected the ability to write Palestinian history, as the Palestinians have lost many of their written sources, both as a direct result of the fighting and deportation, and indirectly, as a result of "cultural looting" by the young State of Israel – as Dr. Rona Sela presented few minutes ago regarding her pioneering work in revealing the hidden materials. In this sense, physical uprooting also meant the uprooting of memory and legacy.

Most of the Palestinian written legacy in areas that became Israel: in public libraries, personal diaries, photo albums, municipal and press archives, hospital and school records – was destroyed, lost or looted. This destruction was massive in the Palestinian cultural centres of Jaffa, Haifa and Jerusalem, a home to the secular intelligentsia, newspapers and printing shops. Much of it can be found in the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem. Combined with the highly biased and politicised historiography offered by the victors based on selective exposure of the archive materials under their control, this loss provides the rationale for focusing on oral history.

Oral history narratives have been important to researchers particularly in the field of forced migration, as it is often the only available source. This is mostly true in the case of the Palestinian displaced from rural areas, which have lost all their property. As historians of peasants and other subaltern groups have emphasised, they do not leave their own documents behind, and do not speak to us directly in archival documents, which are usually produced by and for the ruling classes (Chakrabarty, 2000). In my study I found out that some informants are even illiterate, especially the rural women, so that they had no opportunity to document even if they wanted to.

Thus, conducting oral history research among elderly Nakba survivors makes the memory issue critical. The process of life review in old age may compensate for the effects of ageing by enhancing long-term memory, or at least slowing its decline compared to short-term memory. Many interviewees have said things like, “If you asked me what I did yesterday, I wouldn’t recall, but I can tell you everything that happened when the Jews came”. For them, the displacement is the main *lieu de memoire* site of memory as Pierre Nora calls it, with life divided into “before” and “after”, as the space and time of history-telling sessions are themselves a site of memory)- Such sites are created by the interaction of memory and history. Oral history is thus not only about the event, but also about its place and meaning in the witnesses’ lives. Accordingly, human memory does a remarkably good job of preserving the general contours of the past and of accurately recording important events (Schechter, 1996).

Relatedly, one of the central challenges we face is the disappearing field. The literature has begun dealing with the Nakba generation and the displaced persons in particular very late, and as a result we have very little oral documentation studies on this group. Among this silenced group we can easily find out that women were affected the most.

Like the global case of war narratives, the silencing of women is a central issue in the Palestinian historiography. According to Rochelle Davis’s study, more than 120 (one hundred twenty) village memorial books have been published since 1948, mostly by men. Women are consulted as sources in less than half, and only in subjects such as: songs, handicrafts, food and clothing. Their essential role in agriculture and their specialised skills in healing, midwifery, oral poetry and collective memory work are hardly mentioned, nor is their share in property and economic transactions and here I have to mention the pioneering work of Rosemary Saigh among Palestinian women in the refugee camps in Lebanon.

My starting point in writing the history of Palestinian displacement takes gender as an analytical category. This is part of my commitment as a historical sociologist to include the narratives of the oppressed – particularly as the narrative of the displaced as a community

barely exists in Palestinian historiography. Moreover, we must not treat displaced women and displaced men as (only) two homogeneous groups, but we have to be aware of Palestinian women's double oppression as Palestinians (by Israel) and as women (by Palestinian society).

One key element in the Palestinian women's narratives is the distinction between urban and rural. Rural men have been relatively absent from the historiography of the Nakba. This is indicated as early as in Arif Al-Arif's seminal 1956 study (see al-Arif, 2013). Rema Hammami (2010), who conducted perhaps the only study that examined the historiographical absence of rural women and men suggests that within the male narratives of war and colonialism, the urban story is seen as more important. While the Palestinian peasant man represents the timelessness of agricultural life prior to 1948, he is not the land itself, but the signifier of an immutable attachment to it. The Nakba suddenly thrusts **قرد** him into non-cyclical time: he is forced into modern history (Hammami, 2010). For the rural man, losing control of the land meant losing control of his destiny, of his very essence, something that cannot be said of his urban counterpart (Barakat, 2000). Conversely, village women are often described as "appendices", as objects that the masculine **ماسكويولين** hero is trying to protect – together with the land and community – remaining outside history and modernity (Hammami, 2010). Although not totally silenced like their rural counterparts, only few urban women became active narrators of the traumatic past, and they have not been allowed to narrate women's particular view, but to represent the urban experience as a whole.

As in other historical contexts, Palestinian women have adopted the social stereotypes against them. Many of my valuable informants – especially those displaced from villages – initially claimed "lack of knowledge", despite being able to provide rich and important information as the interview unfolded. This was very much the general image- Unless specifically told, otherwise, people used to refer me to men, and when asked specifically for women, they would often say things like "I know a woman but I don't think she can help you". Thus, most of the women I interviewed were contacted through the "snowballing" services of other women. As such "gendering the field" is a main issue to deal with during the oral history project. No doubt, writing oral history among Palestinian women is a mission that is still in its infancy. Including women in the historiography is an essential issue, as is the documenting and voicing of their narratives.

Documenting oral history among elderly Nakba survivors, and women survivors in particular, is also an *urgent* mission. Especially these days, when Israel is doing its best to legitimise and normalise its crimes, it is also a way of confronting the occupation, colonial practices, Zionist erasure project and putting the oppressed narrative and history in the centre. Oral history validates Palestinian collective memory, rights and claims. As such, it is more than a method of documenting narratives, but also a political tool. I hope that this oral documentation contributes not only to Palestinian history, but also to doing justice with these courageous women, who for sure spread a legacy of truth, justice and hope for the coming generations, for liberation, return and sovereignty. Thank you.

Prof Ilan Pappé: Thank you very much Heba. We can see that reconstructing the history of the nakba is also part of the struggle for gender equality, women's rights, that indeed when

you are rebuilding a future on the basis of the catastrophe and traumatic, collective and individual past it's also a chance to heal and recover aspects of the society as a whole and I think that's why so many people around the world have, and rightly in my mind, so much hope about the Palestinian future once Palestine would be liberated because it is not just it's a comprehensive struggle for justice in all its aspects not just Justice for the refugees, not just Justice or the oppressed Palestinians but Justice for women for workers and so on we are not building a utopian picture of post-colonial Palestine. We are I think building together a very realistic a view of a country once liberated that would radiate and influence the Arab world as a whole and beyond and I think that's why so many people around the world from different persuasions from different cultures, from different backgrounds see Palestine as epitomising the struggle for justice in the world. So thank you very much Heba highlighting aspects that I think many of us who deal with the Nakba are not always aware of and I think that really complemented very well the contributions today.

We have time for questions and answers my suggestion is the following that I would read in one go the questions because they're not that many but they are very important and would go in a similar order that we did the talks and you can choose what part of the questions is relevant to you and answer and maybe also use this to for expressing your final thoughts on the topic given also what you heard from other contributors. I think that would make sure that first of all we all hear the comments of everyone who made the effort and thank you for telling us what they think and so on and then we also have a chance to go back to our speakers and hear the thoughts of what is being commented and asked but also of if there's anything else they would like to add to our webinar.

So we have several comments from Leila Passah. She said thank you Professor Pappé and Dr Salman for a gripping presentation. Thank you Leila. It is the Palestinian people's history that needs to be highly publicised. I am very excited to see the engagement of artists, young people and others in the rewriting of history. How can a global campaign in freeing Palestine use the factual narrative history be created? It is more than 75 years and too urgent not to be doing something globally on a large scale, especially together with the incredible human resources of Palestine that we have today. Leila also said about the film as incredible! Thank you Dr Rona it should be shared very widely worldwide. Visuals are very powerful and film festivals are organised around the nakba and get an audience outside of Palestine and those who know nothing about Palestine, let alone its history and the rich cultural heritage. Eurite asked why the world did not and does not listen or tell about the continuing nakba and how can it be changed? And Leila adds to comments that it is legal for the Israeli government to nationalise Palestinian property. So important to learn about the pre-Nakba and ongoing - how and where can we hear more about the women's contribution in reconstructing the nakba. Great to hear from two women leaders here in the panel. Dr Heba, finally thank you for highlighting women's role in this important point of History, the oral history sharing experiences of the nakba in spite of the gender biases they face, how of these women passing on to the younger women the stories and what measures are being taken to promote intergenerational work on this issue.

So I suggest that each one of you will take five minutes to respond and then I can sum up the webinar. I would be very grateful. So, Dr Salman Abu Sitta, if you don't mind we will begin with you, if that's okay. Thank you very much.

Dr. Salman Abu Sitta: Thank you but first of all I cannot help but to preface my comment on the wonderful work of the Nakba archives. It is a most valuable contribution and when I saw Rona film, I'm very touched by the accuracy and documentation of what we knew in our minds but we did not see in actual fact. So in the 1950 to 1960 when Palestine emptied with its people, she demonstrated very clearly what happened and how people deliberately, I mean the Israelis then we recall, deliberately destroyed the Palestinian landscape and replaced it by that. But the point which comes to mind immediately was the time when **new and gcp in Luzan** as you know Ilan quite well while debating the return to the refugees and sharing it if I'm not wrong I was discussing here how many we can return back and so on. This was done at the very same time they were destroying and rebuilding they destroyed places into from the for the new settlers. So I salute the archive and I urge everyone who hears us to contribute any data they have contributed anything they can for this.

Just a quick remark about how we can promote the story of a Nakba and actually return. I have a great faith in young people. Like Ilan I have a chance to speak with them in Europe and America and even as far as Australia and I find them very attentive, very willing to learn, surprising to some many of my audience approved 30 percent or four where young Jews and they tell me we have been cheated as they were not told about that and as you well know many of them are now in the you know campaign to support Palestine. So they have fresh minds and they have good conscience, clean conscience and they will not be contributing to the crimes committed against Palestinians. So I think we should really support them and increase the campaign to let them know the facts. Now I'm not naive enough to think that their opinion will change governments but in due course like in South Africa the public opinion reached a point in which governments could not anymore support an evil regime. The situation in Palestine and Israel is different because the West has created Israel as within said if we do not have Israel we have to invent it, so the struggle is continuing but there is no question in my mind, crimes in history cannot be left unaddressed anymore.

Quick remark for Heba. Thank you very much for your explanation but let me tell you something which you already know. You mentioned Rosemary, my good friend and here, rural women do not need documentation. They are actually the ones who carry their children and their Nakba and set up a tent for them or under a tree and feed them, while the men were just waiting and wailing and crying and so on. Women have really created the foundation for Life after nakba in addition to before of course and they do not need you know extended recognition I mean their children their husbands and so on do that I salute them. Now urban women as you know have drifted to Beirut or Cairo or something in good time unlike rural women. Because rural men and women live on the land, they are born on the land and they die and are buried in the land. So the land for them is their life and they cannot forget that and thank you both for your very useful contribution. Thank you.

Prof Ilan: Thank you so much Salman who is with us, thank you for your wise words. I will immediately without any delay move to Rona and then we'll hear from Heba.

Dr. Rona: Thank you all for the comments and I'm honoured here to be with Dr Salman, Dr Heba and of course with Ilan Pappé. Thank you for all day the tremendous contribution you know to the research and for me Pappé, Abu Sitta you know the leaders you know of

research and I embrace the opportunity to speak together at the same time. I want to speak about censorship and erasure. This week a parliament member Raymond invited me to the committee of the Science and Technology about the exposure and erasure of a Palestinian materials and I think that one of the main problems and that's I also mentioned in my talk is the fact that Israel afraid of the Palestinian history and the Palestinian history is stored in its archives which cannot be erased and for instance I read two instances about the massacre in the interior scene. I have a long correspondence with the archive, the last one stated that it should be in 2022 and it is still censored. I interviewed the soldier and it's a long story. You know the materials from the previous scene but the soldier told me what you can see in the photographs that Israeli censor is well afraid of three photographs okay only three photographs seriously. You see Palestinian hanging on the tree and you see them as the time, so why is Israel still afraid of these three images? They promised in the committee that they will discuss it but you know their answer you can expect what would be the answer. It will be closed again and again and again and then the material that was taken in Beirut in 82. They copied the archive itself, part of the archive was returned to the Palestinians but they copied it without asking permission in advance to copy the material. They returned only part of the material: all the cultural archives like dresses, like things, like photographs, like art exhibitions, all of them were still closed where they were archived. But what they have returned they copied and they get to an Israeli institution not revealed who receives the materials. So you see the mechanism of power that was extracted you know but by the Israeli archive in order to conceal it in history. But as I argue history cannot be deleted. You always find testimonies - the power of testimonies as Ilan said documents every time something will come up some evidence, some remains that will testify about what happened so from my perspective the fact that Israel you know conceals the material just teaches us you know that it has what to hide, okay, otherwise why they wouldn't open you know the materials so my personal fight is with the Israeli archives as in Israel to be certain and I admire the work that Heba is doing and Salman Abusita is doing with Palestinian sources. This is highly important but I'm in Israeli and I think my goal as a researcher is to fight to open the materials that are censored in Israeli outside and to release them and to reread you know this archive, to point the mechanism of power that manage you know the Palestinian archive and to expose the material that is still open and to fight for opening the material that are still closed. So this is my mind that you know to work as an Israeli in Israel archives and I think together we can build the future Palestinian archive. Thank you.

Prof Pappé: Thank you very much Rona. Heba please.

Dr. Heba: Thank you and thank you Dr Salman for your note and I would like to engage with it regarding the Palestinian women oral history and I would like to say that one of our challenges is to bring out the stories, the narratives from the private sphere into the public sphere and to spread it and to share it and I think that this is our urgent mission nowadays because we know that we are working in a disappearing field, the field of the elderly nakba survivors, the especially nakba woman that they had a very essential role in keeping the Palestinian narrative alive from generation to another generation and another generation but unfortunately they were marginalised and absent from the academic writings and from the national discourse. They are not there so I think that one of my commitments and one of our urgent goals and missions is to bring these stories, these narratives, these very important narratives out of the public sphere to publish them. So I think that this needs this needs from us really to organise also our efforts and to make like a collective and the union maybe as

well as a efforts or projects in order to have all of these discriminates together in order that we can really build an oral history archive that have the narratives of the Palestinians also who the people who were who remained inside Israel the people who aren't against the West Bank and in the refugee camps and everywhere. I think that oral history making among the elderly nakba generation and is very urgent thing that I think that woman is the key person and key measure part of making and writing this history because if we don't do things very urgent and quickly we could unfortunately lose a more and more narratives that are very important to for our narrative, for our national narrative, for our equal narrative or our justice narrative and for resistance and for the colonised also the Zionist ongoing narrative. Thank you.

Prof Pappé: Thank you so much Heba. I think you'll let me just say some concluding remarks and then we'll close the meeting with Hassan al in the last sentence. The two points I really like to mention one is the importance of what Antonio used to call cultural resistance. Cultural resistance is an integral part of the comprehensive resistance of the colonised and oppressed people against the coloniser and the oppressor and what we learned today is proper academic work and as Dr Abu Sitta commented. Accurate professional academic work is part of the struggle, its part of the cultural struggle and therefore it's part of the struggle which means that academics who work on Palestine are also activists but it also means that activists have to be knowledgeable as academics on the topic. It's not enough to have slogans in the sense of justice there's a need for proper research proper understanding and knowledge and I think all of us were a bit older are really hopeful and amazed by the willingness of the younger generation to study, to learn, to research, to continue the work of academics and of activists. So that the knowledge production is both continuing and also challenging the dominating knowledge production by Israel and the Zionist movement and this is my second point, I think we should not underestimate that the denial of the Nakba is still. The refusal of the United States and European countries to participate in a simple ceremony for commemorating the Nakba in the general assembly is one of the most shameful moments in the history of the West. One of the most shameful moments in the history of the United States and Britain. To boycott such a commemorative moment is really beyond comprehension and it shows either ignorance, which I don't think there is, I think they know exactly what happened, but it shows cynicism and immorality of the global north, which is why one of the reasons we created MLN because we believe the global South should be far more important in assisting the Palestinian in the struggle of the Liberation because we're so disappointed by the global north and it's hypocritical attitude towards the Palestine question. This just followed the unbelievable remark by the president of the European Commission that Israel bloomed in the desert. I think what our research and activism shows is that actually Zionism turned a blooming country into a desert and I think that this is something that we should understand that some of the most educated people in the west, some of the most brilliant academics, still appear as total idiots and ignorant when it comes to Palestine. The only explanation for this is either they are intimidated or they are bribed to say these things because one knows that at the level of education that they have and the level of knowledge that they have, they cannot deny the truth. So if they deny the truth there is a cynical reason for it and I think that's very important to understand what kind of a coalition of fabrication in lies we are facing but we're not giving up and we're not giving in and that's the reason we created the MLN for as Dr Abu Sitta said for east of Palestine. I'm sure enough people are working west of Palestine so I think it's very important to continue the effort east of Palestine to educate, to disseminate, to debunk the mythologies and to

expose the lies about Palestine. It's the only crime against humanity in the second half of the 20th century that is still denied and concealed for too many people. But I'm sure that when we continue our work this will not be the case in years to come and I thank you all for your personal and individual efforts in contributing to defending the nakba memory, in challenging the project of fabrication and this information and I think that many of our listeners hearing on zoom and on our live streaming benefited and received a lot of information and probably the most important message that the definition of Israel as a settler colonial state, the definition of Israel is an apartheid state, the definition of the nakba as the ethnic cleansing and the policies of Israel today is not a matter of political opinion it's a result of industrious professional and accurate research and I think when you go around and talk to people about Palestine you should understand that your positions are based on thorough professional research and on the truth when it comes to the truth the Palestinians have very little to lose and I think with this I would end, I would thank you all for being with us and I hope you all to see in our next engagements and again many thanks for Dr Abusitta, Dr Sela and Dr Yazbak for sharing with us their knowledge and time. Hassanal, I will pass it to you.

Hassanal: Thank you, Prof, very well true and very well powerful because as part of MLN's also struggle to keep the truth to the narrative of what happened with the nakba, to the Palestinian narrative but the truth of history itself. As part of our efforts to inform everyone in the audience and to our speakers, the webinar has been recorded and it will be also placed onto our website and our YouTube channel. Please feel free to go there, share the videos with your friends, your networks and also follow the website to keep up to date because this won't be the last webinar. We'll do in fact we plan to do more webinars and specialty detailing the history of the Palestinian struggle as we move forward, preserving the truth from the lies and disease. So once more I would like to thank Prof Pappé for moderating and Dr Rona for sharing her insights and for the documentary, Dr Salman as well and also to Dr Heba. Thank you everyone for joining us today and we will see everyone next time on our next webinar. Thank you very much bye everyone