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Studying the *Nakba* and Reconstructing Space in the
Palestinian Village of Lifta

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Abstract

The following essay portrays two interferences with the landscape of this country, where the remnants of Lifta, a Palestinian village whose residents were expelled in the war of 1948, lay to this day. The first is the case of a day trip of Jewish-Israeli high school students to the abandoned village, lead by refugees from the village and a representative of 'Zochrot', an association that planned this unusual trip. The second is Construction Plan #6036, which upon implementation would completely change this landscape. The discussion here evolves around the attitude toward the Palestinian *Nakba*, as illustrated through the students' tour and the construction plan.

During the students' visit to Lifta, the school's staff bared the organizers from filming the tour. The question that arises here is what is it about the filming that it is perceived as a threat to the school. Roland Barthes's photography theory will help us understand this seemingly marginal incident. Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic theory, and particularly his analysis of the mirror stage, will lead us to view the filming as a 'disturbing mirror,' one that is too difficult to stare back at. The construction plan, at least in theory, aims at preserving the Arab houses of the village. The plan regards the village's natural environment in an almost sacred manner. Does it regard in the same manner the suffering of the people who were forced to leave their homes? In this essay I will argue that the plan's approach to site of this Palestinian village is a standard Oriental approach. Aesthetics is perceived as a centrepiece, while a constant effort is made to avoid and push away any political attribution to the events that took place inside the walls of these houses.

Comparing these two different interventions may shed light on the attitudes of Jews in Israel toward the Palestinian *Nakba*.

Keywords

Palestinian *Nakba*; Photography theory; Psychoanalysis; Mirror stage; Landscape; Israel

For him [Walter Benjamin], the figures made of marzipan were a legitimate, even necessary, object for serious philosophical and historical thinking. It was as if in these simple products the deep idyllic and materialistic processes, which shaped all of modern reality, came together. (Mali, 1993: 52-69)

Introduction*

A Jerusalem high school ran a seminar on Zionism in the school year of 2003/4.¹ The school's staff decided to introduce the 'other side' of the Zionist enterprise to the students, that is, the Palestinian *Nakba*. For this cause, the students were taken on a field trip to the village of Lifta. Since 1948, when the Zionist forces conquered the village, Lifta had remained abandoned. The study tour was led by Zochrot, an organization that attempts at bringing the story of the Palestinian *Nakba* to the attention of the Jewish Israeli population.

The tour was led by Ya'acub Odah, a Palestinian, formerly a resident of Lifta who today lives in East Jerusalem on lands that he owns, which in the past belonged to the village of Lifta. The first part of this text aims at analyzing this tour from the point of view of a seemingly unimportant incident, which took place (or rather, was prevented from taking place). One of the organizers who wished to take pictures during the tour was asked by a school staff member to not take pictures of any of the students. I wish to argue that from this behaviour one can learn about the attitude (of the Israeli-Jewish public) to the Palestinian *Nakba*: On the one hand, the teachers initiated and lead an unusual, out of the ordinary study tour, but on the other hand, they prevented the tour from being documented by photographs and video.

The second part of this text will examine a new development plan designed for turning Lifta into real estate property: an expensive living and commodities area, which will also attract tourism, while at the same time maintaining its village-like atmosphere and keeping some of its original buildings and structures. Reading this and an earlier development plan from the 1980's will enable us to examine common attitudes toward the *Nakba*, as these are revealed in plans for reshaping abandoned Palestinian villages. It is of great significance that the plan does not ignore the many remains of the Palestinian village; on the contrary, these are deconstructed and are a central element of the new design, dozens of them to be preserved. In addition, the natural scenery of the place—a spring, trees, terraces—are a major component of the plan, which strives to preserve the authentic surroundings of Lifta.

Israeli forces conquered Lifta in 1948. However, unlike many of the 530 Palestinian villages and towns which were also conquered during the war, many houses in Lifta remained untouched, yet the village was never 'officially' resettled. Unlike the village of Ein Hud (which later became Ein Hod) and Ein Karem (which became Ein Kerem), Jewish residents did not inhabit Lifta. This does not mean that the original houses remained vacant. Several Jewish families did move (illegally) into formerly Palestinian houses. Some of these families have been living there for a number of decades, and it seems they have become permanent residents. In another part of the village, people from the fringes of society have settled: drug addicts and drug dealers, run-away teenagers, as well as nature freaks. Even so, there are more than a few dozens of houses, some falling apart, which have remained empty and stand as gravestones marking the events that took place here during the 1948 War.

Over the years, Lifta had remained a different and unique place, for several reasons. Geographically, it is part of the 'new' West Jerusalem; however, it represents and symbolizes the architecture and the topography of Arab towns. Unlike the Palestinian villages of Ein Karem, Deir Yassin and Al-Malha, whose houses also remained untouched (relatively speaking) but were absorbed

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1 Concealing the name of the school (and further on other identifying details) follows the request of the school staff.

into West Jerusalem and quiet naturally integrated into that space, Lifta remained in its place as if time froze. Topographically, it is located lower than its surroundings; this also gives across a feeling that Lifta exists underneath the surface of the city. It exists in a different level of history, geography and society. Those who have inhabited Lifta since 1948 are the 'other' for the larger Israeli public. They exist outside the borders of law and order, and also outside our vision, since they usually go about their shady businesses down below, near the village's fountain.

As mentioned already, Lifta is unique in that unlike many other villages its houses remained almost intact but Jews did not inhabit them as part of the Zionist enterprise. Many of Lifta's refugees live today in East Jerusalem, not far from their village. This is not unique to Lifta, as many refugees live in close proximity to their pre-1948 towns and villages.² However, Lifta is distinctive in that many of its original inhabitants are not citizens of Israel but rather East Jerusalem residents, who have a limited civil status.

'Yes' to Touring, 'No' to Photography

A teacher from a Jerusalem high school, who is in charge of the school's 10th grade classes, turned to Zochrot and asked for assistance in creating an educational program that deals with the Palestinian *Nakba*, as part of a two-day seminar on Zionism. The reasoning behind learning about the *Nakba* during a seminar on Zionism is to try and see the 'other' side, the Palestinian side, which was so fatally hurt by the establishment of the State of Israel. In her letter to Zochrot, the teacher wrote: 'We must expose them to the injustices of 1948. As for a solution—each should choose the path he or she finds best suiting.'

There is no doubt this should be seen as an extraordinary initiative by an Israeli Jewish school. Classes on Zionism in these schools do not present the students with the Palestinian story of loss and of forced exile which began in 1948.³ Therefore, the school's request from Zochrot was a surprise as the teacher in charge of the seminar stressed a desire to show the students a point of view that is critical of Zionism. Zochrot and the school staff together decided on holding a tour of Lifta.

At the meeting point in the entrance to Lifta, the students and teachers are welcomed by members of Zochrot, together with the refugee Yaacub Odah who had lived in Lifta (as a child) until 1948. Following a short introduction on the goals and activities of Zochrot, the microphone is passed over to Yaacub. 'Welcome to my village, to Lifta,' he says to the students. 'I hope the day is not long before I will be able to greet you in my house, which will be rebuilt here once again.' The students and their teachers are astonished at Yaacub's straightforward and definitive opening words; at once he brings to the surface all the fears and anxieties Jews have concerning the return of Palestinian refugees.

The group follows Ya'acub down, toward (what was) the village centre. Lifta's spring, which flows into a built pool, is a cherished nature spot, well known to Jerusalemites who come to bathe in it. On the day of the school trip, like other days, the place is buzzing. The group sits next to the spring and Yaacub begins to tell the story of the village and its history, using notes he had prepared beforehand. He presents the students with historical facts and figures and with statistics, and speaks little of his personal life; for example, the school he had gone to that rests at the top of the village, which today hosts a Jewish ultra-Orthodox Yeshiva (seminar). Ya'acub was born in Lifta and together with his family was forced to leave following military pressure placed on the village by Zionist forces.

2 Perhaps the best example for this is the refugees of Safuria. Some 15,000 refugees (and their descendents) live in crowded conditions in a neighborhood in Nazareth called Safafra (named after the village.) Though they live today only several kilometers from their lands, they are not allowed to return to it.

3 One (coincidental) example is the educational index 'Bazz', which lists links for high school students: Under the title 'Zionism' there are many links, but none of them deal with the Palestinian *Nakba*. <http://www.bazz.co.il/cat.phtml?leaf=1842&page=1>

The members of Zochrot are joined by a female student from the (Hebrew University's) Geography Department, who brought along a video camera and was documenting the tour. Her focus is on Yaacub leading the tour, but she also wishes to let her camera wander around and get a sense of the total experience. Members of Zochrot have brought a digital camera and they, too, ask to document this unusual tour. Here, the teachers take a sudden move and together with the school principle, who had also joined the tour, ask firmly to refrain from taking any pictures of the students. A second appeal is denied once again, and the explanation given is that there is no way to know who might see the pictures, and what damage it may cause. In a summary email sent to Zochrot by the teacher in charge of the seminar (several days after the tour took place), she explained: 'There is openness—but there is also a border that should not be passed. The school principle's position is that it might damage the school to be visibly identified with Zochrot. (I don't know if you are aware or not that we are a private school. Though most of the school's budget is from donations, getting money from parents is still significant.) A picture of our students, which may later be published without our knowledge is problematic, as far as the principle is concerned. I do hope you understand this.' What can one document in a picture? This depends on a play between the photographer, those whose picture is to be taken and the imaginary spectators of the photographs.

The study of the Palestinian *Nakba* has a clear line, drawn by the school staff. To learn from a refugee of the injustices caused to the Palestinians—by all means; but to document this in pictures and video is out of the question. The staff clearly said, 'there is no way to know where these pictures will get and what sort of damage that may cause.' The seam line is in the sphere of visibility, or in enabling a glance into the school's educational programming. To expose themselves (and their students) to a number of Zochrot members and several other passers-by in Lifta is considered reasonable, and is also subject to physical control by the staff. To let others peek into this tour and this experience—who knows how they would react? It seems realistic to assume that if this were a study trip to the Engineering Corps Museum and Monument in Latrun or a tour of Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum, there would be no resistance against documentation.

It seems pretty obvious why this study tour of the Palestinian *Nakba* would be controversial among the Israeli (Jewish) public. But what can its documentation teach us about this act of learning the story of the *Nakba* and exposing the wrongdoings of 1948? What was it about the photography that threatened the school so much, that its principle was worried about future donations to the school? Why is it that on the one hand, the tour is perceived to be 'an important objective in itself,' in the words of the teacher in charge—even though students and others who hear of it may cause some sort of damage to the donations and support of the parents—while on the other hand, taking pictures and videotaping the tour is considered an unjustified risk.

There seems to be a sort of scale; on one side of the scale we have educational activities that are acceptable by everyone and therefore allowed to be photographed and documented; and on the opposite side of the scale we have forbidden activities. The tour of Lifta, so it was revealed, lies somewhere between the two extremes: you may conduct the tour but you mustn't take pictures and expose its existence to unknown others. Photography is placed outside the boundaries of this 'important' educational program. Looking into theories of photography laid down by Roland Barthes in his book *Reflections on Photography* (1988) will assist us in understanding the meanings of photographs in the specific context of this tour of Lifta. In doing so, we can gain a better understanding of the attitudes of Israeli-Jews concerning the 1948 Palestinian *Nakba*.

Teaching the *Nakba* outside the Frame

The central observation Barthes makes is that a photograph is a testimony of 'that was there.' 'In the art of photography, one can never deny that **something was actually there**. It includes two positioning: one of reality, the second of the past; and the two aspects come together...this is the essence of the art of photography (the central element of the object?) At the heart of photography lays

‘what was’, or rather, ‘what will no longer be...What I see now in front of me was here, in this place between the infinitive and the subject (the photographer or the spectator); that thing was here, but nonetheless was immediately removed; it existed and was present—there is no doubt—yet it is already detached.’⁴ (Barthes, 1988: 79-80)

What ‘could have existed’ in the picture of the students in Lifta is the testimony that they had been exposed to the highly delicate issue of the Palestinian *Nakba*. The facts that can easily be seen in the pictures could have provided vindictive evidence of that exposure. This, it seems, was too much for the school staff to take on. ‘Lighter’ evidence, such as the oral testimony of the participants, seems to be within reasonable, bearable boundaries. A picture of students and a Palestinian refugee during a tour of the refugee’s village is already too much.

Barthes says that photography also creates a link between the present reality and the past. This past, according to the school teacher, is closely tied with the ‘injustices of 1948.’ Creating a connection, through the pictures, between those injustices and the present, is a weight too heavy for the teachers to carry. In other words, showing a picture of Israeli-Jewish students learning about the Palestinian *Nakba* is considered a relatively high degree of accountability (one could even say ‘pleading guilty’) for the events of the 1948 War, which resulted in the Palestinian *Nakba*. The photo of the students and the teachers in Lifta places them in the scene where the *Nakba* occurred at the same time as they are studying the subject. In some way, they become part of what happened in 1948; they are witnesses, spectators of that tragedy. The photo is proof of that testimony. After being part of such a photo, one can no longer say: ‘I did not know.’

Barthes says that photograph is always a place of death. The photograph of the students in the Palestinian village is a testimony to the moment when ‘we did not know’ was abolished and from then on, could no longer exist. This demise remained undocumented.

This brings us to the private and public aspects of the photos. Photograph is a place where the private becomes public. ‘Every photo is read as the private appearance of the referent; the era of photography is coincident with the spreading of the private into the public dimension, with the creation of a new social value: the publicity of the private individual: the private is referred to as an individual in the public sphere...Yet, the private is a condition, so I believe, to reach a state where my internal world can be identified with my own ‘truth’, or, in other words, with the substance that I am made of. I must use the path of resistance—which is inherent to our reality—in order to try and construct once again the division between the public and the private. I ask to express my inner self without giving up my privacy.’ (Barthes, 1988: 100)

The school staff asks to express its inner self, its authentic views, by exposing the students to the story of the *Nakba*. Yet it is resistant to allowing this to be revealed in the public sphere through the photos. The staff asks to keep the ‘privacy’ of this study. You can almost say that the staff asks to guard the intimacy of the students, who are learning of something which is practically forbidden, and is nearing the red line of acts considered hazards to the public. The photograph is the moment in time when that red line, outlined by the teachers themselves, is crossed. For this reason, the study of the *Nakba* is left out of the frame.

The term *public* is in many ways parallel to *political*. The prohibition on photography and on the documentation of the study of the *Nakba* can also be seen as the division between the private a-political sphere and the political public realm. As long as there is no documentation, teaching the story of the *Nakba* is not a political act but merely an educational act. The photograph transforms this educational activity into an actual political action by exposing it to the anonymous, general public. Here we find the belied, or the cliché, that the school is not in any way involved in politics and its actions are purely educational.

4 Boldface in original.

The prohibition of taking pictures not only minimizes the political aspect of school activities, but also reveals their inevitable political character. The political restraints in dealing with the *Nakba* and the attempt to limit it to the private realm alone make it a private matter for those involved, in this case a matter between the teachers and students on the one hand and the individual refugee they encounter on the other hand. They respect the Palestinian refugee. They demonstrate they acknowledge his suffering by following him in a tour of his village and listening to him speak. However, in their eyes he is perceived only as an individual person, since he has not been exposed to the public. It turns out that even those unusual Israeli Jews who choose to deal with the Palestinian *Nakba* prefer to leave it at the level of personal encounters, in the general sphere of ‘humanity,’ rather than take it on as the fundamental political issue on the agenda between Israelis and Palestinians.

Adi Ophir defines the political action as one that challenges the power balance. ‘The political is the sphere where the struggles over the legitimacy of the authorities and the limits to their powers occur.’ (Ophir, 2003: 9) The political conditions that Ophir describes are idyllic, radical, anti-reality, even anarchist to some extent. Ophir draws a picture where the ‘rationalization of the governing body is not a given fact and is not an inhibition on questioning its legitimacy. Rather, the gist of the ruling body or bodies is constantly reconstructed within political dialogue and within the boundaries of the political sphere—which are also being repeatedly reconstructed by way of dialogue.’ (Ophir, 2003: 11)

The study tour of Lifta has a ‘dangerous’ political potential. Meeting a refugee who wishes to soon invite people to his newly-constructed house in the destroyed village has a potential of undermining the legitimacy of country’s existing social and political order, as well as undermining everything that the Israeli governments have so long been working hard to maintain. The teachers wish to leave this potential unfulfilled, or at least limited. In a sense, it is similar to a philosophical order that contrasts our reality and does not actually interrupt our ‘real’ lives and politics. This distinction may well be a useful definition of the educational process, as perceived by the professionals who are involved in shaping it. The education process provides the recipients with knowledge, an understanding and a sense of meaning of the world in which we live. These, however, are barred from having an actual, immediate political ramification. A discussion about Lifta and about the *Nakba* and the possible return of refugees is possible only as long as it remains within the classroom. Even when the class goes out to a field trip, that ‘field’ remains closed before the outside world, far from the public eye. Making public this encounter and dialogue between Jewish students and a Palestinian refugee makes is part of the political realm, a step which is defined by the school staff as outside the borders of the legitimate educational process.

Expanding the central concept behind photography—a testimony to ‘that which was there’—will further stress the controversial political nature of the study of the *Nakba*. What actually happened there? One might ask. This was not simply a bunch of curious students and one refugee from Lifta, telling the story of his village and his expulsion from it. Actually, the main things present in the tour were those which are **no longer there**. Taking a photo of the students in Lifta is a testimony to what existed in the village until 1948, which is what the students came to learn about; however, it also reveals the scandal that what use to lay here (the Palestinian village of Lifta) has not been present for more than 56 years. It also reveals that the Israeli education system does not deal with these issues; there is no serious and significant examination of this important topic and there is no discussion regarding the liabilities involved.

What could come out in the picture is a ghost, who threatens Lifta's serenity, as well as life in the Jewish state: The ghost of the Palestinian *Nakba* might surface the photo in a way that it could no longer be denied nor ignored. The school staff wished to limit the political ramifications that may develop from taking such a photo by preventing it altogether. Of course, the tour could be documented orally and its events could be inked. But, as Barthes says, ‘nothing which is written can give me the same certainty (as photography.)’ Language is limited—though perhaps this adds to its passionate vigour—‘in that it is not capable of providing testimony to its own authentic nature... the nature of language is fictional; a huge mechanism of methods is needed to transform language into

nonfiction...The photograph, on the other hand, is oblivious to mediators. It does not invent; it is proof in itself.' (Barthes, 1988: 88) Walter Benjamin discussed the historical nature of this process: 'Photos are starting to become evidences in the historical trail; in this lays their hidden political meaning.' (Azulai, 2004) Today, photography is so trivial and mundane that it is truly difficult to understand the resistance of the teachers to taking pictures of their students. However, Benjamin shows how the hidden meaning of photos is always political. In this case, this is considered dangerous politics.

The educational interference that took place in Lifta could also be viewed as a subversive act. There are moments and places, hidden from the public eye and from the cameras, in which the *Nakba* is studied. The knowledge is acquired and transmitted as 'underground information,' far from the control of the parents and the education system. I can say from personal conversations that I've had that there are, here and there, teachers who teach the *Nakba*, but refrain from publicizing their deeds. There are more than several teachers who deal with the matter in their classrooms, but quietly. A special project of cooperation between Palestinian teachers from the West Bank and Israeli teachers resulted in a study booklet in which the both the Israeli and the Palestinian narratives were presented. (Adwan & Bar-On, 2001) The teachers involved used the booklets in their respective classrooms. However, when a newspaper made this project known to the public, the Israeli Education Ministry immediately spoke out against it. Letters were sent to principals of schools that were using the booklet, as well as to the teachers themselves, ordering them to stop using it in the classroom. The explanation given by the ministry was that learning the Palestinian narrative could weaken the confidence of the students in the Israeli-Zionist narrative.⁵

According to the Education Ministry, the Palestinian history of the *Nakba* poses a threat to the consciousness of Jewish students in Israel. Therefore, they should not be exposed to this subject and it should not be taught in schools. Teachers who bring this subject up in lessons are risking their jobs, and are consequently obliged to follow the official narrative. Yet not all follow, and as mentioned before, there are educators who teach the story of the *Nakba* and there are schools that include it in their curriculum. Nevertheless, making these lessons public knowledge may endanger them and bring about sanctions from the educational system.

Nietzsche speaks of the dangers in teaching critical history; for example, the Palestinian *Nakba*. Examining the past 'through critical eyes is placing a knife next to the root of things, stepping cruelly over heads of sacred cows. This process is dangerous to life itself...People who serve life this way—judging and destroying the past—are always people [...] who risk others and risk themselves.' (Nietzsche, 1978: 37)

The threat in studying the *Nakba* is clear both to the Education Ministry and to the teachers touring Lifta. This threat must be veiled so there won't be doubts regarding our narrative, our sacred cows. Teachers who bring up the other narrative of 1948 may 'destroy a past'; and the ministry simply cannot allow this to happen.

Nietzsche, however, looks at this experience with eyes wide open: 'This is a retrospective attempt to try and construct a past which **we would have like to be** its offspring, and not a past that in reality is ours.' (Nietzsche, 1978: 37) The Palestinian *Nakba* is a past which we would not like to see as belonging to us, and therefore there is a ban on facing this issue in the public sphere. The study of the *Nakba* in schools has clear restrictions outlined both by the official institution, i.e. the Ministry of Education, as well as by the local institution, i.e. the particular school, which in this case dared to teach the *Nakba* but not to make this lesson known in to the public.

Photography is dangerous, according to Barthes, 'because I don't know what society might do with my picture, how it will read it (for there are numerous ways to read one single face). However, when I

5 From a conversation with Prof. Dan Baron, one of the administrators of the project, 14 December 2004. It is interesting to note that on the Palestinian side there was no intervention from the Palestinian Authority. This, despite the fact that the person in charge of the curriculums of Palestinian schools took part in the project.

discover myself as the by-product of this action, I find that I have become merely an image; in other words, death itself. The others—the ‘other’—strip me of myself. Cruelly, they turn me into an object and I am in their hands, at their disposal. I am cataloged and labeled, and ready for any and all deceptions.’ (Barthes, 1988: 19)

To give an example for this, one can examine recent pictures from Iraq portraying American soldiers brutally abusing prisoners. In the photos, the soldiers seem happy and excited to have their pictures taken. Little did they imagine the general public's harsh response once the pictures were presented by the media. These soldiers are being tried now and will pay a heavy price for their actions. News of these crimes, however, was known before the pictures came out, as Iraqi eyewitnesses had reported this behaviour. However, only the photos that documented the actions raised such uproar, as they were a testimony to ‘what was there.’

In is impossible to know how the ‘face’ in the photo will be ‘read.’ The students in Lifta whose pictures are taken might be harmed, but perhaps, under certain circumstance, might also gain from it. The teachers, however, were not willing to be responsible for taking that chance. It seems that the hostile response of the Education Ministry to the booklet mentioned earlier, which portrayed the Palestinian narrative alongside the Israeli narrative, restores assurance that the school staff understands that at present, it should not take a risk. Their student may acquire ‘underground knowledge’ and be a dissident, but the act of acquiring this knowledge cannot be an active part in the dissidence. It is too dangerous. The knowledge transmitted—the *Nakba* or catastrophe of Lifta—is not so dangerous so that it should be prohibited, but the way this knowledge was transmitted goes beyond the limits of what the school is ready to expose in front of the public. Unlike the American soldiers, who gallantly documented their actions, the school teachers chose to conceal the tour to Lifta, as if they were accomplices to a crime. The ban on photography in itself demonstrates the staff's belief that teaching the *Nakba* is in some way a crime.

The discussion here focuses on the *Nakba* as part of the collective subconscious of Jews in Israel, and is therefore held mainly on the psychoanalytic level. Examining this at the concrete political level, the danger in educating about the *Nakba* is its potential to undermine the justification of establishing a Jewish State at a price so high for the Palestinian residents of the country. An open discussion about the *Nakba* among the Jewish population may place a real burden on Israeli society, one that is so heavy it may yet undermine the society's foundations. It comes as no surprise that only in a post-Zionist period and mode of thought, a real, critical discussion of the events of the War of 1948 began. This discussion challenges the ruling Zionist narrative, and exists usually in circles that are not bound to the Zionist paradigm. The ‘new historians,’ who question and undermine the ruling narrative, evoke in many Jews a sense that the moral reasoning of their existence is shaky. Teaching the *Nakba* has the potential of causing a fundamental change to the consensus in Israel, which opposes the right of return of Palestinian refugees. If a wider understanding of the refugees' problem is reached, many may adopt views that are currently inconceivable among the Israel public at large. Accepting the Palestinian right of return will no doubt bring about a fundamental change to the character of the Jewish State, which was founded on the base that such a right should not be given to non-Jews. A change of this sort brings with it a revolutionary potential into any discussion on a future peace agreement. Therefore, it is obvious why the ruling political and cultural Israeli-Jewish forces that be oppose any real discussion on the matter.

Teaching the *Nakba* as (the stage of) Irritating Mirror

If our main argument so far is true, that studying the *Nakba* is perceived as a dangerous action, which for the Israeli Jewish public goes beyond the borders of legitimate action, it is important to try and better understand what the *Nakba* means for the Jews in Israel. What is so dangerous about it? The answer that automatically comes up it: collective guilt. Muddling with the *Nakba* brings to surface the ‘original sin’ upon which the State of Israel was established. This sin is suppressed, and it surfaces out

of that suppression and as a result of it, as a type of Freudian threat. This horrid experience is suppressed to allow the collective and the individuals that make that collective to continue on with 'normal life.' When Jewish Israelis are presented with the Palestinian *Nakba* it is as though they look in the mirror and see in it the original sin.

The photograph of the students in Lifta functions as a mirror. We can see ourselves in it when we are directly dealing with Lifta's *Nakba*. This mirror intensifies the experience of being exposed to the *Nakba*, and places it in our awareness because of the public nature of photography. It is a type of recognition of who we really are. When we stand next to a Palestinian refugee and have our picture taken, we take responsibility for our image and identity. But even before that, we admit to a side of immorality in us, as part of the collective that 'gained' from the events of 1948. The difficulty is therefore obvious and understandable.

Lacan, one of Freud's chief commentators, developed the Freudian concept of 'mirror stage.' With the help of this concept we will try to understand and see the study of the *Nakba*, especially in form of a photographed experience (but not just), as a mirror stage of Israeli Jews.

Lacan, following in the footsteps of Freud, says the child first recognizes himself or herself in the mirror at the age of six to eighteen months. This recognition aids the infant in building an individual identity, which is developed as the reflection of the other. That is, his self, the subject, is an empty space that is moulded through the presence of the other. The infant recognizes that the image in the mirror is his. At that moment, a division, or break, occurs between himself and his image. The mirror stage divides between the image in the mirror and who we really are. From that moment on, there exists an unfulfilled desire to unite the 'one.' This unity, however, is a type of illusion that is never fully achieved. The illusion is constantly maintained through the presence of the other, who exists out there in his fullest and enables us to strive and construct ourselves opposite to him as a complete being.

In our discussion we ask to place the other who is seen in the mirror as a part of the self that the mirror helps to see and understand. Looking at a photograph of myself, I can see me and be more aware of traits and sides of myself that I am familiar with. Same is true in regards to this discussion and the photos taken during the tour of Lifta. The possible photo of students touring a destroyed Palestinian village confronts us with the Palestinian *Nakba*. This is a mirror that reflects who we are, where we came from, and how the State of Israel was founded on the ruins of the Palestinian life which existed here. Lacan says the mirror stage is a stage of recognition. A change occurs when the subject comes across the image that Lacan titles 'Imago.' (Lacan, 1977: 2) This is a Latin term for the word 'image,' but following Jung additional meanings relating to the collective subconsciousness, were added to it. Jung says that the individual shapes his or her personality by identifying with various Imagos that surface from the collective subconsciousness, which is a cache of mythological events and characters. Lacan mainly sees in the Imago images relating to violence that amputate the body: castration, removal of limbs, tearing the body to pieces, and uprooting from the home. (Lacan, 1977: 11) Lacan sees the image in the mirror stage as an Imago.

The mirror stage is a defining moment of sudden realization, which leads to a significant change of the subject's inner self. This stage opens the door to the world as the Imago of the individual's body is represented in dreams of various objects and projections on them. The mirror creates the initial **duplication** of the individual, as all physical reality is seen through our eyes. (Lacan, 1977: 3) The function of the image formed at the mirror stage is to establish the relations between the organism and the reality in which it exists. According to Lacan, in every individual there is some defect, immaturity, a fetus element. Therefore, the image seen in the mirror has flaws and is incomplete. This development is experienced as a dialect in time, which projects on the shaping of the individual into history. The mirror stage is a drama; its impulse struggles between anticipation and deficiency. The subject is trapped in a seduction of space, a chain of fantasies that begins with an amputate body image and strives for a fullness that Lacan calls orthopaedic. (Lacan, 1977: 4)

What happens when the image in the mirror, the Imago, is too hard for the individual to deal with? Is it possible the image could be so intimidating that the individual would refrain from looking in the mirror? If this comparison is accurate, and the mirror stage can also be true in regards to the collective, one should ask: What happens when the image that the collective sees is so intimidating that it is unbearable to look at it? If this Imago includes harsh images, similar to those witnessed during a nightmare, it is reasonable to assume that the defence mechanism would be to simply wake up and cast it away, same as you do when having a bad dream. If the image continues to haunt the dreamer after he woke up, he will make every effort to get rid of it and instead think happy, pleasant thoughts. The pleasant images the Jewish collective in Israel likes to attribute to itself are far from the images of slashed body parts in Lacan's Imago. The opposite is true: This is a collective of high self appreciation of a noble society that was created from the 'dust of humanity' that survived the Holocaust, and in the spirit of the pioneers made the desert bloom and brought life and vigour to its barren land after 2,000 years of exile. This is told as the story of the unification of a scattered and cut up Jewish body by the Zionist project, which gathered all the Diaspora communities and made them a free sovereign nation.

Hence it is clear, that the Imago of the Palestinian *Nakba* completely undermines the self image of this collective. This is a mirror that, at this stage, Israeli Jews cannot look straight at. Looking away from the *Nakba* enables this society to continue holding on to the fantasy of the whole, pure body, of the collective that climbed out of the concentration camps and the persecutions of exile and became its own master in its mythological homeland.

Lacan tells us that avoiding the mirror stage prevents the subject from being 'thrown' into history. The master-Zionist subject, which desires to see itself as a sovereign subject, asks to leave out history and not let it penetrate its time and space. Looking at the aspect of time, this subject asks to rid the history of its own establishment, or at the very least leave it as a slim history—'our' history of victory. The memory of what occurred to those who lost in 1948 is suppressed and removed. However, this is also the history of the Zionist subject itself, because it took an active part in defeating the 'other,' the Palestinian. The actions of the Zionist forces were among the main contributors to the creation of the *Nakba*. As a result, the *Nakba* is also a Zionist memory. Perhaps it is its 'negatives,' which cannot be separated from the Zionist picture. For the Zionist collective memory, the memory of the Palestinian *Nakba* serves as the other and is therefore an imminent part of it.

For this reason, attempting to remove the *Nakba* from the collective Israeli conscious is a Sisyphus effort with no avail. Just like the rock that Sisyphus pushed to the top of the mountain always rolled back down, the *Nakba* always reappears in the memories of individuals or communities. Usually it appears among Palestinian communities that have suffered from it directly or indirectly; but it also appears in the consciousness of Jewish communities and individuals who 'were there,' who saw the actions and remember them.

Representations of the *Nakba* can be found in Israeli culture as early as 1948, though these do not amount to neither a comprehensive record as Benny Morris's book on the birth of the Palestinian refugees nor a significant discussion that draws attention to the role of Israelis and Zionism in the creation of the *Nakba*.

The photo that may be taken during a school field trip to Lifta falls also into this type of memory. Barthes says: 'The photo does not bring back the past. It does not cause me to try and reconstruct things that were already terminated (by time and distance). Rather, it reassures that what I see did indeed exist... The art of photography is somehow related to resurrection.' In this specific case, this is a resurrection of a village that once was and the stories of the village as told by the refugee. 'What I see in front of me is not a memory, an imagination, a reconstruction... but reality and past both as one.' (Barthes, 1988: 84-85) Through the photograph, the past suddenly comes back and appears in the mirror as a threatening imago. Its presence is unbearable. Therefore, the intensity of its presence is limited to a direct experience at the sight of the Palestinian village. This is not an experience that will

leave behind documented photos which may enhance the damage of the imago by duplicating it through other agents, like the students' parents and school sponsors.

So Why is the *Nakba* Taught at All?

If the *Nakba* can be understood as a type of threatening and irritating imago, the question we must ask is, why approach it at all? Why not try to fully eliminate it, or at least try and ignore it completely? Why would a school initiate an educational program on the *Nakba*?

Various pedagogical reasons can be given for this. It seems, though, that here also Lacan's psychoanalysis (following Freud's psychoanalysis) provides a fascinating explanation. We will assume that for the Zionist subject the *Nakba*, as shown beforehand, is the object. This is a unique object because, as Freud puts it, 'it is a radically lost object.' (Vanier, 2003: 62) This object was lost not because it had gone away but because 'symbolization made it go missing (...). From that moment on (...) the object leads the subject's life into a constant search after the reunification with the lost object. From the moment the subject exists in language, only language stands at its disposal to try and find the object that was lost through it.' (Vanier, 2003: 62) This explanation is paradoxical; 'the object appears as such only when its lost is felt [by the subject]—its status as the object is given only in retrospective.' (Vanier, 2003: 63) Losing the object is an essential part of shaping and constructing the subject and that's why it is not easy for the subject to expose it. The language, and the symbolic order, shapes the subject as alienated from itself from the moment it constructed itself and dissolved into language.

The *Nakba* is the object which was lost the moment the Zionist subject was formed. Once the State of Israel was established, the Palestinian tragedy went through a process of symbolization among the Jewish Israeli public, leaving no more than faded traces of tragedy. 'The Palestinians ran away, as their leaders had told them too; therefore, only they are to blame'; 'the Arab countries are using the refugees for anti-Israeli propaganda, and that's why they don't rehabilitate them'; 'the 1948 war started because all the Arabs refused to accept the United Nations' partition plan and wished instead to expel all of the Jews'—all these explanations/myths created a language in which the Palestinian *Nakba* has no place as a subject equal to the Zionist subject. In other words, the Zionist narrative left no room for the Palestinian narrative to introduce itself to the Jewish Israeli public. At the moment the master-Zionist subject was formed, the Palestinian *Nakba* subject was also created.

The *Nakba* is essential in fulfilling Zionism. But once it had taken place, it must be cast away, so it won't threat and challenge the Zionist subject. The appearance of the *Nakba* on the map of history has the potential of divesting the Zionist subject. They both are understood to be excluding elements and their relations a sum-zero game. Within the symbolic Zionist order, there is no room for the Palestinian *Nakba*, especially not when seen as an act of destruction and expulsion carried out by the Zionists themselves.

This missing object turns into the cause of passion for the subject. But it is located outside the symbolic order. It is the 'other' which the subject longs for; however, it cannot say anything about it because the subject exists between the imaginary and the real. (Vanier, 2003: 81) The Zionist subject suppresses into its subconsciousness the Palestinian *Nakba*. Yet from time to time, the *Nakba* erupts and resurfaces. These outbreaks from the collective subconscious stir a kind of desire to touch this wound, this original sin; just like the universal human desire to touch that which is forbidden.

People go to psychologists when they believe they can help them resolve their subconscious complexes. The Jewish-Israeli collective asks from time to time to punch a hole in the tight symbolic order, peak into its own subconscious and stare at the *Nakba*, which is the dark negative of its moment of formation (the white, the happy). Usually, after the hole is punctured, it is immediately closed back again so that the light of the sun would not blind the observers. Sometimes the hole is blocked with special filters that ease the absorption of images and voices coming up from the past. Like an itching bruise, the *Nakba* is always there, as is the uncontrolled desire to scratch it, to peel it. This act is

somehow pleasurable; it is masochist and narcissist. If we scratch too much—as a photo of students studying the *Nakba* might—the eruption of blood is prevented instantly by limiting the documentation of the event.

The source of power the *Nakba* has, which brings Israeli Jews to teach it despite the potential threat, can be understood through the fantasmatic term developed by Slavoj Žižek, who followed in the footsteps of Freud and Lacan. (Žižek, 2000: 24-36) He brings the distinction made by Erik Sentner ‘between symbolic history (the alignment of apparent mythological narratives and the ethical-ideological orders that shape the tradition of a community; what Hegel calls its ‘ethnic self’) and between the significant Other, which is so intolerable that it cannot be looked straight upon; or in other words, the secret, fantasmatic, spectacular history that one cannot acknowledge its existence. It’s that history which in reality enables the existence of the known symbolic tradition, but which must be delayed in order to be operative.’ (Žižek, 2000: 25-26) Zionism’s significant Other—the intolerable one that mustn’t be seen—is the Palestinian *Nakba*. It is kept a secret, like a *fantasma*, a ghost that continues to walk through our space and time and continues to interfere in strange, sometimes uncontrollable ways.

In my opinion, it is impossible to give a full, rational explanation as to why the students were nonetheless brought to Lifta to learn about the *Nakba*. If there is some danger here, as was demonstrated in the incident with the cameras, why should the students be presented with this matter at all? In ‘the alignment of apparent mythological narratives’ that forms the Jewish community in Israel, there cannot be a full and ‘reasonable’ answer for this. At least part of the answer—though how big a part it is we cannot tell, because it is hidden—lays in the fantasmatic nature of the *Nakba* in our lives. It was a historical event, yet also ‘a traumatic occurrence which continues to not take place’ (Sentner); an event that cannot be placed in the symbolic space that it was part of creating (...) It is the spectrally and traumatic event that does not cease from **not** creating itself. (As such, as non-existent, it continues to insist on **an existence from**, so its spectrally presence continues to chase after life.’ (Žižek, 2000: 26)

The *Nakba* is similar to Freudian myths, like the murder of the father figure, which ‘to a certain extent is more real than reality; they are ‘true’ even though they never really took place.’ (Žižek, 2000: 27) The *Nakba* is a traumatic event that keeps on insisting not to take place within us. The exact mechanism that makes it a part of our life cannot be fully understood, because it is sealed and concealed; however, the mystifying manifestation of the *Nakba* is proof that we are talking about a trauma that cannot be contained in the idioms of our symbolic order, at least not within the cultural conditions of the Jews in Israel.

It is fascinating to see that the suppression of the *Nakba* is not complete, not total. This is not a secret event that only few know of. This is an event that much has been written of, also by Zionist authors—Benny Morris perhaps the famous of them.⁶ Yet, it is not something which is taught out in the open and which has become an integral part of the school curriculum or the political discourse in Israel.

In recent years there have been many representations, including in Hebrew, of the Palestinian *Nakba*, amongst others in the fine arts and in writing. Therefore, it is difficult for Israeli schools to ignore it. However, as stated, the *Nakba* is rarely taught in the state-run education system.

The Desire for a Palestinian Stone House

Another ‘incursion’ of Lifta is being conducted these days through a new construction plan for the village and its surrounding. The plan was submitted to the Jerusalem Municipality Planning

6 His book, on *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugees Problem*, written in the 1980s, is considered one of the most important—and one of the most frequently quoted books—concerning the *Nakba* and the Palestinian problem, also in the eyes of Palestinian researchers and other researchers.

Committee in 2004 and was approved by a regional committee. The program asks to turn the place into a residential neighbourhood that would include some small-scale commerce, hotels and open green areas.

For our purposes, it is important to examine if at all and in what form the plan relates to the village, to the *Nakba* of 1948, to the refugees, to the houses still standing, and the like. Israeli authorities took part in creating the plan, and also gave it an official approval, and for this reason it is interesting to see and learn how the State of Israel perceives the village's physical space. Lifta is partially in ruins since it was conquered in 1948. Before the war there were some 2,000 village residents, living in almost 450 houses. The village's refugees today live mostly in East Jerusalem and in the Ramallah area. The lands which belonged to Lifta were confiscated by the state. However, the centre of the village, like in other villages, was never rebuilt. Today, there are some 55 remaining Palestinian houses, some standing practically complete while others almost entirely ruined. Several houses—those closest to the road leading up to Jerusalem—were occupied decades ago by families who still live there, and apparently will not be evacuated when the new construction plan is implemented.

The state declared that lands belonging to Palestinians until 1948 have become 'abandoned' and fell into the possession of the state, under the 1950 'Absentees' Property Law' and additional laws. The writings of Oren Yiftachel are a fine example for the sake of this discussion. (Yiftachel, 1997) They show how the state created a land rule that established an 'Ethno-cracry'—a hierarchy that is headed by the settlers, then the immigrants, and lastly the natives, most of whom were either exiled or forbidden to return. The lands of Lifta, like other abandoned villages, were passed on to the possession of the state. Some lands were designated to building new neighbourhoods, while others remained vacant.

The plan, essentially, focuses on reshaping the space of Lifta's village centre, the surroundings of the famous spring, and the bottom part of the *wadi* the mountain. The plan, numbered 6036, was designed by two architect offices: G. Kartas—S. Grueg and S. Ahronson, and is part of the 'local space planning of Jerusalem.' It was submitted on June 28, 2004 and according to its title refers to 'The Spring of Naftoach (Lifta).' The plan includes a change of previous construction plans for the area. For our purposes, it is significant to focus on a plan to preserve some of the houses of the Palestinian village, which was established in the 16th century. The plan's goals, as stated in the document, is that residential areas be built, some of them preserving the original houses that still exist in the village centre. It includes plans to build areas for commerce, shops, public buildings, hotels, passages and a transformation centre. In addition, some part of the scenery will remain untouched for the public to enjoy. The total area to be included in the plan is 455 *dunams*. Some 50 houses located before 1948 in the centre of the Palestinian village will be preserved. A total of 243 housing units will be built, as well as a 120-room hotel.⁷ How does construction plan 6036 relate to the Palestinian village of Lifta? We shall detail here all of the direct and indirect references to the village mentioned in the plan. In article 3 of the plan's goals it says: 'Instructions on how to preserve, restore and reconstruct the existing structures and the terraces inside the village of Lifta, and their integration with the new developments in the area.' In the chapter about 'A particular residential area to be preserved' it says: 'Any additional building or reconstruction or renovation of houses in these areas will be conducted by maintaining the architectural nature of the existing structures that are destined to be preserved, including their building scale and architectural details, and by keeping and completing the distinctive fabric of that area.' (Article 7, 1); 'There will be no changes in the level of the lands and the terraces; no damage will be caused to trees, apart from when paving access routes and shops' (Article 7, 2); 'the construction work of preserving, restoring and expanding will only be done reusing old stones' (Article 7, 4); In Chapter 13, 'Areas for Institutions,' it says: 'Construction will be performed using natural square stones chiseled manually. Building with a stone that was not chiseled is forbidden' (Article 3, 5); In Chapter 15, 'Terraces', it says: 'All the existing terraces [...] are to be preserved and restored [...] Terraces that are to be restored will be created using stones similar to the

7 Itzik Shviki *Lifta, The Picturesque Village*, available at: http://www.shimur.co.il/VF/ib_items/1273/lifta.doc

existing ones' (Article 1); In Chapter 18, 'Conditions for building permits', it says: 'A condition (...) is handing in a document that includes detailed instructions [...] for preventing destruction of structures for preservation, careful detailing of the greenery in the area, and explaining the methods of construction to be used so that the existing vulnerable fabric not be harmed' (Article 1, 7); In Chapter 22, 'Trees for restoration/uprooting' it says: 'Those trees that are located in the areas of buildings, roads and infrastructures are meant to be preserved and uprooting them is forbidden' (Article 1,1).

In Chapter 10 of the plan, titled 'Particular residential area for preservation,' a previous construction program for Lifta is mentioned. Dating back from April 11, 1984, plan number 2351 is still to be implemented as part of the new plan, excluding specific articles that stand in contrast to the newer plan. Plan 2351 was never realized, but looking at its instructions regarding the preservation of Lifta's remains is important for our topic. The goals of the previous plan were that inside the village area there would be 'museums, shows, offices, and institutions that care for nature, landscape and that place.' It included 'instructions for preserving the village, the orchard and the spring' (Articles 1 and 2); In Chapter 8 it read: 'The area designated to be preserved and renovated shall remain open to the public. Usages in that area that would involve closing it off to the general public will not be approved. Fencing the area selected to be restored is also forbidden' (Article 5); Chapter 11 mentions that 'in the area of the nature reserve, it will be allowed to conduct actions needed for preserving the nature and landscape of the spring and its immediate surroundings, the agricultural steps and the orchard; it will also be permissible to renovate the existing structures in the area of the nature reserve—these building can be used only as museums and study rooms' (Article 11); In Chapter 13 titled 'Buildings to be preserved' the plan mentions three oil process structures and two halls dating back to the time of the Crusades. This are to be renovated, and 'the archeological finding there are not be harmed' (Articles 1,2).

Both plans exemplify the outlook of the planners on the space of the village of Lifta. If the present construction plan will be given the final okay, we can say that this plan also demonstrates the outlook of the authorities. According to this view, the remains of Lifta exist in the landscape and should be preserved. The trees, spring, terraces, natural stone, remaining houses (complete and incomplete) and the oil process structures are all originally from Lifta. They even have character, like 'distinctive texture' and a unique 'architectural nature.'

The plans are not in denial concerning the Arabic space of the village. On the contrary, they are aware of its advantages and use them, through the practices of preservation, to elevate the touristy—commercial—real estate value of the project.

This comes across clearly in plan 2351 when it stresses that 'the area which is subject to directives of preservation and renovation is to remain open to the public.' Those who will visit the place, and not Lifta's residents alone, will be able to enjoy the remains of the renovated village, and access to it will not be denied in any way. The aesthetics and the architecture of the Arab ruins raise the value of this space, and therefore they will be professionally safeguarded. The 'natural' stone—and not the 'smooth, chiseled stone'—is the building material allowed in that area, so the nature of the materials used is preserved. The landscape with the terraces will be preserved, as will the trees. Those trees that will have to be uprooted will be re-rooted within the area included in the construction plan.

There is almost an approach of sacredness to this space. It is a kind of effort to revive the village after 56 years of negligence, destruction and natural decay. Lifta is reconstructed from its old materials. It is being built around the centre of the renovated village, as if the centre will spread around it some of the authentic spirit of the place. It seems that in the eyes of the planners, the larger, newer Lifta is a kind of duplication of the preserving kernel of Lifta's original houses. Therefore, all of the area included in the plan will be built in the original architectural manner. Not only will Lifta be preserved, one could say, but it would also be duplicated many folds. The wasteland that now exists in most of the area slated for renovation will bloom and be filled with housing of a new and successful real estate project. The kernel that stood ashamed and battered will be renovated on all its sides, which

till today stood neglected, home to wild animals. Here the greater Lifta will be established, a neighbourhood that will provide great quality of life for the country's wealthy people.

Here we can find not only a typical Zionist 'making the desert bloom' achievement, of building where nothing once stood, but also the expansion of constructed Israeli areas; an expansion that does not overlook the history of this place, the terraces, trees, houses, spring, etc. Not only is one Lifta being rebuilt but several duplicated Lifta's will from now on will exist down in the *wadi*, right below the western entrances to the capital.

And that's where it ends. The original Palestinian inhabitants of Lifta until 1948 are nowhere to be found in the plans. Those who created and cultivated this space, their memories from the village, the moment of exile and the longings to return are not mentioned at all. Only a deconstruction of the plan reveals that these were removed. Two thousands of the village's refugees, who are missing from a plan to 'rebuild Lifta,' live within few kilometres from their lost village. They are not part of the construction plan; or rather, they are part of the 'hidden elements' of these plans, are the element that 'most definitely' should not be taken into consideration. They are too close to be a part of it.

For Israeli Jews, embodied in this case in the planners, the refugees are too close to this place both physically and mentally. The planners apparently understand this kind of closeness as a threat that must be removed immediately, or at the very least be suppressed into our subconsciousness. The refugees are still here, together with their decedents, their memories, and their desire that the injustices done to them be acknowledged and mended. All this, it seems, cannot be part of the new construction plan of Lifta. It is like a bomb that hurts only human beings and causes no damage to other objects. Humanity is separated from Lifta, and only a mixture of materials remains there. Turning Lifta into a high-class neighbourhood will also eliminate the marginal culture that developed there, as it is one of those values that a 'proper' Western environment cannot tolerate.

This attitude toward the country's natives and landscape is not new to Zionism. Ariel Hirschfield finds similar lines in the poetry of Shlonski, where the Palestinian Arab is 'completely expelled from the space, though on the other hand, the wide open space, the landscape, the skies and the air continue to carry his Oriental characteristic **without him.**' (Hirschfield, 1998: 12) With much enthusiasm at times, Zionism adopted this space, with its Oriental traits.

In Shlonski's poet called 'Sovereignty,' the expulsion of the Arab from the landscape is particularly blunt:

*We
All
Knew
That we have come
From a flourishing land to a desolate land
For here it is barren
And the future for us holds
Hunger and fever.*

(Hirschfield, 1998: 21)

Hirschfield interprets the establishing of the artists' village of Ein Hod as a similar action, in which blindness rules the approach toward the destruction of Palestinian life. The 'naivety of Israeli painting led a group of painters to come and reside inside the object of their paintings. They came to dwell inside the 'beauty' of Israeli art, which unlike what was going on in Tzfat and Jerusalem, contained within its development process the emptiness and destruction that were at its very basis.' (Hirschfield, 1998: 22)

This is not just an act of 'making the desert bloom' as far as the settlers were concerned, or an act of overlooking the end of lives which existed before them. Their attitude and action transforms the previous human life that existed here into desolate. The Arabs who lived in Lifta and Ein Hud (before it was renamed 'Ein Hod') are reconstructed through the Zionist settlement venture to vacant, barren;

nothing was there that we need to face today, let alone in the future. Ein Hod was built and so will Lifta be rebuilt on ‘beautiful’ ruins that have no humanity left in them. ‘Making the desert bloom’ is a discursive mechanism through which the preceding lives to the Zionist enterprise in the country becomes a ‘mental desert’ in Jewish-Israeli awareness.

Yigal Tzalmona sees a similar trend in the paintings of Gutman and Rubin. The country’s landscape, with its Arab villages, ‘carries the characters of the Orient without the presence of its indigenous people. The excepted Zionist perception of the Land of Israel from the turn of the 20th century until the 1920s was embodied in its images as a desolate land, which the Jews who returned to it will turn into a flourishing land.’ (Tzalmona, 1998: 58)

‘The Arab village itself, as seen, for example, in Rubin’s portrait of the sculpture Melnikov, becomes the scenery and backdrop in pictures showing portraits of a strong, rooted Jew, who is connected to nature, to the landscape, to the mountain and to the village—as a sign of indigenous. The village is empty (of people) specifically because it plays a role as a mark. The Orientals—in this case, the inhabitants of the village—are not needed in the scene, because the human dimension is already realized through the presence of a real person, the portrait of a particular person, a man with a name, a Jew. In the descriptions of the Orient in the 1920s there is an elevation of the Orient’s features, but without identifying or concretizing with these features through true intimacy. (Tzalmona, 1998: 59)

Similarly, in the construction plans for Lifta, the village’s houses and material remnants function as a natural environment, as a local and Oriental nature whose aesthetics should be benefited from. This plan is not disconnected in its approach to space from other cultural manners of Zionism. In this plan, the void in human, Palestinian presence is filled with Jewish settlers. One clear expression for this is the intension to build a Jewish synagogue in Lifta (Chapter 14, Article 1, ‘Area designated for public buildings’). There is also a plan to build a museum there, but there is no sign that the local Palestinian history will be made part of the exhibitions.

One blunt testimony to the eradication of the human in Lifta’s construction plan is the absence of Palestinian cemeteries. In plan 6036, the cemeteries don’t appear at all. They also don’t appear in the detailed cartographic map (1:2,500) that was submitted with the plan. In construction plan 2351, from 1984, the cemeteries are not to be found in the written plan but are located in the cartographic map. According to Chapter 10 of the current plan, a ‘specially preserved residential area’ is to be built on the cemeteries. There is no recognition of their presence in that area. So not only are the living refugees, who were forced to leave the village in 1948, absent from the plan, even the dead who remained in Lifta are not to be mentioned in any way. Once again we see that preservation applies only to buildings, trees, terraces and landscape, but not to the people, dead of alive, who had once lived in Lifta.⁸

Between a Study Tour of Lifta and the Construction Plan of the Village

One might ask, what is the connection between these two affairs? Allegedly, the study tour of the Palestinian *Nakba* in the village and the construction plan for the village can each lead to completely separate directions. It is true that connecting the two is somewhat arbitrary (as is any comparison between two subjects in one article); however, it seems that the comparison conducted here can teach us a few things about the ways in which the Israeli Jewish public understands and perceives the Palestinian *Nakba*. The photography and the preservation of a Palestinian village each reflect this

8 Nonetheless, two families living in the village’s area were allowed to stay put. During a debate regarding objections submitted over the first construction plan (No. 2351) it was decided to allow Mrs. Yekutieli and the Sofer family to continue living in building ‘in an area which is designated to be an ‘open view area’, allowing them to use it as a residency and a studio...’ These are structures of the village into which Jews moves in illegally. The committee that responded to the objections actually legalized their residency in the place even though they don’t have an original attachment to this specific village as Lifta’s Palestinian refugees do.

understanding. The connection between the two can begin in their shared geographical space—the village of Lifta—which brings with it approaches that include similar ingredients. The tour and the plan of this specific village take notice—though unconsciously—to its uniqueness as an almost sole Palestinian village that remained vacant of people but kept many physical remnants.⁹

For the students and teachers of a Jerusalem high school, this is an encounter with a space that is on the one hand familiar and close but on the other hand is estranged to their consciousness as Israeli Jews. By means of touring Lifta they wish to be introduced to a place and a history through a refugee from the village, who is today also their neighbour. The sight is familiar to anyone who goes in and out of Jerusalem, as it is located at the central entrance to the city. It is looked upon as something familiar that is always ‘there,’ a part of the scenery that is taken for granted. Yet, learning the story of the refugee from Lifta is kept a solely educational matter, and its political aspects are torn away from this act through the prohibition of photography, which would give testimony of the tour.

The construction plan, too, relates to the village’s space and asks to conquer it once again through new and old-new buildings. As previously shown, the plan aims to partially build and preserve the village, yet alienation from the village itself remains a central ingredient of the plan. Both the tour and the plan either ignore the politics of the village remnants or aspire to limit them. Perhaps because of the awareness to Lifta’s political potential as a monument of the *Nakba* and as a place where refugees hope to return, the architects of the plan and the school staff choose to ignore the revealing of the political nature of their doings. The study tour can become political by photos that document the occasion; and the construction plan can become political if it included mentions of the refugees who were uprooted from the village and their longings to return to it. The avoided political story in these two seemingly separate incidents connects them both at a place where the Jew in Israel aims at expelling the *Nakba* from his or her life as an event which has practical political consequences.

Both the tour and the construction plan portray the *Nakba* in the village as ‘an event with no witness,’ (Felman, 1993: 8) using the phrase created by Shoshana Felman as she analyzes Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* movie.’ The *Nakba* in both the tour and the plan remains as a deficient testimony, though this is true more in the case of the construction plan. The plan completely ignores the human side of the village and the people’s expulsion from it in 1948. Contrary to this, the students went on a study tour with full intentions to recount the Palestinian life that existed there. However, the political aspect of this testimony remains deficient, limited by boundaries of a classroom lesson that conceals the act of learning, that is, the act of exposing the *Nakba* in the village. The plan as it was formed and the ban on taking pictures during the study tour ruin the chance to understand the *Nakba* by ‘violating the eyewitness testimony itself.’ (Felman, 1993: 8)

Lifta’s construction plan constructs the *Nakba* as a non-event, an occurrence that did not actually take place or is not worthy of any references; the tour of the village demonstrates that the *Nakba* is an actual event that occurred, but places it as an event that should not be spoken of in public—this too is constructing the *Nakba* as an event which is concealed or denied in the collective consciousness of the Jews in Israel. Constructing the *Nakba* as a ‘non-event’ goes along with the common Zionist notion that ‘a people without a land returned to a land without a people,’ quoting Zangvill’s famous motto. In a land with no people, a human tragedy of expulsion could not have taken place, simply because there was no one to expel.

To both events—the tour of Lifta and the village’s construction plan—a disturbing agent joins, trying to create a sense of incompatibility in the attempted denial of the *Nakba* that took place in Lifta. The organizers of the tour who are members of Zochrot organization ask to take pictures during the tour as a testimony that Jewish students in Israel are learning about the *Nakba*; the same agent, Zochrot, files an objection to the construction plan, claiming that the denial of the village’s *Nakba* is immoral.

9 Also in Bire’m village rather many houses remained standing.

Zochrot wishes to restore the prospect of giving testimony of the *Nakba*. It plays the role of a photographer during the study tour and it tries to seduce the objects of the photo/tour to 'befriend' its myths, in the words of Barthes. However, the school staff refuses to 'fully trust them. The clear purpose of these myths (and for this reason the myth is born) is to bring about conciliation between the art of photography and society. (Is this necessary? Well, yes: Photography is **dangerous**) in that it gives it (the art of photography) **roles**, which provide the photographer many mini-alibis. The roles are: to give across information, to represent, to surprise, to serve as a mark, to evoke passion.' (Barthes, 1988: 32-33) The photographer/Zochrot has clear myths and mini-alibis. They asks to bring about conciliation between the society and the ghost of the *Nakba*, which haunts it and stirs up uncomfortable emotions and fears. Zochrot's action in itself awakens the ghost of dangerous photography. As an agent of political change, Zochrot unites the two actions and wishes to make them public: telling the world of a construction plan that demolishes the memory of Lifta, and showing the world pictures of students who are studying this memory. This text itself, as is its author, is a partner to this undermining act.

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