
Bienville House Center for Peace and Justice

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Book Review: *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, by Ilan Pappé

In many conversations between partisans of opposite sides in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, the topic quickly shifts to events in the Middle East 60 years ago, at the time when Israel was established as a state. Given the psychological significance of this argument and the depth of US involvement in the Middle East, concerned Americans should familiarize themselves with the differing perspectives. Zionists question the Arab narrative, which blames the new state for the forcible displacement of Palestine's indigenous Muslim and Christian population. "I can show you Jordanian papers that quote Arab leaders calling on the Palestinians to leave their homes," a Zionist friend once told me when I was in college, quickly adding "of course they might be forgeries."

This recollection illustrates 1) the continued emotional and moral significance of the events of 1948, called the "War of Independence" by Israelis and the "Nakba" (or "catastrophe") by Palestinians, and 2) the degree to which the basic facts are hotly disputed. According to the liberal Israeli paper Ha'aretz, in 2009 the Israeli Ministry of Education chose to pull a high school text that attempts to present Israeli students with both versions.

(www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/1122006.html)

In 2008, a British-based Israeli historian, Ilan Pappé, published an important contribution to this debate. *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* describes village by village the documentary evidence that Zionist militias, and later the Israeli army, used force to compel the original inhabitants to flee. Pappé draws upon serious

academic scholarship, but the book is written in an accessible narrative style.

To appreciate the significance of Pappé's book, it is necessary to consider the historical context, not just for the events of 1948, but also the history of the debate surrounding those events. As shown by my Zionist friend's comments, and comments posted by Israeli readers below the Ha'aretz article cited above, Israelis traditionally blamed Arab states or Palestinians themselves for the loss of their homes. During the eighties, a movement of Israeli "New Historians," with access to archives of correspondence amongst Israel's founders, including the first Prime Minister of Israel, David Ben Gurion, documented that in at least some Palestinian towns and villages, Arabs were forced to leave at gunpoint.

Since 2000, Benny Morris, the most famous of the New Historians, published a series of articles and interviews in which he surprised many by arguing that 1) the forcible expulsion of the Arabs during the founding of Israel was more far-reaching and deliberate than he had previously believed and 2) that the ethnic cleansing should have gone yet further. With *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*, Pappé breaks with Morris on the second point. He condemns the brutal Zionist treatment of the Palestinians, along with the failure of main-stream Israeli historians to expose the historical truth.

Pappé's book addresses Israeli arguments that deflect criticism of early Zionist actions by blaming the Arab leadership. In fact, Pappé's book does blame Arab states for lack of a

coherent and coordinated response and for mistreatment of Palestinian refugees. He emphasizes the lack of readiness for confrontation in these newly/barely independent states. Yet in the process, he questions another aspect of the traditional Israeli historical narrative that presents Israel in mortal danger from an Arab effort to destroy it. Pappé argues that the Zionist leaders were well aware of the lack of any Arab capacity or intention (at government levels) to militarily threaten the new state. Israel's early leaders, he suggests, knowingly frightened their own population with exaggerated claims of the danger from Arab armies.

For a more personal, Palestinian eyewitness account of the phenomena described in Pappé's book, Father Elias Chacour's book, *Blood*

Brothers, provides a compelling and readable account of the Israeli destruction of the predominantly Christian Palestinian village of Biram. Chacour witnessed these events at the age of eight, but the book goes on to describe Chacour's later life growing up as an Israeli Arab, his education and his later work educating Palestinian children. Chacour's book is to be recommended not only for its powerful and highly personal articulation of the Palestinian's perspective, but also for its positive and encouraging tone. While Chacour is a passionate advocate of the Palestinian cause and a critic of Zionism, he is just as passionate in his advocacy of peace, understanding and coexistence.

Fareed Aboul-ela

OP-ED: Don't Tread on Me

Like others who lean toward social justice, I am bothered by opportunists who play on the selfish interests of citizens, like the televised Tea Party activists waving their guns and "Don't Tread on Me" signs. I wonder why people respond to this rhetoric of self-interest—the same people who go to church and listen to stories of Jesus, who was clearly an early proponent of social justice, an enemy of capitalism, and a critic of the what's-in-it-for-me mentality.

There seem to be two strands of the current revolutionaries: the wealthy, white, male, semi-racists, and the disaffected who imagine their guns as their resurrection. In between lie the media, who love nothing more than childish costumes, inflamed rhetoric, and the appearance of guns on the scene. In describing this kind of perverted rhetorical triangle of actors, media, and audience, I am not casting blame—I'm trying to understand how the triangle works because I believe that through understanding it, we will be able to cope with it, frame it within the overall social dynamic that constitutes our social structure.

We must also understand the money that runs behind the scene like a puppeteer pulling the

strings. It is not difficult to imagine, as have many social theorists before us, that the social groups who have made billions off deregulation or the absence of government oversight find ways of channeling money to organizations that act as fronts for Tea Party activists shouting about how they can't take it anymore. In fact, that's how our government seems to work—privileged sectors do their best to protect their privileges through subversive networks that give front money to figureheads, who pretend to be patriots while using the sociopolitical drama to skim off easy money for themselves.

I think we would profit if we could understand what drives people to act so selfishly—people like the Vitters, the Palins, the Paulsons, and the Maddoff's—people who spend their lives dreaming up things like synthetic collateralized debt obligations only for the purpose of making money off others' naiveté. The fact that we have so many of them in our financial industry and political system seems like a symptom of a sociopolitical disease. And it seems to run deep, far beyond healing.

The ubiquity of these people seems strange to me, because I rarely run across them. I don't know any cynics, and I don't think I know any-

one whose driving motivation is to make money even if it means taking it from others while pretending to help them. It's as if these sorts of people live only in the newspapers: I read about them, but they don't seem real. The people I know all seem like decent people, most of them working to contribute to their communities, albeit sometimes in conflicting ways. I have friends who are political conservatives, religious, independents, socialists, atheists—but all of them with a general goal of trying to make a reasonable living for themselves while making positive contributions to their communities. So who are these other people? How did they ever develop into adults whose driving purpose is to be rich?

I don't think these people, whoever they are, are evil. When we think of them as being individually at fault, I think we're missing something. We're interpreting the symptom as the disease. Although I strongly oppose his stance in Afghanistan, I think Obama knows the difference between a symptom and the disease. He gives me hope. It's a thin thread at the moment, but it's a thread and it's better than the despair I feel when I read about the people who really don't seem to care about the consequences of preaching during the day and visiting prostitutes at night.

Irvin Peckham

OP-ED: Afghanistan War

Afghanistan is a landlocked, mountainous country in South-Central Asia, bordered by Iran in the west, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan in the north, Pakistan in the south and east, and China in the far northeast. It is important because of its geostrategic location.

Various foreign powers have invaded Afghanistan, including Macedonians, Muslim Arabs, Turks, and Mongolians. In the late 19th century it was a buffer state between the British and Russian empires, and gained independence in 1919. Since the late 1970s, Afghanistan has experienced a continuous state of civil war and foreign occupation. Soviets invaded in 1979, and over the decade of their involvement, they won almost every battle, and occupied at least once every inch of Afghanistan, but they lost about 15,000 soldiers and the war. The Taliban, a Sunni Islamist political movement, governed Afghanistan from 1996 until late 2001, when they were overthrown by Operation Enduring Freedom, a US-led invasion. The Taliban continues to be a strong insurgency.

Corruption, bribery, and treason are common in the Afghan National Police (ANP), the primary civil law enforcement agency in Afghanistan. This agency contains the Afghan Uniform Police, Border Police, Highway Police,

and the Criminal Investigation Department. Half a year ago President Obama, instead of withdrawing U.S. troops, sent 30,000 more to Afghanistan! He seems to trust the Afghan president, Hamid Karzai, in spite of signs of corruption in Karzai's inner circle.

In the wars previously fought by the U.S., war was won by getting the government of the opposing nation to surrender. However, in Afghanistan, securing peace is complicated by the fact that the country is really thousands of villages, each of them more or less politically independent and self-sufficient.

I recommend that our U.S. government leaders read *Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Fight Terrorism and Build Nations—One School at a Time*, by Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin. This book is the story of Mortenson, a mountaineer who was treated kindly in an impoverished Pakistan village in the Karakoram mountains. Over a decade Mortenson built 55 schools, especially for girls, in that region of Afghanistan and Pakistan.

If our government wants to stay in Afghanistan, it should help the Afghans with aid like Mortenson did. Certainly, President Obama should withdraw our troops.

Paul Y. Burns

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