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MYTHS, OLD AND NEW

NORMAN FINKELSTEIN

In recent years, a more or less cohesive body of work has emerged which challenges the received wisdom on the origins of the Israeli-Arab conflict. Various labels—“new history,” “revisionist history,” or simply “history” (as against the “pre” history of an earlier generation)—this scholarship severely qualifies—without, however, roundly dismissing—the standard interpretation of the eve, unfolding, and aftermath of the 1948 war. Its authors, mostly Israeli, argue five major points: 1) the Zionist movement did not enthusiastically embrace the partition of Palestine; 2) the surrounding Arab states did not unite as one to destroy the nascent Jewish state; 3) the war did not pit a relatively defenseless and weak Jewish David against a relatively strong Arab Goliath; 4) Palestine’s Arabs did not take flight at the behest of Arab orders; and 5) Israel was not earnestly seeking peace at the war’s end.

In this essay I want to focus on the work of Benny Morris, a former diplomatic correspondent of the *Jerusalem Post* who received his doctorate from Cambridge University. Morris is the most influential and prolific of the “new” historians.¹ The central concern of his research is the most passionately disputed chapter of the 1948 war: the flight into exile of Palestine’s indigenous Arab population. Morris’s first study, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949*,² was near-universally acclaimed as a classic, a model of scholarly rigor and detachment. The recent publication of *Birth’s* companion volume, *1948 and After: Israel and the Palestinians*,³ is an espe-

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cially propitious occasion for taking stock of his—and, by extension, the “new” history’s—achievement.

In *Birth*, Morris definitively shatters one of the most enduring myths about the origins of the Israeli-Arab conflict— but only to substitute another that is scarcely more credible in its place.

The aim of Morris’s study is to explain why roughly 700,000 Palestinians fled their homes in the wake of the November 1947 United Nations General Assembly Resolution supporting the creation of an Arab and Jewish state in Mandatory Palestine.⁴ The book’s central thesis is that neither of the standard accounts of the Palestinians’ exodus can withstand close scholarly scrutiny: the Zionists did not expel them with premeditation, as the Arabs allege, and the invading Arab states did not urge them to leave, as the Zionists allege. The truth, as Morris sees it, rather lies “in the vast middle ground” between these two extremes:

The Palestinian refugee problem was born of war, not by design, Jewish or Arab. It was largely a by-product of Arab and Jewish fears of the protracted, bitter fighting that characterised the first Israeli-Arab war; in smaller part, it was the deliberate creation of Jewish and Arab military commanders and politicians. (1948, p. 88; *Birth*, p. 286)

Morris further asserts that, under the given circumstances—i.e., mutual fear and hostility, war, and so on—the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem was “almost inevitable.” (*Birth*, p. 286)

The results of Morris’s research thus apparently belie the most damaging Arab claims⁵ and exonerate Israel of any real culpability for the catastrophe that befell Palestine’s indigenous population in 1948.⁶ While these conclusions will not satisfy those among Israel’s partisans who will accept nothing but Arab culpability, they nevertheless substitute a new version of what occurred in 1948 which as well requires judicious analysis.

In this essay I will argue that Morris has substituted a new myth, one of the “happy median,” for the old. My contention will be that the evidence Morris adduces does not support his temperate conclusions and that the truth lies very much closer to the Arab extreme.⁷ Specifically, I will argue that Morris’s central thesis that the Arab refugee problem was “born of war, not by design” is belied by his own evidence which shows that Palestine’s Arabs were expelled systematically and with premeditation.

“Born of War, Not by Design”?

Morris maintains that the Palestinian Arab refugee problem was “largely a by-product of Arab and Jewish fears and of the protracted, bitter fighting that characterised the first Israeli-Arab war.” Simply put, it was “born of war, not by design.” Yet, in a note to *Birth*, Morris suggests a rather significant qualification of this view:

The world “expelled” was often used rather loosely by Israelis in 1948. It was quite often assumed by non-witnesses that a given community had been expelled when in fact it had left before Israeli forces arrived. The

desire to see the Arabs leave often triggered the assumption that commanders—who it was presumed shared this desire—had had to act overtly and directly to obtain this result, when this had not been the case. *But if denial of the right to return was a form of “expulsion,” then a great many villagers—who had waited near their villages for the battle to die down before trying to return home—can be considered “expellees.”* (p. 343, note 7; emphasis added)

Thus, Morris agrees that, in at least one crucial sense, “a great many” Palestinian refugees were systematically expelled from their homes. This then raises the questions of whether the Zionists intended that the Arabs flee from their homes and whether they acted in a manner consonant with this intention. If the answer to these two questions is also in the affirmative, then it becomes impossible to sustain Morris’s thesis that the refugee problem was “born of war, not by design.” One could maintain that, given the armed hostilities, the Zionists had no alternative except to expel the indigenous Arab population; but one could not still maintain that the Arab flight was an unintended or unanticipated “by-product” of the war.

Before turning to the evidence in this regard, it is not without interest to consider the Arab estimate of Zionist intentions on the eve of the war. Morris cites a British report on the conference of Arab prime ministers in December 1947, in which the Arab view of Zionist ambitions was summarized as follows:

The ultimate aim of all the Zionists was “the acquisition of all of Palestine, all Transjordan and possibly some tracts in Southern Lebanon and Southern Syria.” The Zionist “politicians,” after taking control of the country, would at first treat the Arabs “nicely.” But then, once feeling “strong enough,” they would begin “squeezing the Arab population off their lands . . . [and] if necessary out of the State.” Later, they would expand the Jewish state at the expense of the Palestinian Arab state. However, the most militant Haganah commanders wished to move more quickly. . . . Exploiting the weakness and disorganization of the Arabs, they would first render them—especially in Jaffa and Haifa—“completely powerless” and then frighten or force them into leaving, “their places being taken by Jewish immigrants.” The Arab leaders . . . thought that there existed a still more extreme Jewish plan, of the Revisionists, calling for more immediate expansion. (*Birth*, p. 24)

For all the monumental corruption and incompetence of the Arab leaders, one cannot but be impressed by the prescience of their analyses. Curiously, Morris virtually admits as much but, in a peculiar turn of phrase, describes these Arab “prognoses” as “in the nature of self-fulfilling prophecies.” (*Birth*, p. 24) If he means that the Arabs, by electing to wage war, facilitated the expulsion, he is no doubt correct. Yet, this in no way belies the fact that it *was* an expulsion.

The Arab flight from Palestine divides into basically two stages, the first covering the period from the 29 November 1947 UN General Assembly resolution to the Israeli independence declaration in May 1948, and the second

covering the period from June 1948 to the signing of the armistice agreements in mid-1949. I will deal with each of these stages in turn.

November 1947–May 1948

For the period preceding Israel's birth, Morris focuses primarily on the months April and May. Morris's central conclusion reads as follows:

The main wave of the Arab exodus, encompassing 200,000–300,000 refugees, was not the result of a general, predetermined Yishuv policy. The Arab exodus of April–May caught the Yishuv leadership, including the authors of Plan D, by surprise, though it was immediately seen as a phenomenon to be exploited. (*Birth*, p. 128)

This conclusion incorporates three claims, none of which, in my opinion, can sustain close scrutiny: 1) April–May 1948 witnessed “the main wave of the Arab exodus,” 2) the Arab exodus was “not the result of a general, predetermined Yishuv policy,” and 3) the Arab exodus during these months “caught the Yishuv leadership, including the authors of Plan D, by surprise.”

1) *April–May 1948 witnessed “the main wave of the Arab exodus.”* Morris divides the Arab flight from Palestine into five waves: December 1947–March 1948, April–May 1948, July–October 1948, October–November 1948, and December 1948–September 1949. Of these five waves, he reports that the “main wave” unfolded April–May 1948, as “the bulk of the Palestinian refugees—some 250,000–300,000—went into exile.” Morris devotes by far the largest chapter of his study (“The second wave: the mass exodus, April–June 1948”) to the Arab exodus during these months.⁸ The unmistakable inference is that this wave is somehow representative. Indeed, Morris describes the events in Haifa during April and May as “illustrative of the complexity of the exodus.” (1948, p. 18)

Yet, Morris's periodization obscures the fact that Israel's statehood declaration was actually *the* watershed date. In the weeks immediately preceding 14 May, the Zionist leadership was especially sensitive to international pressure because of threats (emanating particularly from the United States) to rescind or modify the partition resolution. This concern for world public opinion acted to some extent as a brake on Zionist policy vis-à-vis the Palestinian Arabs. As Avi Shlaim puts it in *Collusion Across the Jordan*:

The flight of the Palestinian Arabs [in April 1948] served the military needs of the Yishuv but endangered its international position. A major contention of official Zionist propaganda was that peaceful relations between Arabs and Jews were possible, and Ben-Gurion himself repeatedly declared a Jewish-Arab alliance to be one of the three main objectives of his policy. Any sign of deterioration, any incident liable to plunge Palestine into a bloodbath, naturally, encouraged the opponents of partition. (pp. 164–65)

In the wake of Israel's declaration of independence, however, this constraint was to a large extent (but not altogether) lifted. Coupled with a new military context (the invasion and subsequent rout of the Arab armies), this diplomatic breakthrough enabled the Zionists to pursue with virtual impunity a policy that, as we shall see presently, was openly and relentlessly bent on

expulsion. At least as many, and probably more, Arabs fled after Israel's statehood declaration as before (for the various estimates, cf. *Birth*, p. 292; 1948, pp. 30, 72, 88; Flapan, p. 89). What happened in, say, April is thus not exactly "illustrative of the complexity of the exodus." Morris himself concedes this point in another context, observing that the "circumstances of the second half of the [Arab] exodus" from June onward were "a different story." (1948, p. 88) In effect, the overt expulsion of Lydda's Arabs in July was no less representative of Zionist policy than the covert expulsion of Haifa's Arabs in April. Nevertheless, as I will argue presently, Zionist policy throughout was one of expulsion.

2) *The Arab exodus was "not the result of a general, predetermined Yishuv policy."* Morris's argument is that no single factor can explain the flight of the Palestinian Arabs during this period:

There is probably no accounting for the mass exodus . . . without understanding the prevalence and depth of the general sense of collapse, of "falling apart," that permeated Arab Palestine, especially the towns, by April 1948. In many places, it would take very little to induce the inhabitants to pack up and flee. Come the Haganah (and IZL-LHI) offensives of April-May, the cumulative effect of the fears, deprivations, abandonment and depredations of the previous months, in both towns and villages, overcame the natural, basic reluctance to abandon home and property and go into exile. As Palestinian military power was swiftly and dramatically demolished and the Haganah demonstrated almost unchallenged superiority in successive conquests, Arab morale cracked, giving way to general blind panic or a "psychosis of flight," as one IDF intelligence report put it. (*Birth*, p. 287)

The correlative of this argument is that the Arab exodus did not result from a systematic policy of expulsion. Yet the evidence Morris brings to bear in support of his thesis points to a different conclusion. In this section I will look at general Zionist policy and in the next section I will focus on two key architects of Zionist policy during these months.

According to Morris, the Yishuv military leadership formulated in early March and began implementing in April Plan Dalet to cope with the anticipated Arab offensives. The "essence" of Plan D "was the clearing of hostile and potentially hostile forces out of the interior of the prospective territory of the Jewish State. . . . As the Arab irregulars were based and quartered in the villages, and as the militias of many villages were participating in the anti-Yishuv hostilities, *the Haganah regarded most of the villages as actively or potentially hostile.*" (*Birth*, p. 62, emphasis added; cf. *Birth*, pp. 113, 128–29) In short, Plan D constituted—and here I am quoting Morris—"a strategic-ideological anchor and basis for expulsions by front, district, brigade and battalion commanders . . . and it gave commanders, *post facto*, a formal, persuasive covering note to explain their actions." (*Birth*, p. 63; cf. *Birth*: pp. 113, 157)⁹

I do not see how the above admissions can be reconciled with Morris's claim that there existed no General Staff " 'plan' or policy decision" to "expel 'the Arabs' from the Jewish State's areas." (*Birth*, p. 289) One can argue

that Plan D was neither discussed, nor would it likely have been approved, by the official Jewish decision-making bodies—the provisional government, the National Council, and the Jewish Agency Executive. (cf. Flapan, p. 89) One can also argue, and I will return to this question, that Plan D was “not a political blueprint for the expulsion of Palestine’s Arabs” but, rather, “was governed by military considerations and was geared to achieving military ends.” (*Birth*, pp. 62–63) The fact still remains, however, that such an expulsion policy was formulated.

Furthermore, Plan D was the *operative* policy in the field. According to Morris, “during the first half of April, Ben-Gurion and the Haganah General Staff approved a series of offensives . . . embodying [Plan D’s] guidelines.” (*Birth*, p. 129) And again: “The doctrinal underpinning of Plan D was taken for granted by the majority of the Haganah commanders. . . . The gloves had to be, and were, taken off.” (*Birth*, p. 113) And yet again: “It was understood by all concerned that, militarily, in the struggle to survive, the less Arabs remaining behind and along the front lines, the better and, politically, the less Arabs remaining in the Jewish State, the better. At each level of command and execution, Haganah officers in those April–May days when the fate of the State hung in balance, simply ‘understood’ what the military and political exigencies of survival required” (*Birth*, p. 289)—i.e., expulsion.¹⁰

In accordance with Plan D, the Haganah and dissident Zionist groups launched a series of military offensives, the fully anticipated result of which was the Arabs’ flight from Palestine. The attacks themselves were “the most important single factor in the exodus of April–June from both the cities and from the villages. . . . This is demonstrated clearly by the fact that each exodus occurred during and in the immediate wake of each military assault. No town was abandoned by the bulk of its population *before* Jewish attack.” (*Birth*, pp. 130–31, emphasis in original; cf. 1948, pp. 74–77) The widely publicized slaughter at Dayr Yasin, the massacres in Khirbet Nasr ad Din near Tiberias and ‘Ein az Zeitun near Safad, the indiscriminate and protracted mortarings in Haifa¹¹ and Acre, the use of loudspeakers broadcasting “black propaganda” (i.e., terrifying) messages in Arabic, crop burnings, and so on, spurred into exile those Palestinians not sufficiently impressed by the lightning assaults of the Zionist forces. (1948: pp. 71, 75–76, 173–90 *passim*) Especially outside the major urban centers, “it was standard Haganah and IDF policy to round up and expel the remaining villagers (usually old people, widows, cripples) from sites already evacuated by most of their inhabitants.” (*Birth*, p. 288) Finally, Morris reports that the Arab exodus during these months was “certainly viewed favorably” and “with satisfaction” by “the bulk of the Yishuv’s leadership.” (1948, p. 87)

Given that the expressed aim of the wartime *de facto* Zionist leadership was to expel the Arabs, given that its intention became operative policy in the field, given that the tactics of the Jewish commanders had the predictable result of inducing a mass flight, and given that Palestinians who fled the scene of battle were blocked from returning to their homes once hostilities

were suspended, not too much significance would seem to attach to Morris's observation—itsself questionable, as we shall see below—that expulsion orders were rarely issued “since most of the villages were completely or almost completely empty by the time they were occupied.” (*Birth*, p. 131)

Morris does acknowledge that the “atrocities factor” (his phrase) played a major role in certain areas of the country in encouraging Arab flight. (*Birth*, pp. 130, 288; *1948*, pp. 75–76) Nonetheless, there are several curious twists in his account. In the first place, he rightly points to the pivotal role of the Dayr Yasin massacre, but accuses the Arab radio stations of “luridly and repeatedly” broadcasting accounts of it “for weeks.” (*Birth*, p. 130; cf. *Birth*, p. 114 where he refers to the “Arab media atrocity campaign”) Yet, according to an authoritative (if controversial) Israeli military historian of the 1948 war, Uri Milstein, the reports on Dayr Yasin that spurred the Arabs into exile were “mostly fabricated or exaggerated by various elements on the Jewish side.” (“No deportations, evacuations” in *Hadashot*, 1 January 1988) Furthermore, in *Birth*'s conclusion, Morris revises the meaning of the “atrocities factor.” There it mainly refers not to Zionist brutalities but to Arab premonitions of Jewish retribution: “Arab villagers and townspeople, prompted by the fear that the Jews, if victorious, would do to them what, in the reverse circumstances victorious Arab fighters would have done (and did, occasionally, as in the Etzion Bloc in May), to defeated Jews, took to their heels”; the “actual atrocities committed by the Jewish forces” serve, in this reckoning, only to “reinforce such fears considerably.” (*Birth*, p. 288) In any event, Morris provides only the flimsiest of evidence—for example, a hearsay account of an American reporter's conversation with an English sergeant in which the latter surmised what the Arabs must have “imagined to themselves” as they fled (*Birth*, pp. 363–64, note 2)—to support his tendentious redefinition of the “atrocities factor.”

Much ink has been spilled on the mass Arab exodus from Haifa in late April.¹² There is no need to rehearse all the specific arguments here. For our purposes, the important point is that events in Haifa generally conformed to the pattern of terror, assault, and expulsion described above. Intercommunal strife in Haifa first peaked in December 1947 with an unprovoked attack by Irgun Zvai Leumi (IZL) members on a crowd of Arab refinery workers. By April, some 15,000–20,000 of Haifa's 70,000-strong Palestinian community had already fled the city, as hostilities continued to escalate. In accordance with Plan D, the Haganah launched its major offensive against Haifa on 21 April. Attacking Jewish forces made liberal use of psychological warfare and terror tactics. We have already noted the terrible scene near the port area. (Cf. note 4) Jeeps were also brought in broadcasting recorded “horror sounds”—including “shrieks, wails and anguished moans of Arab women, the wail of sirens and the clang of fire-alarm bells, interrupted by a sepulchral voice calling out in Arabic: Save your souls, all ye faithful! Flee for your lives!,” according to the eyewitness account of a Haganah officer—and threats to use poison gas and atomic weapons against the Arabs.

(Palumbo, p. 64) The Carmeli Brigade was ordered to “kill every [adult] male encountered” and to attack with firebombs “all objectives that can be set alight.” (*Birth*, pp. 76–77) According to Morris, “clearly th[e] offensive, and especially the mortaring which took place during the morning of 22 April, precipitated the mass exodus.” (*Birth*, p. 85; *1948*, p. 21)

Amid the wrack of Haifa, negotiations convened between the local British, Zionist, and Arab civilian authorities. By this time probably half and perhaps more of Haifa’s Arabs had already fled in terror, many fearing a repetition of the Dayr Yasin massacre. For reasons that still remain obscure, the Arabs refused to accept the surrender terms, choosing instead to evacuate the city. Haifa was the only place where civilian Zionist leaders asked the Arabs to stay put and one of only a handful of places where the local Arab leadership made an organized, considered decision to leave. (*1948*, p. 20) But the pleas on one side and the demurrals on the other were largely irrelevant to the actual unfolding of events. For the atrocities continued unabated, with “the civilian [Zionist] authorities . . . saying one thing and the Haganah . . . doing something else altogether.” (*Birth*, p. 90) With only several thousand Arabs remaining, certain Zionist authorities did finally make a serious effort to halt the exodus, apparently for fear of diplomatic repercussions and the serious strains in the Haifa economy that the flight of Arab workers would cause.¹³

Watching the Arabs flee, Ben-Gurion, who visited the city on 1 May, reportedly exclaimed, “What a beautiful sight!” (Palumbo, p. 76) Learning that one Zionist official in the city was trying to persuade the Arabs to stay, Ben-Gurion remarked, “Doesn’t he have anything more important to do?” (*Birth*, p. 328, note 4) The policy he announced was to treat the remaining Arabs “with civil and human equality” but “it is not our job to worry about the return of the Arabs [who fled].” (*Birth*, p. 133) In July, Haifa’s remaining inhabitants, some 3,500, were packed into a ghetto in the downtown Wadi Nisnas neighborhood. (*1948*, pp. 149–71)

Morris maintains that “there is no evidence that the architects of, and commanders involved in, the offensive of 21–22 April hoped that it would lead to an Arab evacuation of Haifa.” He goes on to observe that “at the level of Carmeli Brigade headquarters, no orders were ever issued to the troops dispersed in the Arab districts to act in a manner that would precipitate flight.” (*Birth*: pp. 85, 92; cf. *1948*, p. 84) Yet Morris himself so qualifies these claims as to render them at best trivial. First, we are told that “clearly the Haganah was not averse to seeing the Arabs evacuate” Haifa. (*Birth*, p. 86) We next learn that, notwithstanding Carmeli headquarters orders—issued “somewhat belatedly”—that forbade looting and urged the Arabs to remain calm and return to work, “if not explicitly to stay in the city,” there was “certainly an undercurrent of more militant thinking akin to the IZL approach.”

At the company and platoon levels, officers and men cannot but have been struck by the thought that the steady Arab exodus was “good for the Jews” and must be encouraged to assure the security of “Jewish” Haifa. A trace

of such thinking in Carmeli Brigade headquarters can be discerned in the diary entries of Yosef Weitz for 22–24 April, which the [Jewish National Fund] JNF executive spent in Haifa. “I think that this [flight-prone] state of mind [among the Arabs] should be exploited, and [we should] press the other inhabitants not to surrender [but to leave]. We must establish our state,” he jotted down on 22 April. On 24 April, Weitz went to see Carmel’s adjutant, who informed Weitz that the nearby Arab villages . . . were being evacuated by their inhabitants and that Acre had been “shaken.” “I was happy to hear from him that this line was being adopted by the [Haganah] command, [that is] to frighten the Arabs so long as flight-inducing fear was upon them” . . . Weitz, it appears found a responsive echo in Carmeli Brigade headquarters. It made simple military as well as political sense: Haifa without Arabs was a more easily defensible, less problematic city for the Haganah than Haifa with a large Arab minority. (*Birth*, pp. 92–93)

In short, *de facto* Zionist policy, even at the level of the Carmeli Brigade headquarters, was to press the Arab exodus from Haifa. Thus, Milstein observes that, notwithstanding the Zionists’ claim that they “wanted the Arabs to stay in Haifa, but the Arabs refused,” the “truth was different: The commander of the Carmeli Brigade, Moshe Carmel, feared that many Arabs would remain in the city. Hence, he ordered that three-inch mortars be used to shell the Arab crowds on the market square. The crowd broke into the port, pushing aside the policemen who guarded the gate, stormed the boats and fled the city. The whole day mortars continued to shell the city, even though the Arabs did not fight.” (“No deportation, evacuation”) Indeed, the “great efficacy” of these “indirect methods” (among others) in Haifa is singled out by the important IDF intelligence report of June 1948 in its recommendations for precipitating Arab flight. (1948, p. 71)¹⁴

The other Arab cities and the Arab villages besieged during the months April–May met roughly the same fate as Haifa—and for roughly the same reasons. The aim of Operation Yiftah, commanded by Yigal Allon, was to “clear” the Eastern Galilee border area “completely of all Arab forces and inhabitants.” Thus were Safad and the villages of Fir’im and Mughr al-Khayt emptied of their inhabitants. (*Birth*, pp. 101–2, 121–22) The aim of Operation Ben-Ami, commanded by Moshe Carmel, was “the conquest and evaluation by the Arabs” of the Western Galilee. Carmel’s operational order of 19 May to his battalion commanders read: “To attack in order to conquer, to kill among the men, to destroy and burn the villages of Al Kabri, Umm al Faraj and An Nahr.” (*Birth*, pp. 124–25) The aim of Operation Lightning, commanded by Shimon Avidan, was to cause a “general panic” and “the wandering [i.e., exodus]” of the Arabs in the south, bordering Egypt. (*Birth*, p. 126) The villagers of Kaufakha in the Negev had, according to Morris, “earlier repeatedly asked to surrender, accept Jewish rule and be allowed to stay, all to no avail. The Haganah *always* regarded such requests as either insincere or unreliable.” (*Birth*, p. 128; emphasis added) Even villages that had “traditionally been friendly towards the Yishuv”—for example, Huj, whose inhabitants had hidden Haganah men from a British dragnet in 1946

and whose *mukhtar* was shot dead by a mob in Gaza because of his “collaboration with the Jews”—were depopulated and destroyed. (*Birth*, p. 128)

The record Morris has assembled evidently belies his central thesis that the vicissitudes of war, not an expulsion policy, accounted for the flight of Palestine’s Arabs during these months. Yet it is not only Morris’s evidence that works against his thesis; his own arguments work against it as well.

Morris asserts that, although right-wing Revisionist Zionists like Menahem Begin and the Irgun leadership did not “openly espouse a policy of expulsion” during April and May, the goal was “manifest” in the nature of the attacks they led. He elaborates on this point in a revealing footnote worth quoting at length:

While Begin and the IZL leadership were careful not to openly espouse a policy of expulsion, it is clear that the IZL’s military operations were designed with the aim of clearing out the Arab inhabitants of the areas they conquered. Following the massacre at Dayr Yasin, the IZL fighters trucked out the remaining villagers to East Jerusalem. In May in the Hills of Ephraim the IZL assault ended in the flight of the majority of the villagers; and those who remained in place were, within days, swiftly sent packing. . . . In their post-operational reports, . . . the IZL commanders emphasized their satisfaction with the fact that the assaults had precipitated mass civilian-Arab flight. (1948, p. 37)

Terror, the flight of most Arabs as an assault unfolded and the dispatch of those who remained behind, the satisfaction of the Jewish commanders with the Arab flight—this is Morris’s description of the “main wave of the Arab exodus” during April and May. But then, by Morris’s own reckoning, it was not only the right-wing Revisionists who *de facto* pursued an expulsion policy.

3) *The Arab exodus during the months April–May “caught the Yishuv leadership, including the authors of Plan D, by surprise.”* Morris maintains not only that the Palestinian exodus was an unintended “by-product” of the war but that it “surprised”—indeed, “shocked,” “flustered,” and “astonished” (*Birth*, pp. 82–83; 1948: pp. 70, 90)—the Yishuv. He frequently sounds this theme, for example, in the following representative passage:

[There is] no evidence, with the exception of one or two important but isolated statements by Ben-Gurion, of any general expectation in the Yishuv of a mass exodus of the Arab population from the Jewish or any other part of Palestine. Such an exodus may have been regarded by most Yishuv leaders as desirable; but in late March and early April, it was not regarded as necessarily likely or imminent. When it occurred, it surprised even the most optimistic and hardline Yishuv executives, including the leading advocate of the transfer policy, Yosef Weitz. (*Birth*, pp. 63–64)

Inasmuch as Morris specifically names Ben-Gurion and Yosef Weitz, let us look at what the actual record reveals about them.

David Ben-Gurion was without question the major architect of the 1948 war. His words and deeds informed as no other Zionist leader’s did the unfolding of events. A review of his record thus provides special insight into the Zionist approach to Palestine’s Arab population during that fateful year.

Morris reports that, as far back as the late 1930s, Ben-Gurion repeatedly and forthrightly expressed his support—at public meetings as well as in private correspondence and diary entries—for the expulsion of the Palestinian Arabs. For instance, at a Zionist meeting in June 1938 he affirmed that “I support compulsory transfer. I don’t see in it anything immoral.” (*Tikkun*, p. 83; cf. *Birth*, p. 25)

The “idea of a transfer as a solution to the prospective Jewish state’s major problem,” Morris continues, “never left the Zionist leader’s mind”; it “simmered” until the outbreak of hostilities in 1948. Indeed, “already in November 1947, a few days before the UN partition resolution, Ben-Gurion was thinking in terms of a ‘transfer’ solution to the prospective Jewish state’s Arab problem.” Hence, he advised giving the Arabs of the future Jewish state citizenship in the future Arab state so as to facilitate their expulsion in the likely event of war. Then, as the Palestinians first began to flee before the Zionist assaults during the early days of the war in December 1947, Ben-Gurion grasped that the moment was at hand to implement transfer. Morris writes:

With a little nudging, with a limited expulsion here and the razing of a village there, and with a policy of military conquest usually preceded by mortar barrages, this trickle of an exodus, he realized, could be turned into a massive outflow. (*Tikkun*, p. 82)¹⁵

On 7 February 1948, Ben-Gurion spoke approvingly at a Mapai council meeting of the Arab flight from West Jerusalem and anticipated its generalization. He was delighted that not “since the days of the Roman destruction” was Jerusalem “so completely Jewish as today. . . . There are no strangers [i.e., Arabs]. One hundred percent Jews.” He added that “what happened in Jerusalem and what happened in Haifa could well happen in great parts of the country—if we [the Yishuv] hold on. . . . It is very possible that in the coming six or eight or ten months of the war there will take place great changes . . . and not all of them to our detriment. Certainly there will be great changes in the composition of the population of the country.” (*Birth*, p. 52; *Tikkun*, p. 83; *1948*, pp. 40, 90; Milstein, “No deportations, evacuation”)

When asked at this same Mapai meeting about the absence of Jewish-owned land in strategic areas of Palestine, Ben-Gurion replied: “The war will give us the land. the concepts of ‘ours’ and ‘not ours’ are only concepts for peacetime, and during war they lose all their meaning.” (*Birth*, p. 170) Indeed, throughout this month, he repeatedly expressed his intention to appropriate Arab lands in the course of the upcoming war; for example, he suggested to Weitz on 10 February that Weitz divest himself of “conventional notions. . . . In the Negev we will not buy land. We will conquer it. You are forgetting that we are at war.” (*Birth*, p. 170) Morris comments on this latter exchange:

Of course, Ben-Gurion was thinking ahead—and not only about the Negev. The White Paper of 1939 had almost completely blocked Jewish land purchases, asphyxiating the kibbutzim and blocking Jewish regional devel-

opment. . . . The Partition resolution had earmarked some 60% of Palestine for the Jewish State; most of it was not Jewish-owned land. But war was war and, if won, as Ben-Gurion saw things, it would at least solve the Jewish State's land problem. (*Birth*, p. 170)

Morris evidently fails to draw the obvious inference that, "as Ben-Gurion saw things" already in early February, resolving the Jewish state's massive and seemingly intractable "land problem" would have to entail the dispossession and displacement of the indigenous Arab peasants. Thus, on the *eve* of the Haganah offensive resulting in the Arab exodus which allegedly "surprised" Ben-Gurion, the latter anticipated that the Zionists would "enter the *empty* [Arab] villages and settle in them." (*Birth*, p. 180; emphasis added) Morris observes that Ben-Gurion then outlined "two major characteristics of the settlement drive of the following months: settlement of the *abandoned* Arab villages and settlement in areas thinly populated by Jews." (*Birth*, pp. 180–81; emphasis added) Two days later, on 6 April, Ben-Gurion added:

We will not be able to win the war if we do not, during the war, populate Upper and Lower, Eastern and Western Galilee, the Negev and the Jerusalem area, even if only in an artificial way, in a military way. . . . I believe the war will also bring in its wake a great change in the distribution of the Arab population. (*Birth*, p. 181)

With the implementation of Plan D, Ben-Gurion presided over the intensification and generalization of precisely those policies which, already in December 1947, he knew would result in a mass flight of the Palestinian Arabs. As Morris himself tersely puts it,

Outwardly, he continued until very late in the day to pay the requisite lip service to the grand humanist-socialist ideals. . . . *On the ground, however, he made sure that what he wanted done got done*, and he carefully avoided leaving tracks; his name rarely adorns an actual expulsion directive. (*Tikkun*, p. 82; emphasis added)

In a speech to the provisional government on 16 June 1948, Israel's first prime minister observed that

three things have happened up to now: a) the invasion of the regular armies of the Arab states, b) our ability to withstand these regular armies, and c) the flight of the Arabs. I was not surprised by any of them. (Flapan, p. 88)

The weight of the evidence overwhelmingly points to the conclusion that, at least so far as the "flight of the Arabs" is concerned, this was not an idle boast. (Curiously, Morris does not report Ben-Gurion's claim that the Arab flight didn't come as a surprise to him.)¹⁶

After citing Ben-Gurion's eager anticipation in February 1948 that "there will certainly be great changes in the composition of the country," Morris asks rhetorically: "Are these the words of a man who wishes to see the Arabs remain 'citizens of a future Jewish State'? Or are these, rather, the words of a leader who has long entertained . . . a concept of 'transfer' as the solution to the prospective Jewish state's Arab problem?" One may just as well ask rhe-

torically: Are these the words—*is the record that Morris has assembled*—of a man who was “shocked” by the Arab flight?

Let us now turn to Yosef Weitz. Weitz was the Jewish National Fund executive responsible for land acquisition and its allocation to Jewish settlements, and the JNF representative on the Committee of Directorates of the National Institutions, and on the Settlement Committee of the National Institutions. As Morris comments, he “was well placed to shape and influence decision-making regarding the Arab population on the national level and to oversee implementation of policy on the local level.” (1948, p. 91)¹⁷

As far back as 1940, the idea of a massive Arab transfer from Palestine had “gripped the imagination” of Weitz. (*Birth*, p. 27; cf. Palumbo, p. 4) And, already in early 1948, Weitz—like Ben-Gurion—grasped that the “state of anarchy created by the hostilities” could and should be used to solve the “Arab problem” in Palestine. (1948, pp. 91, 120) In an 11 January diary entry, he wrote: “Is it not now the time to be rid of them? Why continue to keep in our midst these thorns at a time when they pose a danger to us? Our people are weighing up [solutions].” (*Birth*, p. 55) A little over a month later he returned to this theme: “It is possible that now is the time to implement our original plan: To transfer them [to Transjordan].” (*Birth*, p. 55) Weitz personally organized numerous “local eviction and expulsion operations” during these months preceding the major Haganah offensive, sometimes with the assistance of local Haganah units. From January to March, he oversaw the expulsion of Arabs from Ramot-Menashe, Beit Shean Valley and Western Galilee. (*Birth*, p. 26; 1948, pp. 92–97) Throughout March and April, Weitz “desperately sought political backing and help to implement the transfer.” (*Birth*, p. 135; cf. Flapan, pp. 96–97)

With the implementation of Plan D in April, the Zionist leadership in effect undertook to accomplish exactly what Weitz had, in the preceding months, repeatedly urged and already by himself attempted—i.e., to exploit the conditions of “war and anarchy” to expel the Arabs. Given Weitz’s critical place in the Zionist apparatus and his personal foreknowledge of the likely consequences of a massive and bloody assault on the Arab population, it is hard to believe that the ensuing mass exodus came as much of a “surprise” to him.

Indeed, consider the following suggestive incident reported by Morris. On 13 April, Israel Galili, the Haganah chief, wrote Weitz: “We regard as important to security new settlements being established in the following places. . .: Beit Mashir, Saris, Ghuweir, Abu Shusha, Kafr Misr, Khirbet Manshiya, Tantura, Bureir.” Galili asked that the establishment of the settlements at these sites be carried out “as soon as possible.” (*Birth*, p. 181) We learn in the corresponding note that: “Most of the sites had *not yet been abandoned by their inhabitants*.” (*Birth*, p. 339, note 105; *emphasis added*)

Morris’s only pieces of evidence to support his claim that the mass flight beginning in April took Weitz by “surprise” are two diary entries. In his diary entry for 22 April 1948, Weitz, having just arrived in Haifa, muses

about the reason behind the Arab flight from there: "Eating away at my innards are fears . . . that perhaps a plot is being hatched [between the British and the Arabs] against us. . . . Maybe the evacuation will facilitate the war against us." Morris next quotes the diary entry for the following day to clinch his argument: "Something in my unconscious is frightened by this flight." (*Birth*, p. 64)

In the first place, the fact that Weitz was not at first privy to the specific unfolding of events in Haifa scarcely proves that the overall Arab flight came as a surprise to him. Furthermore, Weitz quickly recovered his bearings. The *very same day* that his "innards" were being eaten away by "fears" and the day *before* his "unconscious" was being "frightened" by the Arab exodus, Weitz was already urging that the flight-prone "state of mind" of Haifa's Arabs be "exploited" in order to "hound the rest of the inhabitants so that they should not surrender [and then stay put]. We must establish our state." So reads the remainder of Weitz's diary entry for 22 April 1948, which Morris inexplicably only reports some thirty pages later in another context in *Birth*. (pp. 92–93; cf. 1948, p. 100) By 24 April, Weitz is gleefully recording that his "line was being adopted by the [Haganah] command," that is, "to frighten the Arabs [in Haifa] so long as flight-inducing fear was upon them." (*Birth*, p. 93; cf. 1948, p. 100) Within a few more days, "impressed by the [Arab] flight and encouraged by Ben-Gurion," Weitz "visited the areas conquered by the Jewish forces in order to plan the creation of new Jewish settlements on the ruins of the Arab villages." (Flapan, p. 97)

Weitz, whose cynicism apparently knew no limits,¹⁸ could still enter into his diary on 2 May, after observing first-hand the results of the Haganah's depredations in the Jezreel Valley—"the Arab villages [are] in ruins . . . the houses and huts are completely destroyed"—that the Arabs there left "in a psychosis of fear. . . . Village after village was abandoned in a panic *that cannot be explained*." (*Birth*, p. 111; emphasis added) And, Morris, whose credulity apparently also knows no limits, credits these remarks without even the slightest demurral.¹⁹

Thanks in no small part to Weitz's lobbying efforts, the Arab flight from Palestine was fast becoming a *fait accompli* by the summer of 1948. In mid-June, the "decision against a return" had more or less "crystallized." (1948, p. 186) Weitz now spearheaded an unofficial and then in August an official "transfer committee" to prevent the repatriation of the Arab refugees. In this capacity, he supervised the destruction of, or resettlement of Jews in, the abandoned Arab villages. (For details, see chapter 4–5 of *Birth* and chapter 4 of 1948.) Morris observes that the "great majority" of the Jewish settlements (including the kibbutzim) and officials supported these policies. (*Birth*, pp. 167–68)

The decision to block repatriation of the Arab refugees coincided with Israel's embarkment on a headlong expulsion policy, to which I will return presently. Before doing so, however, I want to take note of a curiosity in Morris's argument.

We have seen that there is precious little evidence that the Arab flight from Palestine came as a “shock” to the wartime Zionist leadership. Yet there is ample evidence that a crucial component of the Yishuv believed the wartime Zionist leadership was engaged in a policy of mass expulsion. This component was Mapam, the United Workers Party.

Mapam was unusually well placed to follow the unfolding of events in 1948. Much of the Haganah/IDF’s officer corps was recruited from Mapam—e.g., Galili, Carmel, Rabin, and Allon. Moreover, committed as it was to achieving a *modus vivendi* with the Arab world, Mapam enjoyed atypically close relations with the Palestinian Arabs. Finally, Hashomer Hatzair, which together with Ahdut Ha’avodah formed Mapam in January 1948, managed to accumulate an extensive archive on the Arab flight.

Now, according to Morris, the “majority opinion” in Mapam throughout 1948 was that Ben-Gurion’s policy was “tending toward expulsion.” A debate did ensue in Mapam on the Arab exodus, but this debate generally assumed that the Arabs were being expelled: the only real question was whether politics or the exigencies of combat inspired Ben-Gurion’s “war of expulsion.” (1948: pp. 71, 184)

In early May, Aharon Cohen, director of Mapam’s Arab Department, wrote that “a deliberate eviction [of the Arabs] is taking place. . . . Others may rejoice—I, as a socialist am ashamed and afraid.” A few days later he repeated that the Arabs were being expelled—a “‘transfer’ of the Arabs from the area of the Jewish state” was being executed—“out of certain political goals and not only out of military necessity.” And at a Mapam meeting in June, Cohen charged that “it had depended on us whether the Arabs stayed or fled. . . . [They had fled] and this was [the implementation of] Ben-Gurion’s line in which our comrades are [also] active.” At a late May Mapam Political Committee meeting, Eliezer Prai, the editor of the party’s daily paper, accused elements of the Yishuv—e.g., Weitz—of carrying out a “transfer policy” by “blood and fire,” aimed at emptying the Jewish state of its Arab inhabitants. In July, Mapam leader Ya’acov Hazan threatened that “the robbery, killing, expulsion, and rape of the Arabs could reach such proportions that we would [no longer] be able to stand” belonging to a coalition with Ben-Gurion’s Mapai. (In May 1948, Mapam had joined the newly-formed government as a junior partner.) At a meeting in December 1948, Mapam leader Meir Ya’ari charged that, while the party officially repudiated a policy of expulsion, “its” generals had helped implement it. And so on. (1948, pp. 46–47, 52, 53, 63, 71, 113; *Birth*, pp. 159–60)

Morris dutifully reports all this without comment. He impeaches neither the motives nor the testimony of the Mapam leaders. Yet Morris never once confronts the question begging to be asked: If the Arab flight was “born of war, not by design,” where did the Mapam leaders get such strange ideas?

June 1948–July 1949

Until the end of April, the Zionist leadership was very sensitive to diplomatic opinion. The international consensus that favored partition in November 1947 seemed to be on the brink of collapse. If the Zionists embarked on a course too openly hostile to the indigenous Arab population, it would have supplied the perfect pretext for those parties eager to preempt the founding of a Jewish state. As the fourteenth of May approached, however, these fears abated and the Zionists' anti-Arab policies became more pronounced. The state was now an irrevocable fact. Furthermore, the Arab invasion could justify an expulsion policy; and, as the IDF progressed from strategic offensive to rout beginning in early July, such a policy could be relentlessly pursued with total impunity. Within the next eleven months, fully half of the total Palestinian population that ultimately found itself in exile took flight.

According to Morris, although "there was no Cabinet or IDF General Staff-level decision to expel" the Arabs, "from July onward, there was a growing readiness in the IDF units" to do exactly that. (*Birth*, p. 292; cf. *Birth*, p. 218) Ben-Gurion himself left no doubt during these months that he "wanted as few Arabs as possible to remain in the Jewish State. He hoped to see them flee. He said as much to his colleagues and aides in meetings in August, September, and October." (*Birth*, pp. 292–93) Indeed, already in July he was openly complaining to the Northern Front chief of operations that too many Arabs had remained in newly conquered Nazareth: "Why did you not expel them?" (*Tikkun*, p. 82) On 26 September, Israel's first prime minister assured his cabinet that, during the next offensive, the Galilee would become "clean" and "empty" of Arabs. On 21 October, he declared that "[t]he Arabs of the Land of Israel have only one function left to them—to run away." Describing the Arab exodus from Galilee ten days later, Ben-Gurion commented, "and many more still will flee"—to which Morris adds: "It was an assessment— and, perhaps, hope—shared . . . at the time by many key figures in the Israeli military and civil bureaucracies." (*Birth*, p. 218)

Certain exceptions were made to this now overt expulsion policy—notably, Druze and Christian Arabs were for various reasons not forced into flight (*Birth*, pp. 198–202)²⁰—but, generally, it was executed with ruthless efficiency. For example, in Operation Yoav (as in all IDF offensives during these months), "bombers and fighter bombers, battalions of field artillery and mortars, and tanks" were "deployed with telling effect." The Arabs who failed to flee before the Zionist juggernaut were expelled outright. (*Birth*, pp. 219–22)

Atrocities escalated, "no doubt precipitat[ing] the flight of communities on the path of the IDF advance." (*Birth*, p. 230) Consider the massacre at Ad Dawayima in late October. A soldier eyewitness described how the IDF, capturing the village "without a fight," first "killed about 80–100 [male] Arabs, women and children. The children they killed by breaking their heads with sticks. There was not a house without dead." The remaining Arabs were

then closed off in houses “without food and water,” as the village was systematically razed. “One commander ordered a sapper to put two old women in a certain house . . . and to blow up the house with them. The sapper refused. . . . The commander then ordered his men to put in the old women and the evil deed was done. One soldier boasted that he had raped a woman and then shot her. One woman, with a newborn baby in her arms, was employed to clear the courtyard where the soldiers ate. She worked a day or two. In the end they shot her and her baby.” The soldier eyewitness concluded that “cultured officers . . . had turned into base murderers and this not in the heat of battle . . . but out of a *system of expulsion and destruction*. The less Arabs remained—the better. This principle is the political motor for the expulsions and the atrocities.” (*Birth*, pp. 222–23; emphasis added)²¹

Morris reports the following (partial) inventory of IDF atrocities committed in the October fighting, as presented to the Political Committee of Mapam:

- Safsaf—“52 men tied with a rope and dropped into a well and shot. 10 were killed. Women pleaded for mercy. [There were] 3 cases of rape. . . . A girl aged 14 was raped. Another 4 were killed.”
- Jish—“a woman and her baby were killed. Another 11 [were killed?].”
- Sa’sa—cases of “mass murder [though] a thousand [?] lifted white flags [and] a sacrifice was offered [to welcome] the army. The whole village was expelled.”
- Saliha—“94 . . . were blown up with a house.” (*Birth*, p. 230)

At a Mapam meeting in November, IDF atrocities—or, as Morris sometimes calls them, “excesses” and “nudging”—in the Galilee were described as “Nazi acts.” (*Birth*, p. 350, note 37) Probably thinking about the Ad Dawayima massacre, Aharon Zisling of Mapam remarked at another meeting in November that “I couldn’t sleep all night. . . . Jews too have committed Nazi acts.” (*Birth*, p. 233) In December, Mapam party coleader Meir Ya’ari declared that “many of us are losing their [human] image.” (*Birth*, p. 211)²² To be sure, Ben-Gurion, who believed that “the Haganah and the IDF had . . . to be allowed to get on with the war” and hence resisted any censure of the attacking forces, was apparently *not* shocked by the reported atrocities. (*Birth*, p. 232)²³

* * *

We have seen that, already during the first weeks of hostilities, Ben-Gurion and his lieutenants were intent on expelling the Arabs from Palestine. The tactics deployed in the successive offensives by the Zionist military forces were tailor-made to achieve this end. As the fourteenth of May approached, and with the majority of the Arabs who eventually became refugees still *in situ*, the fully fury of the Zionist military machine was unleashed. Palestinians who fled the field of attack, even if lingering right outside their villages or towns until the terror abated, were blocked from returning. Palestinians who lagged behind or failed to “get the message” were generally expelled outright. The villages that were home to these Palestinians were systematically razed.²⁴

Thus, to distinguish between the Palestinian refugees who fled before the attacking (or approaching) Zionist forces, on the one hand, and the Palestinian refugees who were expelled outright, on the other, is, to put it most charitably, an exercise in sophistry. Occasionally, Morris comes close to conceding this point,²⁵ but I don't think he goes nearly far enough. Indeed he couldn't without abandoning his central thesis in the same breath.

Yet even if, for the sake of argument, we were to credit this disingenuous distinction, Morris's account of the Arab flight is still highly misleading—or, at best, inconsistent. Consider the incongruity between his text and sources, on the one hand, and the tables he assembles at the front of *Birth*, on the other.

These tables purport to give a synoptic view of the Arab flight from Palestine. Each of the roughly 370 Palestinian villages and towns ultimately depopulated is labelled mainly according to whether the inhabitants fled because of Arab orders ("A"), Zionist military assault ("M"), or Zionist expulsion ("E"). Although Morris admits that the line between categories is "occasionally blurred" (*Birth*, p. xiv), he nonetheless apparently strives to achieve a high degree of precision. Thus, although Morris himself refers without qualification to the "expulsion" of the Arab population of Lydda and Ramle in July,²⁶ in his tables the exodus from these two cities is attributed to expulsion ("E") *and* military assault ("M"), presumably because some Arabs fled as the IDF was approaching. The reasonable inference is that, wherever more than one factor contributed to the flight (however unequally), both factors are tabulated.

In accordance with Morris's central thesis, flight from the overwhelming number of Arab villages and town listed is attributed *solely* to Zionist military assault (or fear of such an assault), with flight from only a sprinkling of towns and villages being explained by Arab orders or Zionist expulsions. Morris's tables thus conform with his preference for the "happy median."

Morris's tables are similar to the ones found in an important June 1948 IDF intelligence report, "The Emigration of the Arabs of Palestine." Morris faults this IDF report mainly for "minimiz[ing] the role direct expulsion orders played in bringing about the Palestinian exodus." (1948, p. 84) Ironically, Morris's tables are in this respect identically flawed. In effect, Morris's tables may conform with his preference for the "happy median," but they do *not* conform even with his own findings or the sources he lists. Here I can only sample the record.²⁷

Morris reports that the IDF document erred in not also assigning an "E" classification to Khirbet Lid (al-Awadim), Fajja, Al Khalisa, As Salihya, and Beisan (Beit Shean), since expulsion did play a part in the Arab flight from these sites. (1948 pp. 83–84) Yet in Morris's own tables, not one of them is listed with an "E" classification.

Morris reports that in early 1948 Joseph Weitz first "initiated or prompted the expulsion" of Arabs from Jewish-owned land, and then shifted his focus to "large areas, such as the Beit Shean Valley, Western Galilee, and Ramot-

Menashe,” where he was again “instrumental in emptying [them] of their Arab population.” (1948, pp. 141–12) Yet of the roughly *one hundred* Arab villages and towns Morris lists for these areas, only *four* are given an “E” classification.

Morris reports that the Arab villagers of Beit Naqquba were given “strong advice” by the IDF to leave. Subsequently, a “handful” were allowed back to live in a neighboring Arab village. (1948, p. 192ff.) Yet in his tables Beit Naqquba is listed with an “M.” (Even more curiously, Morris includes Beit Naqquba in a chapter of 1948 devoted to Arab villages that remained *in situ*.) Likewise, Morris reports that the Arab villagers of Jaba, ‘Ein Ghazal, and Ijzim “fled and/or [were] driven out.” (The official Israeli account of Arab flight was disputed by UN observers who found evidence of expulsion.) (1948, p. 212; *Birth*, pp. 213–14) Yet in Morris’s charts, not one of these villages receives an “E” classification. And again, Morris reports that the IDF “carried out a full-scale clearing operation in the Kaufakha–Al Muharraqa area” during which “the villages’ inhabitants and [Bedouin] concentrations in the area were dispersed and expelled” (*Birth*, p. 215; the second quote is from an official Israeli source). Yet in the text, Al Muharraqa–Kaufakha receives only an “M” classification.

Morris reports that Palmah units entering Abu Zureiq “took some 15 adult males and some 200 women and children” captive and “sent” the women and children towards Jenin. (*Birth*, p. 117) Yet in Morris’s tables, Abu Zureiq receives only an “M” classification. Likewise Morris reports that at As Sindiyaana, “the *mukhtar* and his family and some 300 inhabitants stayed put and raised a white flag. They were apparently expelled eastwards.” (*Birth*, p. 117) Yet, in Morris’s tables, As Sindiyaana receives only an “M” classification. And again, Morris reports that the IDF “arrested some of the villagers” in Qatra, and “within a few days, either intimidated the rest of the villagers into leaving or ordered them to leave.” (*Birth*, p. 126) Yet in Morris’s tables, Qatra receives only an “M” classification. And still again, Morris reports that the “last major wave of evictions” in the Galilee in mid-1949 caused a public scandal as the remaining inhabitants of three formerly cooperative Arab villages—Khisas, Qeitiya, Ja’una—were brutally expelled south of Safad. (*Birth*, p. 242) Yet not one of these villages receives an “E” classification in Morris’ tables.

Morris reports that a Haganah raid “precipitated the evacuation of . . . Al Manara.” (*Birth*, p. 70) In the tables, the village is listed with an “M.” The only source Morris cites is Naffez Nazzal, *The Palestinian Exodus from Galilee, 1947–1949*.²⁸ Turning to Nazzal, we read that “Zionist soldiers attacked . . . El Manara (a village of 490 Arab inhabitants), chased its inhabitants out, destroyed some houses, and left leaflets behind warning the inhabitants not to return because the village had been mined.” (pp.28–29) Morris reports that a Haganah force “captured the village of Khirbet Nasir ad Din. . . . Some non-combatants were apparently killed and some houses destroyed. Most of the population fled to Lubiya or to Tiberias. . . . Several dozen villagers

remained *in situ*.” (*Birth*, p. 71) In the tables, Nasir ad Din receives three classifications, none of which is an “E.” The main source cited by Morris is Nazzal. Turning to Nazzal, we read that “Zionists attacked the . . . village of Nasr-ed-Din (with 90 Arab inhabitants) and destroyed all its houses, killing some of its inhabitants, including women and children, and expelling all the rest.” (p. 29) Morris reports that “[w]hile most of ‘Ein az Zeitun’s young adult males fled. . . , some of the village women, children and old men stayed put. These were apparently rounded up . . . and expelled.” (*Birth*, p. 102) In the tables, ‘Ein az Zeitun is listed only with an “M.” The only source Morris cites is Nazzal. Turning to Nazzal, we read that, although the armed villagers fled, “[a]lmost all the old men, women and children remained in the village because the villagers had previously agreed among themselves not to leave.” They were all subsequently expelled. (pp. 33–37)

Morris concludes his discussion of the IDF report that the observation that “only a small proportion” of the Arab exodus can be accounted for by direct or even indirect expulsion. (1948, p. 88) This reckoning perhaps has less to do with the facts than with Morris’s idiosyncratic bookkeeping.

Conclusion

Let me conclude by putting Morris’s achievement in perspective. Morris has indisputably produced landmark studies. He has permanently redefined the parameters of legitimate scholarly debate on the origins of the Palestinian refugee problem, dispatching to oblivion the standard Israeli claims about “Arab broadcasts.”²⁹ Indeed, Morris’s devastating reply to Shabtai Tevet’s recent defense of these claims can only be described as a virtuoso performance (cf. the *Commentary* and *Tikkun* articles cited above). Morris has tapped a wealth of archival material which no serious student of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can afford to ignore. In effect, Morris’s research will serve as the benchmark for all future scholarship on the topic.

Yet Morris’s achievement falls well short of the estimable standard he has set himself. In *Tikkun*, Morris distances himself from “propagandists” such as Professor Edward W. Said. He rather locates his calling as a scholar above the realm of crass political partisanship in the pristine heights of truth and objectivity. Said’s sin was to have cited Morris for the claim that “a sequence of Zionist terror and Israeli expulsion . . . was behind the birth of the Palestinian refugee problem.” Surely, as I think I have shown, this is a legitimate interpretation of Morris’s evidence—if not of his thesis. According to Morris, however, his research shows that “war, without a Jewish masterplan or indeed, without any preplanning whatsoever, brought a Palestinian exodus of itself,” and that “with a little nudging in the right direction, the low-key exodus . . . turned into a mass flood and a *fait accompli*.” What is this if not official Zionism’s “astonishing” flight of Palestine’s Arabs now graced with Morris’s imprimatur?

In the same *Tikkun* article, Morris cautions that “the moment the historian looks over his shoulder, begins to calculate how others might utilize his work, and allows this to influence his findings and conclusions, he is well on his way down that slippery slope leading to official history and propaganda.” Morris would have done well to heed this caveat as he prepared the results of his research for publication.

NOTES

1. The other Israeli scholars include: Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities* (New York: Pantheon, 1987); Ilan Pappé, *Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948–51* (New York: St. Martin's, 1988); and Avi Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement, and the Partition of Palestine* (New York: Columbia University, 1988). The works of non-Israeli scholars also deserve mention here, especially inasmuch as they have been ignored in the ensuing debates. I would note in particular Mary Wilson's elegant study, *King Abdullah, Britain and the Making of Jordan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1988) and Michael Palumbo's *The Palestinian Catastrophe* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987). Palumbo makes extensive use of hitherto untapped UN archival sources.

2. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988; hereafter, *Birth*.

3. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990; hereafter, 1948.

4. Morris cites (*Birth*: pp. 284, 297–98) the following estimates for the total number of Palestinian refugees by 1949: UN-sponsored Palestine Conciliation Commission (PCC)—711,000; United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA)—726,000; UN Economic Survey Mission—726,000; British Government—810,000; British Foreign Office—711,000.

Walter Eytan, then Director General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry, referred to the UNRWA registration of 726,000 as “meticulous” and believed that the “real number was close to 800,000.” Officially, however, the Israeli government maintained that the total number of Palestinian refugees came to only a little over 500,000. Inexplicably, even after citing Eytan's testimony and conceding the cynicism behind Israel's public estimates, Morris writes that “Israel sincerely believed that the Arab (and United Nations) figures were ‘inflated.’”

William Roger Louis reports that “by 1952, a secret British estimate calculated the total number of refugees at 850,000 with the following breakdown: 460,000—Jordan; 200,000—Gaza; 104,000—Lebanon; 80,000—Syria; 4,000—Iraq; and 19,000—Israel”; see *The British Empire in the Middle East, 1945–1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 588. (The British estimate may be slightly misleading since it perhaps includes natural increase between the years 1949 and 1952.)

5. Indeed, not only Arab claims. Meir Pa'il, the widely respected Israeli historian of the 1948 war, estimates that, of the total Palestinian refugee population, “one third fled out of fear, one third were forcibly evacuated by the Israelis. . . , [and] one third were encouraged by the Israelis to flee.” Cited in Palumbo, xviii. Palumbo's study reaches roughly the same conclusion

as Pa'il. To be sure, Pa'il still holds the Arabs fully responsible for the refugee problem since they engaged in a “premeditated conspiracy” to start the war.

Ironically, even the chief exponent of the official Zionist faith and the “new” history's main detractor, Shabtai Tevet (senior research associate at Tel Aviv University and Ben-Gurion's current biographer), is much more forthcoming than Morris on the matter of expulsion. He concedes that, once the Arab armies attacked on 15 May, “one may properly speak . . . of expulsion by Israel” of Palestine's Arabs, who were henceforth perceived as “declared enemies.” (“Charging Israel With Original Sin” in *Commentary*, September 1989, p. 28) The majority of the Palestinian population that ended up in exile was still *in situ* on the eve of the Arab invasion.

6. In “The Eel and History,” (*Tikkun*, January-February 1990; hereafter, *Tikkun*), Morris explicitly exempts the Zionist leadership from moral culpability for the unfolding of events in 1948, arguing that no leader would or could have acted otherwise than Ben-Gurion did: “[W]ere I pressed . . . to morally evaluate the Yishuv's policies and behavior in 1948, I would be loath to condemn. . . . Would any leader, recognizing the prospective large Arab minority's potential for destabilization of the new Jewish state, *not* have striven to reduce that minority's weight and numbers, and been happy, nay, overjoyed, at the spectacle of the mass Arab evacuations? Would any sane, pragmatic leader *not* have striven, given the Arabs' initiation of hostilities, to exploit the war to enlarge Israel's territory and to create somewhat more rational, viable borders?” (pp. 20–21; emphases in original) Perhaps it is true that no “sane, pragmatic leader” would have acted differently; but that simply points up that—at any rate, by current standards—a “sane, pragmatic leader” is not a *moral* leader. Morris also argues here that the “inevitability in the unfolding of the events” in 1948 “renders somewhat incongruous any attempt at moral judgment against Jew or Arab.”

7. Morris's search for the “happy median” occasionally results in bizarre formulations. Consider his usage of the locution “dovetail.” He describes the Palestinian evacuation of a village threatened with a Haganah massacre as “a dovetailing of British, Haganah and Arab views—all parties concerned, for different reasons, being keen on a speedy Arab evacuation” and the IDF-ordered expulsion of Palestinians remaining in Lydda after the mass slaughter as a “dovetailing, as it were, of Jewish and Arab interests and wishes—an IDF bent on expelling the population and a population ready, perhaps, even eager, to move to Arab-held territory.”

(*Birth*: pp. 209, 319) Do the interests of a torturer and his victim "dovetail" when the latter finally confesses or succumbs?

8. Morris is not entirely consistent on the dates of the so-called main wave. Usually he puts it April-May, but occasionally April-June or April-July.

9. For background to, analysis of, and excerpts from Plan D, see Walid Khalidi, "Plan Dalet: Master Plan for the Conquest of Palestine", in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. XVIII, No. 1 (Autumn 1988), pp. 4-37. The "General Section" called *inter alia* for:

Mounting operations against enemy population centers located inside or near our defensive system in order to prevent them from being used as bases by an active armed force. These operations can be divided into the following categories:

—Destruction of villages (setting fire to, blowing up, and planting mines in the debris), especially those population centers which are difficult to control continuously.

—Mounting combing and control operations according to the following guidelines: encirclement of the village and conducting a search inside it. In the event of resistance, the armed force must be wiped out and the population must be expelled outside the borders of the state.

10. Cf. *Birth*, p. 131, where Morris observes that "in general, operational orders in Haganah attacks on both urban and rural targets did not call for the expulsion or eviction of the Arab civilian populations." I take Morris to mean here explicit, written orders. Given what he has already conceded, this is plainly a distinction without a difference.

11. Morris cites a British observer who noted that, during the morning of 22 April, the Haganah was "continually shooting down on all Arabs who moved in Wadi Nisnas and the Old City. This included completely indiscriminate and revolting machinegun fire and sniping on women and children . . . attempting to get out of Haifa through the gates in the dock. . . . There was considerable congestion outside the East Gate [of the port] of hysterical and terrified Arab women and children and old people on who the Jews opened up mercilessly with fire." (*Birth*, p. 85)

12. In addition to Morris and Palumbo, see Walid Khalidi's important article, "The Fall of Haifa," in *Middle East Forum*, December 1959, pp. 22-32.

13. According to Morris, the British claim that "the Jews of Haifa for economic reasons wanted the Arabs to stay put" was partially "based on prejudice." (*Birth*, pp. 87-88) Yet, it was precisely this concern that Golda Meir registered at a Jewish Agency Executive meeting in early May; Palumbo, pp. 74-77. Morris quotes extensively from Meir's remarks at this meeting (*Birth*, pp. 132-33) but omits the crucial passages cited by Palumbo.

14. Cf. Ben-Gurion's account during a Mapai meeting of the Arab flight from Haifa. Expressing his "surprise" at what had happened, Ben-Gurion deemed it inexplicable ("there was no necessity for them to flee") and mused that it was as if a "dybbuk" had got into the Arabs' souls. (1948, p. 43) Cf. also Ben-Gurion's 1 May diary entry for Haifa, in which he expressed his bewilderment that "tens of thousands" should "leave in

such a panic—without sufficient reason—their city, their homes, and their wealth." (*Commentary*, p. 30) I will return to Ben-Gurion's surprise and bewilderment at the Arab flight in the next section.

15. Cf. Milstein: "Already in the second week of the war, on 10 December 1947, the leader of the Jewish community, David Ben-Gurion, became aware that military operations by the Haganah in Arab population centers would cause a mass flight. The experts on Arab affairs, Ezra Danin and Yehoshua Palmon, reported to him that, after an operation by the Haganah in . . . Haifa, the inhabitants fled to Nablus and Jenin. . . . Danin suggested to inflict casualties on the Arabs. Palmon estimated that the Arabs would evacuate Haifa and Jaffa because of the food shortage. Thus it was decided to drive the inhabitants out by means of attacks and starvation." ("No deportations, evacuations")

Cf. also Flapan, pp. 90-92, for pertinent extracts from Ben-Gurion's diaries. Flapan convincingly argues that it "can hardly be doubted" that Ben-Gurion's ultimate aim was to evacuate as much of the Arab population as possible from the Jewish state, "if only from the variety of means he employed to achieve this purpose: an economic war aimed at destroying Arab transport, commerce and the supply of foods and raw materials to the urban population; psychological warfare, ranging from 'friendly warnings' to outright intimidation and exploitation of panic caused by dissident underground terrorism; and finally, and most decisively, the destruction of whole villages and the eviction of their inhabitants by the army."

16. More difficult to credit is Ben-Gurion's diary entry for 18 May on arriving at Jaffa: "I couldn't understand: Why did the inhabitants of Jaffa leave?" (*Birth*, p. 101) For the extraordinarily brutal IZL assault on Jaffa, the explicit purpose of which was to "create a mass flight" among the civilian population, see *Birth*, p. 96ff. The Haganah despoliation of Jaffa's rural hinterlands was a contributing factor in the Arab flight. (*Birth*, p. 100)

17. Referring to the summer of 1948 (the "main wave" of the Arab exodus), Morris writes: "It was . . . a boom-time for private, semi-official, and official initiatives by single-minded, dogged executives—such as Weitz." (1948, p. 111)

18. Morris describes Weitz as a "man of integrity, vision, and action." (1948, p. 142) Referring to the Bedouin slated for expulsion in May, this "man of integrity" observed that "we must be rid of the parasites." Referring to the destruction of an Arab village in June, he observed that "I was surprised [as] nothing moved in me at the sight." (1948: pp. 98, 109) Morris claims to find in Weitz's remark "in war—[act] as befits war" evidence of "pangs of conscience." (1948, p. 98) Similarly, Morris claims to find in Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett's anxiety that the expulsion of Arabs "stirs up the public . . . perturbs its conscience . . . [and thus might] lead to public rebellion against the government" evidence of his "soul-searching." (1948, pp. 202-3) This sort of apologetics, incidentally, bears close comparison with the style of the "old" historians. Thus, in *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), Shabtai Tevet claims that Ben-Gurion's remark that "uprooting, by foreign force, some 100,000 Arabs from villages which they have inhabited for hundreds of years" would be "terribly difficult" (p. 181) is evidence of his sensitivity to Arab claims.

19. Even as the Zionist expulsion policy went into high gear, Weitz was still expressing bewilderment at the Arab flight. On 1 June he referred to it as a "miracle" and on 5 June an "unexpected phenomenon." Yet on 2 June he was soberly predicting that the flight "may continue as the war continues and our army advances." (*Birth*, p. 160; 1948, pp. 103-4) In this connection, Morris reports that, according to a ranking Jewish representative in Tiberias, Moshe Tzahar, the Arab evacuation of that city, which was preceded by Haganah atrocities in the nearby village of Khirbet Nasir ad Din and a murderous Haganah attack using mortars and dynamite on Tiberias itself, came as a "shock." (The Arabs who remained left after the Haganah, refusing a truce, demanded an unconditional surrender, and the British refused to guarantee their safety.) In the corresponding note, we learn that Tzahar's expression of "shock" is from an interview with him in January 1982. (*Birth*, p. 313, note 25) Recall Morris's strictures about the dubious value of "interviewees recalling highly controversial events some fifty years ago." (*Birth*, p. 2) Finally, Morris cites a memorandum submitted to the U.S. State Department by Israeli Foreign Minister-designate Moshe Sharett to document the "Yishuv's astonishment at the [Arab] exodus." (1948, p. 70) Responding to Washington's growing anxiety at the Arab flight from Palestine, Sharett referred to it as an "astounding phenomenon," and said "something quite unprecedented and unforeseen as going on." This sort of "evidence" requires, I think, no comment.

20. Bechor Shitrit, the minister of Minority Affairs, for example, warned the cabinet that "the army must be given strict instructions to behave well and fairly toward the inhabitants" of predominantly Christian Nazareth "because of the great political importance of the city in the eyes of the world." (*Birth*, p. 202) Occasionally, Arab villagers with a long record of "collaborationism" (Morris's word) with the Zionist movement and/or were needed for harvesting Jewish crops were allowed to stay (or trickle back after being expelled). Cf. chap. 7 of 1948 for details.

21. Cf. Palumbo, pp. xii-xiv. The village *mukhtar* estimated 580 civilians killed, Israeli sources, 100-350, and testimonies preserved in U.S. State Department records, 1000; see Noam Chomsky, *Turning the Tide* (Boston: South End Press, 1985), p. 76. Palumbo puts the number at "probably about 300."

22. Earlier in August, Ya'ari lamented that

the youth we nurtured in the Palmah [elite strike force], including kibbutz members, have [occasionally] turned Arabs into slaves; they shoot defenceless Arab men and women, not in battle. . . . Is it permissible to kill prisoners of war? I hoped that there would be some who would rebel and disobey [orders] to kill and would stand trial—and not one appeared. . . . They are not against transfer. What does it mean . . . to empty all the villages? . . . What did we labour for. . . ? (1948, p. 59)

(Morris reports that a few soldiers did refuse to carry out "barbaric orders.")

23. The full scope of the IDF's carnage during the 1948 war is suggested—perhaps unwittingly—by Morris in the March-April 1989 *Tikkun* when he observes that the IDF has "progressively become a 'cleaner'

army," its "record, when it come to *tohar haneshet* [i.e., purity of arms]" being "far better" during the 1982-85 Lebanon War than in 1948." For Israel's less-than-glorious Lebanon "adventure" (Morris's word in *Tikkun*, p. 19), cf. the grisly records assembled in Robert Fisk, *Pity the Nation: The Abduction of Lebanon* (New York: Atheneum, 1990) and Noam Chomsky, *The Fatal Triangle: The United States, Israel and the Palestinians* (Boston: South End Press, 1983).

24. "Most of the destruction in the 350 villages," writes Morris, "was due to vandalism and looting, and to deliberate demolitions, with explosives, bulldozers and, occasionally, handtools, by Haganah and IDF units or neighboring Jewish settlements in the days, weeks and months after their conquest." (*Birth*, p. 156)

25. Cf. 1948, pp. 83-84: "In general, the situation on the ground made it impossible in many cases to draw a clear distinction between a Haganah/IDF or IZL 'military operation' which ended in villagers fleeing their homes and 'expulsion orders,' which had the same effect."

26. Benny Morris, "Operation Dani and the Palestinian Exodus from Lydda and Ramle in 1948," *The Middle East Journal* 40, 1 (Winter 1986), p. 82.

27. There may be some overlap in the Arab villages and towns I report as erroneously tabulated since Morris's textual references range from single sites to broadly inclusive regions. I did not spot any clearcut cases in which Morris's tables incorrectly tally sites abandoned because of Arab orders. Several such sites are not listed in the tables but this is true for expelled sites as well.

28. Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1978.

29. Alas, the same cannot be said for Morris's impact on popular debate. Consider the following examples chosen at random from the past few years:

(1) Former Israeli defense minister Yitzak Rabin, who presided over some of the most ruthless expulsions of the 1948 war and freely admitted as much in his memoirs [cf. Peretz Kidron, "Truth Whereby Nations Live," in *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question*, edited by Edward W. Said and Christopher Hitchens (New York: Verso, 1988)], nonetheless observes in an interview in a liberal Jewish monthly that

Haj Amin Husseini . . . called upon the Arabs to leave in view of the invasion of the Arab armed forces in 1948. This brought the first disaster on the Palestinians and created the Palestinian refugee problem. (*Moment*, May 1988)

These utterances, incidentally, evoked not the slightest demurral from his interlocutor.

(2) Menahem Milson, the highly regarded (at least in the U.S.) professor of Arabic literature at the Hebrew University and former head of the Civil Administration of the West Bank, writes in a liberal Zionist periodical that "the established version of the origins of the refugee problem is on the whole historically correct." This "established version" goes as follows:

Under orders of their leaders, the Arabs left their homes in the towns and villages in the area which was to become Israel. These areas evacuated were those which were or were becoming battle arenas between Arabs and Jews. The reasoning behind these orders, rooted in Arab plans and expectations at the

time, was that the Jews would soon be vanquished, and thus the Arabs would not only be able to return to their homes in a matter of days, but would even inherit the property of their Jewish neighbors. (*Jewish Frontier*, March-April 1988)

(3) In a memoir excerpted in a prominent liberal journal, the acclaimed Israeli author Amos Kenan describes his stint as "a platoon commander of the 82d Regiment of the Israeli Army brigade that conquered the Palestinian town of Lydda." Recall that Lydda was the scene of one of the bloodiest atrocities of the war (between 250 and 400 Palestinians were "slaughtered"; *Birth*, p. 206) and that the single biggest outright expulsion occurred there (fully 30,000 Palestinians were, on Ben Gurion's orders, driven into exile; cf. note 19 to section III). Yet, in Kenan's fanciful account, "we never really *conquered* Lydda. Lydda, to put it simply, fled," "there was really no city to conquer. The whole

place, except for George Habash and his sister and a few others, was empty," and so on. (Emphasis in original) Furthermore, except for "those of us who couldn't restrain ourselves [and] would go into the prison compounds to f*** Arab women" (which, after all, wasn't so terrible since "I want very much to assume, and perhaps even can, that those who couldn't restrain themselves did what they thought the Arabs would have done to them had they won the war"), the worst IDF sin committed at Lydda was that "here they smashed a windowpane, there they killed a chicken." (*The Nation*, 6 February 1989) The journal, incidentally, refused to publish a brief letter that sought to set the factual record straight.

(4) In a review article for a prominent literary magazine, rabbi and professor Arthur Hertzberg cites Morris's research as showing that "more than half of the Palestinians left of their own accord, or in the hope of coming back with the invading Arab forces in victory". (*The New York Review of Books*, 25 October 1990).