



Nakba and Holocaust: Mechanisms of Comparison and Denial in the Israeli Literary Imagination

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# Nakba and Holocaust: Mechanisms of Comparison and Denial in the Israeli Literary Imagination

Shira Stav

## ABSTRACT

*This article considers analogies between the Holocaust and the Nakba in Israeli narratives, analogies that became increasingly dominant in political discourse in Israel through journalism, historiography, art, and literature. I focus on two recent works: the memoir *My Holocaust Thief* by Noam Chayut (2009) and the film *Waltz with Bashir* by Ari Folman (2008). Both juxtapose Palestinian refugees and Holocaust victims (and less explicitly, Israeli soldiers and Nazi officers) as a way of rehabilitating a moral self. I ask what kind of political meaning is constructed by this mirroring, by placing the narrative of the other—the Palestinian catastrophe—within a Holocaust-based representation of the Nakba. In a certain sense, thinking through the conceptual framework of the Holocaust focuses attention on the catastrophe of the Jews and relegates the Palestinian catastrophe, once again, to secondary importance, driving it out first as a physical reality and then as a narrative.*

*Key words:* Holocaust, Nakba, catastrophe, Noam Chayut, Ari Folman

**T**oward the end of S. Yizhar's novella "Hirbet Hiz'ah," which traces the expulsion of the residents of an Arab village by Israeli soldiers, the narrator ventures a provocative analogy:

Something struck me like lightning. All at once everything seemed to mean something different, more precisely: exile. This was exile. This

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was what exile was like. This was what exile looked like. I couldn't stay where I was. The place itself couldn't bear me. . . .

I felt that I was on the verge of slipping. I managed to pull myself together. My guts cried out. Colonizers, they shouted. Lies, my guts shouted. Khirbet Khizeh is not ours. The Spandau gun never gave us any rights. Oh, my guts screamed. What hadn't they told us about refugees, their welfare, their rescue . . . our refugees, naturally. Those we were driving out—that was a totally different matter. Wait. Two thousand years of exile. The whole story. Jews being killed. Europe. We were the masters now.<sup>1</sup>

Another story by Yizhar, “The Captive,” implicitly engages the conceptual framework of the Holocaust, as shown by Gil Anidjar.<sup>2</sup> But the connection in “Hirbet Hiz'ah” is much clearer. Initially hinted at by the use of the word “coaches,” describing the trucks carrying the exiles beyond the frontier, and by the German “Spandau gun,” by the time we reach the end of the story there is no doubt as to the analogy between the Jewish and the Arab refugee experiences and, implicitly, between the Holocaust and the Nakba. “Hirbet Hiz'ah” was the first expression of this analogy, an analogy based not only on the temporal proximity and historical dependence of the two events but also on pictorial imagination, a complex system of displacements, projections, and identifications.

In an insightful article about Israeli and Palestinian literature, Elias Khoury, the Lebanese author, writes about the representation of the Palestinian villagers in “Hirbet Hiz'ah” as a method of mirroring the Israeli protagonists:

If we replaced the Palestinians with Jews, we would have before us a typical anti-Semitic discourse, and would find ourselves dealing with all the adjectives of cowardice that were attributed to Holocaust victims. . . . The Palestinians in this poor village have to play the role of the Jews for the Jews. They serve as a mirror. . . . Literature becomes a mirror of the self, and misunderstanding the other a tool that enables us to see ourselves with greater clarity.<sup>3</sup>

In what follows I consider this “play of mirrors” between the Holocaust and the Nakba in Israeli narratives. At issue is this analogy, this sensitive mirroring, that becomes increasingly dominant in Israeli political discourse through journalism, historiography, art, and literature. I focus on two recent works: the memoir *My Holocaust Thief* by Noam Chayut (2009) and the film *Waltz with Bashir* by Ari Folman (2008). Both juxtapose Palestinian refugees and Holocaust victims (and less explicitly,

Israeli soldiers and Nazi officers) as a way of rehabilitating a moral self. Of particular interest is the political meaning that this mirroring constructs by placing the narrative of the other—the Palestinian catastrophe—within a Holocaust-based representation of the Nakba.

In an interview with Hayim Nagid in *Ma'ariv* published on February 10, 1978, Yizhar said about “Hirbet Hiz’ah,”

When I wrote the story, I didn’t write it as a Jew against an Arab. I wrote it as a human being who was hurt. I was hurt, because my entire consciousness could not accept what became a reality there. There was only one thing in me—a cry. . . . [T]he act of expelling the villagers and bombing their houses—made me jump to my feet. Something about it contradicted my very worldview.<sup>4</sup>

Yizhar’s words portray the kind of “hurt” he experienced: the cry inside of him is the raw kernel of a moral sense, of outrage at wrongdoing. This injury stems from identification with the immediate victims as well as the shattering of the ideal mirror of the collective self-image. This is an outrage not of a Jew in front of an Arab but rather of a human being, says Yizhar, of an individual who sees himself helpless in the presence of the wrongdoing brought about by his own collective.

Yizhar’s words convert the national categories—“Jew” and “Arab”—into a universal, supposedly neutral category, “a human being.” But the universal human being nevertheless carries with him a national story, the story of a person who is hurt by the destruction of his vision of the moral Jew in the new state of Israel. In a later interview, Yizhar explained exactly what it was that shattered his world: “What then happened to me was a moral earthquake, the fact that Zionism was about to be realized not as I thought it would be and not as my father said it would be.”<sup>5</sup>

Yizhar’s wound reveals the breakdown of the moral order inherited from the fathers, which established the “I” as part of a national collective gathered around an ideological vision. The realization that Zionism, as manifested in the atrocities of war, has betrayed this image of a national self, creating a split between the self and the nation, is what allows Yizhar to write as “a human being” rather than “a Jew against an Arab.” The “cry” he felt is not only the immediate moral cry of a universal, prenatal human being in the face of an injustice wrought upon human beings like him. More than that, it is a cry at the injured unification of self and nation.

We find a different kind of outrage in the reaction of Aharon Zisling, a member of Mapam. Here it is not an individual standing against

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a collective but the entire Zionist collective being hurt by the atrocities of soldiers conducted on its behalf. Zisling, then minister of agriculture, related his feelings about the atrocities committed by Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers to Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion (according to the historian Benny Morris, Zisling was referring to the expulsion of local Palestinians from Duwayima, a massacre of 80 to 100 refugees): “I could not sleep at night. I felt that what was done hurt my soul, the soul of my house and the souls of all of us here. . . . Nazi acts have been committed by Jews as well, and I was shaken to the core.”<sup>6</sup> Like Yizhar, Zisling voices the moral cry of the categorical imperative: “Do not do unto others what you do not want others to do unto you.” Hurting the other indeed hurts us; otherwise, morality would not be possible. Nevertheless, one wonders what the political meaning of this injury may be. In particular, what role does the imagined similarity to the Holocaust play in it?

Although Zisling’s statement might be merely rhetorical, it does imply an unstated identification with the Palestinian victims, the kind of “mirroring” that Khoury detected in Yizhar’s novella. Nevertheless, the identification of Yizhar and Zisling with the victims is more than just an instance of mirroring. It is a shift of perspective, barely perceptible, from the catastrophe of the other, which I/my nation brought about, to the injury I/we suffer. The Palestinian catastrophe—the massacre, expulsion, and deportation—is expressible only through the injury to “the souls of all of us here,” to our self-perception as human beings and Jews and, more than that, to the character of the nation. Characteristic of this shift is the appeal to Holocaust terminology: “Nazi acts have been committed by Jews.” Indeed, such wording is understandable and perhaps even justified by the status of the Holocaust as a powerful, accessible trope in the Israeli imagination; as such, it is capable of shocking the listener into noticing the horror happening here and now. But we should look beyond that. In a certain sense, thinking through the conceptual framework of the Holocaust again raises the image of the victimized Jew and puts the subject in a vulnerable position; it focuses attention on his injury as the chief injury and relegates the Palestinian catastrophe, once again, to secondary importance, driving it out as a physical reality and then as a narrative.

Yizhar’s and Zisling’s responses were made in 1948–49—when Israel was still experiencing the aftershocks of a bloody war, the Holocaust not yet a memory but a very recent past. Yizhar and Zisling were among the few dissenting voices that attempted to take a moral stance toward the Palestinian catastrophe. The crux of this stance is the character of

the national self (or the “self” of the nation) being contaminated or even shattered by the pictorial resemblance of Zionist deeds to images of what is considered to be the absolute evil—Nazi actions—and the complementary resemblance between Palestinian refugees and Holocaust victims. Are these controversial comparisons a result of the limits of imagination? Or are they the result of the limits of representation?

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Let us take a closer look at the implicit mechanisms underlying these analogies by shifting to contemporary expressions of the Nakba in Israeli narratives, which often appropriate the Palestinian story by representing the Nakba in terms of the Holocaust. The Nakba is thus diminished and turned into an internal event of Jewish history, as if “their” catastrophe is impossible to understand without “our” catastrophe, which is, of course, *the* catastrophe. A common Israeli response to this comparison is, “There is no comparison!” The very comparison between the Holocaust and the life and fate of the Palestinian refugees is considered “monstrous.” As an example, this word was used by Tzvika Shapira, head of Israeli educational television, in March 2002 to describe the comparison made by José Saramago between actions of the IDF in the occupied territories and everyday life in the concentration camps.<sup>7</sup> However, as Idith Zertal has shown,<sup>8</sup> it is chiefly right-wing polemicists who invoke the Holocaust and compare Arab threats against “the vision of greater Israel” to the deportation of Jews to concentration camps; the same right-wing rhetoric compares the leaders of Arab nations to Hitler and has even compared an Israeli prime minister to an SS officer.<sup>9</sup>

We shall see that narratives from the other side of the political spectrum also use modes of comparison that rely on the pictorial imagination of the Holocaust. It should be noted that these expressions serve as important means of voicing the silenced reality of the Palestinian catastrophe, forming a place and a presence for an absent narrative within a hostile political atmosphere. Nevertheless, they too produce the same effect of belittling the Palestinian Nakba while intensifying the Israeli narrative and insisting on the victimized position of the Israeli Jew.

Though we need not concur with Joseph A. Massad that “Israel’s insistence on its vulnerability reflected a conscious strategy,”<sup>10</sup> it is instructive to examine the unconscious mechanisms that sustain this image of vulnerability, repeatedly manifested in narratives that employ the vocabulary of the Holocaust in discussing the Palestinian experience.<sup>11</sup> Massad writes about the use of Holocaust rhetoric by both sides in the conflict, demonstrating the ways in which Zionists have appropriated the Holocaust and its victims to assert Israel’s “right to exist” in such a way that any denial of this right was perforce taken as a denial of the

Holocaust: “The Jewish Holocaust, therefore, could be apprehended only through the mediation of Zionism and Israel. Israel insisted on freezing the moment in which the Holocaust survivors became such.”<sup>12</sup> In response, Palestinians who did not want to accept Israel’s right to exist at the cost of Palestine’s existence reasoned that the Holocaust must be denied or at least questioned. An alternative was to delink the Jewish Holocaust and the Zionist solution. This strategy, condemned by Zionists, created the possibility of recognizing the resemblance between the Jewish and the Palestinian refugee experience.

In an important article that generated a long debate among Arab intellectuals, Edward Said pointed to the use of Holocaust imagery by both sides as a tool of minimizing the narrative of the other:

There is a link between what happened to Jews in World War II and the catastrophe of the Palestinian people, but it cannot be made rhetorically, or as an argument to demolish or diminish the true content both of the Holocaust and of 1948. Neither is equal to the other; similarly neither one nor the other excuses present violence; and finally, neither one nor the other must be minimized. . . . We must accept the Jewish experience in all that it entails of horror and fear, but we must require that our experience be given no less attention or perhaps another plane of historical actuality.<sup>13</sup>

Said draws attention to the fact that both nations are dominated by deep and strong mechanisms of comparison, each used for multiple purposes, including justification of occupation and terror and as a tool to minimize the suffering of the other, who is portrayed as the real and only aggressor. Like Massad after him, Said writes from the point of view of a Palestinian intellectual: as much as he feels responsible for bringing out the historical truths of the Jewish catastrophe, his main concern is the fate of his own nation.

Turning to the Jewish perspective, we might argue that these mechanisms of comparison derive from what Hannah Arendt in 1948 identified as the ahistorical character of Jewish self-perception: the exclusion of Jews from history, which constitutes Jewish victimhood as an immutable essence:

Jewish historians . . . used to ignore all those trends of the Jewish past which did not point to their own major thesis of Diaspora history, according to which the Jewish people did not have a political history of their own but were invariably the innocent victims of a hostile and sometimes brutal environment. . . . In sharp contrast to all other nations, the Jews were not history-makers but history-sufferers, preserving a kind of eternal identity

of goodness whose monotony was disturbed only by the equally monotonous chronicle of persecutions and pogroms.<sup>14</sup>

Drawing on Arendt's observation that an "eternal identity of goodness" fails to recognize the Jews as active agents in history, we arrive at a critical consequence: in addition to elevating the Holocaust to the level of "absolute evil," owing to its singular impact, this view of Jewish passivity places the Holocaust and the Israeli-Arab conflict on a single continuum, entitled "the persecution of the Jews."

"Such an approach," wrote the historian Dan Diner, "does not allow one to perceive the significant distinction between Arabs or Palestinians fighting with Israel on a local conflictual basis and anti-Semites who are hostile to Jews as such. The conflict thus becomes transhistorical, like another round in an eternal, insoluble struggle, between the world and the Jews."<sup>15</sup> Idith Zertal has shown how this discourse disconnects both the Holocaust and the Israeli-Arab conflict from their specific historical contexts, blurs their boundaries, and makes them "closed mythical realities, immune from criticism, interlocked and ever enhancing each other."<sup>16</sup>

In her book *Constituent Violence*, Ariella Azoulay explains how the Nakba was made into a catastrophe without a presence in the Israeli narrative. The dividing line between Arabs and Jews, on which the state was founded, created a view of the Palestinian catastrophe not as a real event with objective, universal implications but as an event that is only viewed as a catastrophe from the narrow Palestinian perspective: part of "their" story, a result of their own errors, missed opportunities, and weaknesses. Following Ann Stoller, Azoulay describes the creation of a "colonial aphasia," an impairment of sight and speech regarding the ruins and relics of the catastrophe: "a difficulty in producing a vocabulary to match words and concepts to things. Aphasia in its various forms names a difficulty in retrieving an available vocabulary, and most important—a difficulty in understanding what is talked about."<sup>17</sup>

It is possible that adherence to the Holocaust terminology and its associated world of experience produces, once again, an aphasic syndrome—a difficulty in using suitable names. This is a distinct kind of impairment within the general aphasia. The well-intentioned attempt to view the historical events not only as "a catastrophe from their point of view" but as one common to both Arab and Jewish existence eventually shapes expressions of the Nakba within the concepts of the Holocaust. One important result of this mechanism is that the perpetuation of the Holocaust as absolute evil, the most common and appropriate idiom to describe suffering, creates an imperceptible shift from "a

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catastrophe from their point of view” to “a catastrophe from our point of view” and then to “our catastrophe”—the shattering of the moral self. Paradoxically and yet quite cunningly, the moment when the moral façade is shattered is the very moment that reinforces it: the return to the position of the victim makes it possible.

In this context, the poet Avot Yeshurun—who more than any other contemporary Israeli poet has recognized the Nakba—said that “the Holocaust of European Jewry and the Holocaust of the Arabs in ‘Erets Yisrael’ are one and the same Holocaust for the Jewish conscience of the Jewish people.”<sup>18</sup> Alluding to this statement, his daughter Hilit Yeshurun reminded him, in an interview of her father that she conducted for *Hadarim* (a journal she founded and edited): “You once saw Palestinian Arabs as an extension of Jewish fate.”<sup>19</sup> Hannan Hever writes that for Yeshurun, the testimony on the Palestinian calamity is a mirroring of the Jewish calamity: “As much as you want to experience the trauma of the other, you must turn it into a display of your own initial trauma.”<sup>20</sup>

Hever shows that Yeshurun’s stance is complex, neither denying nor diminishing the Palestinian catastrophe. Yeshurun believed that an Israeli who was alienated and distanced from the Jewish collective could not properly address the Palestinian calamity. On the contrary, precisely the adherence to traumatic personal and national history demands that the Jewish collective assume responsibility for its wrongdoing to the other. In my view, however, the question goes beyond the demand for responsibility and touches on the nature of that responsibility. It is not “responsibility toward the other,” to borrow a Levinasian term, but responsibility toward the *similar*. The responsibility that Yeshurun talks about, too, grows out of similarity, despite different identities: the similarity between the Jewish and the Arab catastrophes. It is not a responsibility that grows out of the basic otherness of their experiences, narratives, and perspectives.

Perhaps the clearest example of the mechanism described here is Noam Chayut’s book *My Holocaust Thief*, an autobiographical narrative of a young Ashkenazi Israeli, a *moshavnik* (member of an agricultural collective) from the valley of Jezreel. He is “the salt of the earth,” a combat officer in the military and a squad commander in Operation Homat Magen (Operation Defensive Shield, 2002).<sup>21</sup> The book traces the slow, painful process whereby Chayut renounces the safe sense of belonging to a just Israeli society and takes part in establishing Shoverim Shetikah (Breaking the Silence), an organization created during the Second Intifada, following an exhibition of testimonies by soldiers about crimes committed against Palestinian civilians in Hebron.

Chayut lays out his process of initiation through a series of Israeli rites, which were intended, and indeed succeeded, in turning him into a good soldier at the service of the nation: ceremonies at memorial days, tales of combat heroism, activities in the youth movement, the tacit promise of eroticism in militarism, and naturally, the youth expedition to Auschwitz and propaganda on “the lessons of the Holocaust” (“In Poland I was happy and proud,” he remarks ironically<sup>22</sup>).

In retrospect, the point of conversion is an encounter with the gaze of a little Palestinian girl in a village in the territories, where Chayut performs routine military duties, posting announcements of land confiscation:

The girl didn't smile back at me, as I was used to since my time as a youth guide, when I made this smile a habit of mine. No, she froze, all pale, looking horrified. She didn't scream or run away, just stood there, her face aghast, and stared at me with her black eyes.<sup>23</sup>

The reader here is supposed to be reminded of the picture of the Jewish child from the Warsaw ghetto, perhaps the most iconic image of the Jewish Holocaust. Evoking these two children, the Jewish one from Europe in the 1940s and the Palestinian one from the 2000s, the book's cover features the author's photograph as a little child, dressed up as a soldier for Purim, beret on head and rifle in hand, wearing military shoes and real insignia of rank.

This movement, from the scared Jewish child in Europe to the militarist Zionist child in Israel, and from him to the horrified Palestinian girl, encapsulates the story. The girl is the source of the book's title, “my Holocaust thief”: “This girl escaped, carrying with her the most precious emotional and spiritual asset ever bequeathed to me—my Holocaust.”<sup>24</sup> This girl, writes Chayut,

robbed me of the belief that there exists in the world an absolute evil and that I avenge it and fight it. For this girl I am the absolute evil. Once I realized that I myself am the absolute evil in her eyes, the absolute evil that has dominated me so far started to fade away. Since then, I was left without my Holocaust.<sup>25</sup>

Chayut is obviously critical of the way in which the Holocaust has become the main spiritual asset of the people of Israel. Yehuda Elkana wrote similarly two decades earlier, in his short article “In Praise of Forgetting”: “Any conception or lesson of life originating in the Holocaust is a disaster.”<sup>26</sup> Yet Chayut's critique conceals two undercurrents, probably unconscious, related to the use of the Holocaust: First, in comparing the

Palestinian girl to the Jewish child from the Warsaw ghetto, he turns her into a “thief,” a criminal, undermining her status as a victim.<sup>27</sup> Second, he is unable to think of the suffering of the Palestinian people without subordinating it to the historical suffering of the Jewish people. But this is precisely the trap of making the Holocaust the absolute evil. Again and again we encounter the problematic limitation of treating the Palestinian story through the prism of “our” Holocaust, as if the Palestinian catastrophe can only be understood when appropriated by the national system of images. This is always our history, our story, our catastrophe.

Not surprisingly, Chayut writes: “Since then, everything in my life has gained a new meaning. The affiliation is blurred. The pride is lacking, faith failing, regret taking over, forgiveness being born.”<sup>28</sup> What is this forgiveness? Who is it that needs forgiveness? There is no question about it: he does. In fact, we all do. In this way, the autobiographical self-examination, the probing of personal and national past, and above all, the confessional mode—which is the main form used in testimony collected by *Shoverim Shetikah*<sup>29</sup>—all these become valuable tools for purification of guilt and reconstitution of the moral image of the self. Throughout this process, one element is consistently omitted, becoming ever more superfluous, to the point of total erasure: the Arab story.

The picture of the Jewish child from the Warsaw ghetto played out as a Palestinian child recurs—this time explicitly—in the much-discussed Israeli film *Waltz with Bashir*. The film, written and directed by Ari Folman, is an animated documentary that addresses the issues of memory and trauma, guilt and responsibility, against the backdrop of the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. The protagonist, Folman himself, embarks on a journey in an attempt to recollect his lost memories as a young conscript in the war. The film was immensely popular and widely acclaimed, winning many international awards.

The reference to the child in the Warsaw ghetto occurs in a scene depicting Palestinian refugees fleeing the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps and the Christian Phalangist massacre of Palestinians during the Lebanese Civil War. One of the characters interviewed in the film, the journalist Ron Ben-Yishay, reports how he watched the slow march of refugees and describes a hands-up gesture of a Palestinian child as a visitation of the Jewish child.<sup>30</sup> Elias Khoury, in an article published in the Lebanese newspaper *Al-nahar*, was deeply impressed by this powerful image. In a piece he wrote about the film, he was mainly concerned with the fact that a film whose topic is the recovery of a lost memory—for the forgetfulness of the Israeli protagonist is but an echo of the collective amnesia of Israeli society—completely

ignores the connection between the memory and the present (the time of publication of Khoury's article, February 2009, was marked by the shelling of Gaza in Operation Cast Lead): "Self-purification and purging through exploration of the memory become deceitful pursuits if they are not also applied as a means of measuring and reading our present," Khoury concludes.<sup>31</sup>

Khoury, however, overlooks the central role of Holocaust memory in paralyzing the interpretive keys that could have bridged the remembered massacre and the unfolding one. Folman's attempt to recover the memory of what he had done at the time of the massacre brings him, toward the end of the movie, to his friend and colleague Ori Sivan. Sivan offers him a psychoanalytical explanation: Folman's interest in his lost memory, he says, is posttraumatic:

Your indulgence in the massacre precedes the massacre itself. It is connected to a totally different massacre. Your interest in what happened in the camps is what happened in those other camps. Your parents were in the camps . . . in Auschwitz, . . . this is where it comes from. Your childhood. This massacre already happened to you at age six. You live it. You live this massacre. And you live those camps.

The unearthing of the personal trauma is what allows Folman, by the end of his journey, to renounce any moral guilt: "At age 19 you felt guilty, you were cast as the Nazi, against your will. It's not like you weren't there. You were, you fired illumination mortars, but you committed no massacre."

Once again, we recognize the perfect workings of imagination: because the massacre in Lebanon replicates *the one* massacre—the Holocaust—in the mind of the protagonist, it immediately becomes a replication, a pale reflection. Shortly after Ron Ben-Yishay testifies that the Palestinian refugee boy had reminded him of the Jewish child from the Warsaw ghetto, we realize that this child was not Palestinian at all: it was Folman himself, as the reincarnation of the child. The Israeli soldier assumes the role of the victim, staggering under the enormous burden of traumatic memories. There is no point in asking why the Sabra and Shatila massacre echoes the memory of the Holocaust rather than events more relevant to the Palestinian experience, such as Kefar Kassem, Kibiya, or Deir Yassin. The mind that reflects is an Israeli mind, and memory can reflect nothing but what it contains: a Jewish story, an Israeli narrative.

The Palestinian story thus becomes yet another chapter in the story of the journey of the Israeli soldier, scorched in guilt and then

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exonerated in the crucible of personal-national trauma. As Ursula Lindsey points out in her review of the film, “The non-Israeli victims are never given a voice: They snarl and they wail, but they never speak. Israelis are the only subjects: They interrogate themselves, confront themselves and ultimately congratulate themselves for their moral courage in doing so.”<sup>32</sup>

In the final moments of the movie, animation gives way to documentary footage from the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. Amidst the piles of corpses, a Palestinian woman refugee walks and wails, crying at the press photographers: “Sawaru, sawaru, wein el-arab, wein el-arab.” The words appear without subtitles; precisely the moment of extreme pain remains untranslated. Is this choice another expression of the torn tongue of the old Arab from A. B. Yehoshua’s “Facing the Forests”?<sup>33</sup> Are the victims denied their ability to voice their own cry, their own story? Or is it, on the contrary, a materialization of this cry as an untranslatable act, which avoids the reduction of experience to mere words? It is hard to tell. “Film it, film it,” she cries. “Where are the Arabs? Where are the Arabs?”

Ending the film with this echoing question may suggest that Folman, too, addresses the same words to Arab nations who have forsaken the Palestinian refugees and doomed them to their fate. This possibility implies again that Arabs—and only Arabs—were responsible for protecting the Palestinians and failed, while Israelis are kept out of the equation. As I have tried to show, this renunciation of responsibility is a typical outcome of viewing the Palestinian catastrophe in terms of the Holocaust. There is a mechanism here, a play of mirrors, that leaves the experience of the other nation always in a marginal place. In many ways, the Israeli narratives dealing with the Palestinian experience lead us to an empty space, an empty hole that resounds with the very question that ends Folman’s film: Where are the Arabs?

## Notes

- 1 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from foreign-language sources are mine. S. Yizhar, *Khirbet Khizeh*, trans. Nicholas de Lange and Yaacob Dweck (Jerusalem, 2008), 104, 109.
- 2 Gil Anidjar, “‘Be-lo‘ei havayat adam’: ‘Al ‘Ha-shavui’ vecha-Shoah,” *Teoryah u-vikoret* 21 (2002): 9–19.
- 3 Elias Khoury, “The Mirror: Imagining Justice in Palestine,” *Boston Review*, July–Aug. 2008, p. 36. I thank Lital Levy for calling my attention to this article.

- 4 Cited by Anita Shapira, "Hirbet Hiz'eh: Zikaron ve-shikhehah," *Alpayim* 21 (2002): 16.
- 5 Hilit Yeshurun, "'Lomar et ha-sofi ba-einsofi': Reayon 'im S. Yizhar," *Hadarim* 11 (1994): 223.
- 6 Cited by Yitzhak Laor, *Anu kotevim otakh moledet: Masot al sifrut yisraelit* (Tel Aviv, 1995), 128. According to Benny Morris, who writes about the same episode, "Zisling agreed that outwardly Israel, to preserve good name and image, must admit nothing, but the matter must be thoroughly investigated"; Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949* (Cambridge, Engl., 1987), 233.
- 7 According to the press, Saramago said that the "IDF's presence in the occupied territories brings to mind methods from concentration camps like Auschwitz." In response, Shapira canceled a planned interview with the writer. In Shapira's words, "Saramago's declaration is a vulgar, heartless utterance, inhumane and inconsiderate toward a large group of Holocaust survivors. . . . These are monstrous declarations that concern every Israeli and every Jew. Holocaust Memorial Day is near and he compared us to Auschwitz." See Merav Yudilovitch, "Ha-televiziah ha-hinukhit bitlah: Reayon im Saramago," *Ynet*, Mar. 26, 2002, <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/1,7340,L-1793530,00.html>.
- 8 Idith Zertal, *Ha-umah veva-mavet: Historiyah zikaron politikah* (Tel Aviv, 2002), esp. 225–84.
- 9 See Moshe Zuckerman, *Shoah ba-heder ha-atum* (published by author, 1993).
- 10 Joseph A. Massad, *The Persistence of the Palestinian Question: Essays on Zionism and the Palestinians* (New York, 2006), 134.
- 11 See also Hannan Hever, "Mapping Literary Space: Territory and Violence in Israeli Literature," in *Mapping Jewish Identities*, ed. Laurence J. Silberstine (New York, 2000).
- 12 Massad, *Persistence*, 130.
- 13 Edward Said, "Usus al-ta'ayush," *Al-hayah*, Nov. 5, 1977, n.p.; cited in Massad, *Persistence*, 139, 141.
- 14 Hannah Arendt, *The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age* (New York, 1978), 96.
- 15 Dan Diner, "Yisrael ve-traumat ha-hashmadah," *Politikah* 8 (1986): 22.
- 16 Zertal, *Ha-umah veva-mavet*, 229.
- 17 Ariella Azoulay, *Alimut mekhonenet 1947–1950: Geneologiyah hazutit shel mishtar ve-hafikhat ha-ason le-ason mi-nekudat mabatam* (Tel Aviv, 2009), 17.
- 18 Avot Yeshurun, *Milevadatah: Mivhar 1934–1991* (Tel Aviv, 2009), 385.
- 19 Hilit Yeshurun, "Ani holekh el ha-kol: Reayon 'im Avot Yeshurun," *Hadarim* 3 (1982–83): 96.
- 20 Hannan Hever, "'Ir Yafu mi-gufah rodefet 'ir Krasnistaw she-hozah mi-besarah," in *Eikh nikra: Avot Yeshurun*, ed. Lilach Lachman (Bnei Brak, 2011), 65.

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*Nakba and  
Holocaust*

●  
Shira Stav



- 21 On March 29, 2002, during the Second Intifada, Ariel Sharon, then prime minister of Israel, launched Operation Homat Magen with a stated goal of uprooting terrorist bases in the West Bank. It was the largest military operation in the West Bank since the 1967 Six Day War. The IDF invaded the six largest cities in the West Bank and their surrounding localities, placing strict curfews on civilian populations and restrictions on the movement of international personnel.
- 22 Noam Chayut, *Ganevet ha-Shoah sheli* (Tel Aviv, 2009), 44.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 59.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 51.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 63.
- 26 Yehuda Elkana, "Bi-zekhut ha-shikhehah," *Haaretz*, Mar. 2, 1988, p. 13.
- 27 A similar point was made by David Hadar in a review of the book. See David Hadar, "Ha-gonev mi-ganav patur mi-rigshei ashmah," *Haaretz*, Apr. 16, 2010, <http://www.haaretz.co.il/literature/1.1197786>.
- 28 Chayut, *Ganevet ha-Shoah*, 63.
- 29 See also Ariel Handel, "Me-'ever la-tov vela-roa': Bushah ve-ahrayut be-'edyot hayalim," *Teoryah u-vikoret* 32 (2008): 45–69.
- 30 Apparently the first use of this image to symbolize a Palestinian victim in an Israeli work is in the satiric play of Hanoch Levin, *Ha-patriot* (1982). See Hanoch Levin, *Mah ikhpat la-tsipor: Satirot, ma'arkhonim, pizmonim* (Tel Aviv, 1987), 123. I thank Sidra Dekoven Ezrahi for drawing my attention to this allusion.
- 31 Elias Houry, "Fals ma'a al-dhakira," *Annahar*, Feb. 4, 2009, n.p.
- 32 Ursula Lindsey, "Shooting Film and Crying," *Middle East Research and Information Project*, March 2009, <http://www.merip.org/mero/interventions/shooting-film-crying>. I thank Lital Levy for this reference.
- 33 A. B. Yehoshua, "Facing the Forests," in *The Continuing Silence of a Poet*, trans. Miriam Arad (New York, 1998), 203–36. In this story, an Israeli student is haunted by the ruins of an Arab village beneath the national forests he is supposed to guard. The character of the Arab in this village is an old man whose tongue was torn out during "the war." Critics have interpreted this feature as a way of excluding Palestinian testimony from the narrative; see Laor, *Narratives with No Natives*, 134.