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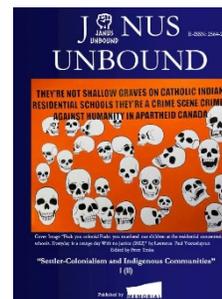
The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine in Israeli and Palestinian Narratives: A Discourse-Conceptual Analysis of Lexical Representation

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Abstract

This paper juxtaposes and examines in a fresh light the genealogy of concepts (especially the labels *Nakba* and *War of Independence*) used by Palestinians and Israelis respectively, to represent the *ethnic cleansing* of Palestine—a *process* that gathered momentum in 1948, and lead to both the displacement of the Palestinian people and the transformation of Mandate Palestine into present-day Israel. The article seeks to answer the question of whether these conceptualizations or labels are accurate in what they represent. Utilizing a discourse-conceptual analysis framework, the article demonstrates how these lexical representations have mystified and perpetuated settler-colonialism. The article argues for a necessary counter-discourse that would rename and restructure the world's understanding of key events in the continued ethnic cleansing of Palestine. The article concludes that the first step towards social change and decolonization entails a conceptual and discursive change in nationalist discourse: the key carrier of conceptual dynamics and change of social reality and history.

Keywords: Discourse-conceptual analysis (DCA), Ethnic cleansing, Nakba, Palestinian narrative.

Introduction

In May 1948, the settler-colonial state of Israel was founded, in the heart of Mandatory Palestine (1917-1948), as envisaged and initiated by the carefully worded Balfour Declaration (1917)—the foundational stone for modern-day Israel. This was Britain's pledge of "a national home for the Jewish people" in Palestine. This pledge or hegemonic act eventually resulted in the establishment of Israel as a Jewish State in Mandate Palestine. This *de facto*

creation of the State of Israel in Mandatory Palestine took place following militarized Zionist immigrants' launch of a premeditated campaign to drive out the native population of Palestine from their homeland—a process of ethnic cleansing (Pappé 2006b; Abdo and Masalha; Qabaha and Hamamra) that has led to the mass expulsions and dispossession of Palestinians from their villages, and the onset of their ongoing dispossession and suffering: "From close to one million Palestinians only around 150,000 remained in the newly created state. From 500 villages, only 100 remained undestroyed by the Zionist Israeli troops, and all major cities were emptied of most of their Palestinian residents" (Shihade 109). This sociocide and politicide—or premeditated destruction and replacement of Palestine as a nation and as a state—was perpetrated through Zionist-British cooperation (Gutwein) as envisioned in 1917 by the British government. The systematic *memoricide* (Pappé 2006b) by the new settler-colonial state of such genocide—referred to by the Palestinian people and Arabs as the *Nakba* (of 1948)—constitutes, along with the 1967 Israeli occupation of the rest of historic Palestine and the resultant displacement and dispossession of many more Palestinians, what, in simple terms, the Palestine question is all about. This memoricide, sociocide, and politicide underlie much of the ensuing spillover of regional wars and political unrest in the Middle East and probably the world at large (Assaiqeli 2013). Such daylight destruction and replacement make, as the expatriate Israeli scholar (and New Historian) Ilan Pappé argues, "the tale of Palestine from the beginning until today … a simple story of colonialism and dispossession, yet the world treats it as a multifaceted and complex story—hard to understand and even harder to solve" (Chomsky and Pappé 12).

Indeed, the Palestinian story is one of uprootedness and continued dispossession. It is a case of settler-colonialism where the *other*—to be negated—is the Palestinian people. Zionism is a racist ideology and the state of Israel is a settler-colonial project that is based on the annihilation of the other. While European colonial projects are aimed at racial domination, as argued by Sayegh (1965), Zionist settler-colonialism is aimed at racial extermination. The Palestinian people have for decades been struggling to put an end to their occupation, dispossession, and diaspora. The Palestine question is an epoch of Zionist encroachment and Palestinian resistance and martyrdom; it is a history of struggle for national independence. In short, the Palestine question is not a "conflict" as is commonly described in media, academia, and popular debate, but rather a national, uphill struggle for freedom and self-determination in the face of settler-colonialism; it is a decolonization struggle, an anti-settler-colonization struggle that is based on ethnic cleansing, military occupation, unequal rights, and *ziheid*—Zionist apartheid.

To ensure its ongoing *de facto* existence, given such destruction and replacement, and to ensure the full application of its envisaged national settler-colonial enterprise, the newly-found settler-colonial state of immigrants has developed an "ideologically-driven lexicon" (Walsh 26) that systematically misrepresents reality where, for example, *ethnic cleansing* becomes "War of Independence,"

Palestine becomes "Israel," the *West Bank* becomes "Judaea and Samaria" and so on, as can graphically be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Binaries of the Israeli Ideological Lexicon

Palestinian people	"Israeli Arabs"
Occupation	"Settlement"
Settler-colonialism	"Return to Zion" or "Biblical land" or "Eretz Yisrael" or "Land of Israel"
Expansionism	"Natural growth"
Colonialism	"Historical rights"
Occupied territories	"Disputed," "liberated," and "in-dependent" "territories"
State terror	"Self-defence"
Israeli occupation forces	"Israeli security forces" or "IDF" (Israel Defence Forces)
Settlements	"Outposts"
Freedom-fighters	"Terrorists"
1967 ethnic cleansing of the rest of Palestine	"The Six Day War"
Resistance to occupation	"Terrorism"
Blatant Israeli attacks	"Escalation"
Apartheid walls or *segregation barriers* such as the West Bank Separation Wall, Gaza-Israel Iron Wall	"Security barriers" or "fences" or "acoustic walls"

In all these examples of linguistic misrepresentation and manipulation a spade is not called a spade. In the same manner, Israel designates its ongoing process of ethnic cleansing against the Palestinian people as "operations," as the examples in the following table show.

Table 2: "Operation" vs Continued Acts of Ethnic Cleansing

"Operation"	Cleansed Locality	Year
"Operation Wall Guardian"	Gaza	2021
"Operation Protective Edge"	Gaza	2014
"Operation Pillar of Defense"	Gaza	2012
"Operation Cast Lead"	Gaza	2008
"Operation Hot Winter"	Gaza	2008
"Operation Defensive Shield"	West Bank	2002
"Operation Inferno"	Jordanian town of Karameh	1968

Drawing on this ideologically-driven lexicon that is designed to distort facts and reverse reality, Israel has, since its inception, used lexical representations and euphemisms whose vacuity and ambiguity could make war crimes seem acts of heroism. Hence, it was not ethnic cleansing that in 1948 transformed Mandatory Palestine into present-day Israel, but a "War of Independence." More recently

in 2014, the 51-day Israeli bombardment of Gaza is labelled "Operation Protective Edge," rather than another act—in a series of systematic acts—of ethnic cleansing against the Palestinian people. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), these acts left "over 273,000 Palestinians" in the Gaza Strip displaced, 1500 children orphaned, 872 homes totally destroyed and 5,005 damaged, 138 schools and 26 health facilities damaged, whole neighbourhoods razed, over 373,000 children requiring psychological support, and over 2200 Palestinian civilians dead under the debris of their homes. All these atrocities of ethnic cleansing, carried out under the guise and discursive stratagem of "Israel has the right to defend itself," are simply represented as "Operation Protective Edge."[1] The physical displacement of the Palestinian people becomes punctuated by the extermination of Palestinian wills and voices; or, in the words of Ahmad Qabaha and Bilal Hamamra, "[t]he Israeli military occupation has been striving to wrest control from Palestinians over Palestine physically and linguistically. Israel has the advantage of controlling narratives, narratives which cast Palestinians outside public discourse and history" (32), and, as John Pilger writes: "The Israeli regime continues to set the international news agenda" where Israelis are murdered by "terrorists," and Palestinians are left dead after a clash with "security forces" (139).

Since the creation of the settler-colonial state, the Israeli narrative has, through such (mis)representations, persistently endeavoured to efface historic Palestine from "global public memory" (Pappé 2006a). It has always attempted through discourse to justify or cover up its institutionalized operations of ethnic cleansing, systematic land annexation and expansionism, and the demonization of Palestinian patriotism and resistance. Israel has continuously used *hasbara*, or discourse in the "defense of the indefensible." It employs the discourse of "peace" to implement practices that are the antithesis of peace. It uses discourse—alongside military force—not to negotiate an amicable solution to the problem it has created but rather as a means to prolong the status quo, liquidate Palestinian national struggle, and further consolidate Israeli power and expansionism. By only agreeing to negotiate about the Palestinians in Gaza and certain zones in the West Bank in Madrid in 1991, Israel effectively "succeeded in destroying the political unity of the Palestinian people" (Massad 114) leaving millions of Palestinian refugees the colonizing state expelled in 1948 "bereft of leadership and with no identifiable goals" (127). The misleading, ambiguous discourse of peace becomes a means to sustain rather than end the status quo, a situation in which the indigenous people are always the loser. This heir to the legacy of colonialism has "won the rhetorical battle over Palestine in the international community thanks to the rhetoric, images" (Qabaha and Hamamra 32), and continued disinformation and misrepresentation of reality.

In contrast, the Palestinian narrative—official and otherwise—has struggled to represent and propagate the Palestine question as a clear case of settler-colonialism. The Palestinians have been unable to project the cause behind the birth of the Palestinian refugee problem and their continued dispossession and displacement at the level of discourse. The Palestinian intelligentsia until today use

the term *Nakba* (نكبة)—literally, catastrophe—to represent this man-made, pre-meditated process of racial elimination, heightened in 1948. They have eloquently expressed the anguish, the brutality, the nostalgia, but have fallen short of representing the context and the crime.

This canonical terminology is the Palestinians' representation for what Israelis discursively represent as "War of Independence"(העצמאות Milkhemet Ha'Atzma'ut) (Peled). Along with this mis(representation) نكبة *Nakba*, the Palestinian people also use similar representations or *sister-concepts* such as هجرة (migration) or تغريبة (Palestinian Exodus) that form a specific *semantic field* (see Section 3 below) of the *Nakba*, further mystifying the reality behind such related non-agentic lexico-conceptualizations by obscuring *causal agency*—the fact that the Palestine question was brought about by *human agency*. This is further exacerbated and mystified by the Israeli naming of such acts of *ethnic cleansing* as "War of Independence" or similar sister concepts such as "War of Liberation," "Independence Day," "population transfer," "voluntary exodus," or "Return to Zion," all of which further distort and reverse the actuality of the ethnic cleansing.

Similarly, in the Palestinian narrative, what Israel systematically designates following its "War of Independence" as "operations" in self-defense, the Palestinians designate as "wars," which further mystifies and misrepresents, not only the ethnic cleansing of 1948, but also the continued process of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine. Referring to "War of 1948," the Palestinians have mistakenly put themselves on an equal footing with the colonizer, when, in fact, they were and are indigenous people fleeing the juggernaut of the colonial power. Table 3 below summarizes the Palestinian and Israeli sister concepts used to represent the 1948 ethnic cleansing of Palestine.

Table 3: 1948 in Israeli and Palestinian Metanarratives

Israeli Designation	Palestinian Designation
העצמאות, *Milkhemet Ha'Atzma'ut* "War of Independence"	نكبة *Nakba* (Catastrophe)
Sister Concepts	**Sister Concepts**
War of Liberation	هجرة *Hijrah* (Migration)
Independence Day	تغريبة *Taghreebah* (Palestinian Exodus)
Voluntary Exodus, Population Transfer, Return to Zion	War of 1948

On both sides are misrepresentations of reality, the reality of the Palestine question as a stark case of settler-colonialism, as an ongoing anti-colonial struggle, as an ethnic cleansing of Palestine. Therefore, I oppose *Nakba* and "War of Independence" as misnomers to the actuality of *ethnic cleansing*. In the following sections, I first provide a theoretical background for how discursive/lexical representations play a role in the perception and construction of reality, then highlight the analytic method and discuss the findings and implications, and conclude with recommendations.

Theoretical Background: Lexical Representations and the Construction of Reality

In his 1989 book, *Beyond 1984: Doublespeak in a Post-Orwellian Age*, William Lutz mentions what a US military officer during the invasion of Cambodia in 1974 said to American journalists: "You always write it's bombing, bombing, bombing. It's not bombing, it's air support" (124). So, it is not, as he sees it or as he knowingly phrases it, *aerial bombardment*; "it's air support." Colonialists have always invested in language to help enact and sustain domination. Since the 15th century, European invasions and military occupation of the peoples of the largest continents of the world—Asia, Africa, and the Americas—have never called such territorial occupation and foreign domination as such, but rather: "duty of the white man;" "colonialism;" "protectionism;" "mandate;" "tutelage" (Al-Mesdi). In the same vein, it can be observed that the *atomic bombs* that incinerated Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the Second World War and reduced them to ruble were referred to as "Little Boy" and "Fat Man" (Cohn). Repeated occupations of Iraq: "Operation Iraqi Freedom." Machiavellian colonial discourse producers have never called their invasions and exogenous domination of indigenous peoples "occupation" and "terrorism." It became "terrorism" later when those nations under the yoke of injustice and the heat of exploitation began to rise against the occupation of their lands and the plundering of their livelihood. Colonial discourse technologists have always resorted to language to find a way to enact and sustain domination.

Territorial occupation of foreign nations—the elimination of the native, and the economic exploitation and the siphoning off of wealth and freedom from indigenous peoples too weak to resist the juggernaut and onslaught of modern canons—has always been enacted and maintained linguistically (Said). The tool has been language, or more accurately *discourse*: the ideological use of language. Nations of the world were occupied and exploited by colonial powers who sought to expand their sphere of influence under the linguistic guise of bringing "enlightenment and civilization," "democracy" and "freedom," and other misleading euphemistic colonial constructions.

Observing the colonial legacy of the lexical constructions of occupation and foreign domination and their sister concepts, one can recognize the subtle workings of language, the violent selections made to achieve nefarious colonial interests. Enacting and reproducing language and discourse establish and maintain

ideologies, states of affairs, in distorting reality, sustaining domination and asymmetrical relations of power (Simpson; Fairclough; Van Dijk).

Our selection of certain lexical and structural iterations, one choice among a set of other choices, encodes a certain conceptualization of the world, with a certain positioning and a certain responsibility and an accountability. Thus, language is brought to the heart of the political event, not as a mere epiphenomenon or tool of description or neutral narration, but as an actual construction of the event through various *argumentative* and *interpretive frameworks*, and *discursive legitimation strategies*—legitimation, delegitimation, and pre-legitimation of political actors and actions (Van Leeuwen; Krzyżanowski 2014). Choosing, for example, to represent a displaced and bereaved young Palestinian woman who blows herself up among Israeli soldiers as a "martyr" or a "suicide bomber" and her act as a "terrorist attack" or a "martyrdom operation" in defense of the defenceless, would entail different positioning, "responsibility and blame attribution" (Amer 2009, 11).

Lexical representations construct social actors (Wodak and Meyer). Such representations include: "fedayee," "jihadist," "fundamentalist," "freedom fighter," "resistance fighter," "militia." Such terms legitimate or delegitimate, incriminate or glorify, criticize or deflect criticism, attribute blame or exonerate. They suggest defensive or offensive, apologetic or stigmatizing, sympathetic or accusing, condemnatory or celebratory attitudes. Their use actively conceptualizes such acts as: war crimes or heroism; terrorism or self-defence; weapons of the weak and tools for resisting oppression (Gavron) or crimes against humanity; noble *hara-kiri* and *kamikaze* acts to be glorified, or criminal and terrorist acts to be condemned and punished. Such concepts construct an interpretive framework for us to consider events as martyrdom operations or acts of terrorism, thus legitimizing or pre-legitimizing or delegitimizing. Such nominations or linguistic representations entail different types and levels of mitigation, condemnation, legitimation, positioning, and responsibility, and hence the construction of reality. Such discursive conceptualizations "entail particular ways of looking at the world and particular ways of defining reality which have social and political consequences" (Montgomery et al. 73).

In all these examples of lexical selection, construction, and representation, the same occurrence can generate two different stories, "a difference in perspective" (Thomas et al. 63), and hence reactions with significant political and ideological implications. Each discourse producer wants the masses to interpret and react to the event in a particular way: to experience it and conceptualize reality from their own perspective or ideological stance. While the event, or the people represented, *is* the same, the way they are being represented is *not* the same. In the words of Martin Montgomery (et al. 1992 73), "[s]election of one term rather than another often entails choosing particular modes of conceptualizing the reality in question." Representation, in the words of Mosheer Amer (2009 26), could *delegitimize* the powerless as "violent, confused and irresponsible" and *legitimize* the powerful as "peaceable, rational and flexible," completely reversing and distorting reality. Therefore, the lack of critical language awareness is, in certain

contexts, disastrous. Language is far from a neutral tool of communication; it is "instead a channel for how we see and construct the world around us" (Thomas et al. xviii), a medium of domination and social force (Wodak and Meyer). It is "the key carrier of conceptual dynamics and change" and the structuring and restructuring of society, social reality, and history (Krzyżanowski 2016, 312). Hence, "the central object of historical inquiry" and critical discourse studies "should not be events or occurrences" as such as emphasized by studies on *Begriffsgeschichte*, or "conceptual history," but rather "social and political concepts which come to define societies and various facets of social order" (Krzyżanowski 2016, 312). It is not the *political event* or occurrence that shapes our life, but rather the *discursive event*.

Domination and oppression, then, take place in linguistic forms. They are discursively enacted and forged through the state or colonial power's ideological apparatuses, which subject the natives or individuals to the hegemony of the dominant ideology of the discourse producer (Thomas et al.). They are also discursively reproduced, legitimized, and perpetuated (Titscher et al.; Fairclough). Social control and power are "exercised with increasing frequency by means of texts" (Titscher et al. 152-53). Power is "exercised and enacted in discourse" (Fairclough 61), which influences our perception of people, events, objects, processes, and phenomena. Our mental development, behaviours, beliefs, and attitudes are all shaped and constructed by discourses, systems of thought (symbolic orders), or habitual ways of *thinking* and *acting* that make certain things thinkable and sayable and regulating who can say them (Foucault). We encode in such discourses our mental picture of reality and how we account for our experience of the world (Simpson). We stabilize or even intensify injustices and inequalities in society discursively. "It is through discourse" then, as Amer states, "that political actors create, maintain, assert or resist social conditions or the status quo … and seek to construct and reconstruct social identities, relations and structures" (2012 181).

Material and Method: Discourse-Conceptual Analysis

In critical discourse studies (CDS), it is generally agreed that there is "no accepted canon of data collection, but many CDA approaches work with existing data, i.e. texts not specifically produced for the respective research projects" (Wodak and Meyer 32). The discussion to follow uses CDS's discourse-conceptual analysis (DCA): an approach within the pluralistic framework of CDS, developed by Michał Krzyżanowski (2016) by proposing a methodological merger between the discourse-historical approach (DHA) in CDS and the branch of historical inquiry known as *conceptual history*. This approach will highlight how some lexical representations and constructions have the capacity to legitimate and galvanize action against injustice—others delegitimate, dehumanize, and stifle action. "War of Independence," and its Palestinian counterpart concept, *Nakba*: two terms selected for *critical case sampling*, a type of *purposive sampling* useful when a single *case* (or small number) "can be decisive in explaining the

phenomenon of interest" (Rai and Thapa 8). Accordingly, I examine the terms *Nakba* and "War of Independence" used by Palestinian people and Israelis since 1948, respectively, along with a genealogy of related sister concepts, to conceive and represent ongoing ethnic cleansing. See Table 4 below.

Table 4: Palestinian Representations of Continuing Ethnic Cleansing

No.	Item/Misnomer/ Misrepresentation	Transliteration	Literal Meaning	Act of Ethnic Cleansing
1	النكبة	*Nakba*	"Catastrophe"/ "Calamity"/ "Disaster"	Zionist militias' 1948 ethnic cleansing of Palestine
2	هجرة/ هجرة ١٩٤٨	*Hijrah*	"Exodus"/ "Exodus of 1948"	Sister concept to *Nakba*
3	الفلسطينية التغريبة التغريبة الفلسطينية	*Taghreebah*	"Palestinian alienation"	Sister concept
4	١٩٤٨ حرب 1948	*Harbthamanyah wa Arba'een*	"War of 1948"	Sister concept
5	النكسة	*Naksa*	"Setback"	Israel's 1967 ethnic cleansing of the rest of Palestine
6	هجرة ١٩٦٧	*Hijra Seb'ah wa Siteen*	"Exodus of 1967"	Sister concept to the *Naksa*
7	١٩٦٧ حرب حرب 1967	*Harb Sab'ah wa Siteen*	"War of 1967"	Sister concept
8	الصراع الفلسطيني الإسرائيلي	*Assira' al-Falesteeni al-Israeeli*	"Conflict"/"Israeli-Palestinian Conflict"	Misnomer
9	حرب	*Harb*	"War"	An Israeli act of ethnic cleansing of Palestine
10	حرب غزة	*Harb Ghazzah*	"War of Gaza"	An Israeli act of ethnic cleansing in Gaza
11	حرب الفرقان	*Harb Al-Furqan*	"War of the Criterion"	Palestinian designation of Israel's 2008 act of ethnic cleansing in Gaza.
12	حرب السجيل	*Harb As-sidjeel*	"War of the Stone-hard Blows"	Palestinian designation of Israel's 2012 act of ethnic cleansing in Gaza
13	العصف المأكول	*Al-Asf Alma'koul*	"Stalks & Straw Eaten up"	Palestinian designation of Israel's 2014 act of ethnic cleansing in Gaza[2]
14	سيف القدس / معركة سيف القدس	*Saif al-Quds Battle/War*	"Sword of Jerusalem"	Palestinian designation of Israel's latest act of ethnic cleansing in Gaza 6-21 May 2021

Nakba vs. "War of Independence"

The lexical representations *Nakba* and "War of Independence" and related sister concepts, as used in Palestinian and Israeli discourses, are misnomers or misrepresentations for *ethnic cleansing*. Not the result of a miscalculation or a fluke (circumstances or the vagaries and momentum of war), but rather the result of long-standing harboured Zionist premeditation (Pappé 2006b), the 1948 ethnic cleansing was meant to eliminate the Palestinian people and replace them with Zionist *olim* or immigrants—constructed later as Israelis. Being unable to completely remove all the Palestinian people from their native land in 1948, however, the new settler-colonial state embarked on a continual process of ethnic cleansing whenever possible. Benny Morris, a "great documenter of the sins of Zionism" and one of the few "figures in Israeli public life" who "has done more to recover the historical truth of the fate of the Palestinians at the hands of the Zionist movement" states that what stops the settler state from eliminating the remaining 20% of Arabs it "regretfully" failed to "cleanse" in 1948 are "purely temporary and tactical" reasons (Piterberg 28-29).

What was perpetrated in Palestine in 1948 was neither a "War of Independence" as propagated by the founders of Israel nor a *Nakba* as inappropriately called by the affected, but rather a predetermined scheme, a well-defined policy of forced mass population expulsion and killing, a method known in modern political parlance as ethnic cleansing.[3] *Nakba* has done more harm than good to the Palestinian people as it has served to obfuscate the cause of their ongoing homelessness and statelessness, and undermined the legitimacy of their colonial struggle. At the same time, the newly found state worked on the memoricide of such ethnic cleansing from the Palestinian and global public consciousness, whitewashing through *concepts* and *discourse*, on the one hand, and the transformation of the original landscape of Mandate Palestine, on the other hand, effectively wiping historic Palestine off the map and from global public memory (Grmek 157).

Connotations and Consequences

The term *Nakba* was first used by the Syrian historian Constantine Zureiq in his 1948 book: *Ma'na al-Nakba* (the meaning of "catastrophe") to record the atrocities perpetrated by Zionist militias between 1947 and 1948 against the unarmed native population of Palestine. *Nakba* is a misnomer as it means a catastrophe or calamity—a natural disaster of some sort, but not genocide. In other words, the nomination objectifies an act of ethnic cleansing into a natural disaster. To be saddened at, rather than as with the work of perpetrators, to be deplored, condemned, and reversed. The concept *Nakba* is thus *non-agentic*. It removes any reference to those who caused such homelessness and dispossession. It obfuscates *causal agency* or the fact that Palestinian dispossession and uprootedness were the product of a perpetrator. In other words, representing this crime against humanity (Saleh; Pappé 2006b) as the *Nakba*, the Palestinians have inadvertently helped in the mystification of the cause and context, and the nature and magnitude of this human crime, and in so doing, the nobility and legitimacy of their

struggle as a colonized people for their inalienable *haq*[4] to resistance, freedom, and national self-determination.

Pappé (2006b, xvii) explains that the term "*Nakba* might have been adopted, for understandable reasons, as an attempt to counter the moral weight of the Jewish Holocaust (*Shoa*)"—the Hebrew word or concept for "catastrophe." So this may explain why the concept *Nakba*—a *counter-concept* then to the Jewish key social and political concept of the *Holocaust*—has been used by the Palestinian people and Arabs.

Nakba distances Zionist-British cooperation in premeditated depopulation of Palestine. It hides the heavily-mechanized Zionist Goliath. It obscures the veteran Zionist leaders' onslaught against the horror-struck native inhabitants of the land. It muffles the anguished cries of pain and the defencelessness of a people in the face of Zionist terrorism. It does not refer to the *mass expulsion* from their homeland of more than 750,000 Palestinians (Pappé 2006b) from a population of 1.9 million at the time. *Nakba* mystifies the homelessness of 85% of Palestinians living in what became the state of Israel (Badil Resource Centre). It does not refer to the mass depopulation of 560 Palestinian villages that were ethnically cleansed at the hands of the then predecessor of the Israel Occupation Forces (IOF): the Zionist gangs of the Hagana, Stern Gangs, and Irgun (Saleh).

Colonizer vs. Colonized

What happened was not a visitation from God. It was settler-colonialism and elimination of the native; it was "destruction and replacement;" the fulfillment of the founding father of Zionism and Israel, Herzl's ideology and praxis: "If I wish to substitute a new building for an old one, I must demolish before I construct" (Qabaha and Hamamra 31).

The Palestinians and Arabs in general—who, unlike colonialists "do not have a military culture or tradition" (Kuttab, ctd. in Gavron, 105)—while having mastered since time immemorial the literary and especially poetic uses of language and appreciated the aesthetic glamour of grammar in a manner probably more profound and ingenious than any other language community, have failed to grasp and manipulate the subtleties of language in relation to power and domination. They have perfected the rhetoric of "the horse, the sword, the gun" (Kuttab, qtd. in Gavron, 105), but all from an aesthetic angle. They are fully conscious of the aesthetic qualities of language and are adept at its art and artifice, but not as an instrument of control and power.

In terms of linguistic representation, Palestinian discourse is far less effective than that deployed by Israeli counterparts who have perfected the discourse of "peace;" the "Shalom this, Shalom that, Shalom the other thing" (Kuttab, qtd. in Gavron, 105); the discourse that has made the Palestinian people, in their despair to live like other free people, compromise the compromise. The Palestinian narrative has failed to construct, articulate, and propagate a paradigm of ethnic cleansing at the hands of a settler-colonial apartheid regime. *Nakba* as the designation for the 1948 ethnic cleansing of Palestine has been a debacle.

75

In contrast, Israeli colonial discourse (or the Israeli official narrative) has successfully managed to reverse reality. Consider, for example, *Der Judenstaat*, the concept Zionists selected when they (re)presented their question in 1896. An instant success, *Der Judenstaat* or "The Jewish State," (capturing of the then "Jewish question" at the level of discursive conceptualization) not only evoked "a widespread interest among the intellectuals of the day" (Herzl 13) but also "brought "Jews out of the ghettos and made them conscious" of a vision of a pure state of their own race (Herzl 13). The title was promising, revealing, and galvanizing: it was inspirational. More importantly, it prompted action—popular and official—and accelerated steps towards the realization of such a vision. It provided momentum. It was a rallying cry of a political movement, of action, of destiny. It was the creation at the level of discourse and conceptualization—a step that precedes action—of such thing as a state, a Jewish state. "The Jewish State," with *the* as definite article. It was a cry for *action*, not a cry for *acquiescence*. It was a cry to end a status quo, not to prolong it.

A settler-colonial movement always needs to construct a narrative to help it enact and sustain its exogenous domination. Unlike the colonized, the settler-colonialists have made expedient use of logos. Israelis have mastered manufacturing discourse. Israelis are adept at misrepresenting reality and distorting facts. "War of Independence" is a far cry from what happened. Independence from whom? Liberation from whom?

Implications

1948 was neither an act of God nor was it a "War of Independence." Premeditated "transfer" is a euphemistic Zionist sister concept for ethnic cleansing.[5] What Zionists perpetrated against Palestinian society was not a cataclysm of seismic proportions, nor was it accidental. It was an ethnic cleansing, envisaged and premeditated (Morris 1988; Masalha 1992; Pappé 2006b). The war was the means for such cleansing, or, as Pappé states, it was:

> not that the Zionist movement, in creating its nation-state, waged a war that 'tragically but inevitably' led to the expulsion of 'parts of the indigenous population.' It is the other way round: the objective was the ethnic cleansing of the country the movement coveted for its new state, and the war was the *consequence*, the *means* to carry it out. (2006a 17-18)

The designation *Nakba*, however, makes it sound as though it was a singular *event* that happened when in reality it launched a process of ongoing *nakabat* (Arabic plural) or acts of racial elimination. Thus, in "The Nakba Continues: The Palestinian Crisis from the Past to the Present," Qabaha and Hamamra state:

> The wounds of the Nakba are still open, and they are getting deeper, not only because Israel is not allowing refugees to return, but because the Israeli military occupation continues to expel and relocate Palestinians to build its own settlements and populate them with Jewish migrants and settlers. Israeli domination obliges Palestinians to dwell in their memories

of loss and to "re-live and re-imagine the *Nakba*, a memory that is more than a memory as it is lived and re-lived in the daily nakbas of the Palestinian people" (Hamdi 2021, 33). The Palestinian Nakba is a living presence that is communicated and enacted through the ongoing Israeli displacement and expulsion of Palestinians who share the scars of collective trauma. (31-32)

Such designations—Israeli and Palestinian alike—serve in the mystification of the process of ethnic cleansing, and hence the continuity of the status quo. They project to the outside world an image contrary to what happened and is still happening. *Nakba,* being such an elusive *non-agentic* term with divine implications, has obviated the need for blame attribution, responsibility and accountability, and action and rehabilitation, helping perpetuate the status quo. Indeed, "in leaving out the actor … it may in a sense have contributed to the continuing denial by the world of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948 and after" (Pappé 2006b, xvii). *Nakba*, by way of such mystification and objectification or naturalization has played a major role in "the absence so far of the paradigm of ethnic cleansing" (Pappé 2006b, 17). *Nakba* does not have the shocking and galvanizing legal implications that the concept *ethnic cleansing* as a crime does, and so does not warrant any commensurate action or attempt at rehabilitation. It does not have mobilizing force. It makes the criminal premeditated act of deracination or uprootedness an act of God or nature—a *fait accompli*; in other words, nothing could be done to redress it apart from passive acceptance.

The imagery of "War of Independence," on the other hand, not only legitimates what happened in 1948, but also celebrates it as an act of heroism and freedom-fighting rather than terrorism and aggression. "War of Independence" implies "a heroic Jewish struggle for survival against all odds" (Pappé 2009, 6) and makes those veteran Zionist leaders behind it into brave national heroes to be celebrated rather than vile war criminals to be condemned and tried in the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Israeli representation paints the perception they were colonized and, following their "noble and brave" "War of Independence," redeemed a usurped territory from Palestinian colonizers. Such an image always places "Israel" in the semantic patient position of defence.

Labeling what Zionists did in and to Palestine and its people in 1948 as ethnic cleansing brings, conceptually at least, Israel to the ICJ. Israel—an ethnocracy—despite its policy and pursuit of a purely Jewish state, is fully aware of why it must master symbolic production, of why it must insist on calling its racist settler actions this, not that. It would never call them acts of ethnic cleansing or ethnocide or even forced displacement as this would incriminate it and expose its colonial practices in Palestine.

Conclusion and Recommendations

I have argued here that the non-agentic concept *Nakba* used by Palestinians to conceive and represent the 1948 atrocities, along with its equally mystifying Israeli counterpart "War of Independence," have helped perpetuate the status quo: they have prolonged injustice, obviated responsibility, and removed *causal agency*. Both narratives—the victim's *Nakba*, and the victimizer's "War of Independence"—have helped in the mystification and continuity of the premeditated process of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine. While the victim's representation suggests a lack of *critical language awareness* (CLA), the victimizer's mythical narrative of Israel's birth bespeaks a heightened awareness of the power of the linguistics of representation in enacting and sustaining domination. These designations have played a major role in the mystification of the cause of the Palestine question and the perpetuation of ethnic cleansing.

The first step towards social change and decolonization is a conceptual change in nationalist discourse, which necessitates a heightened consciousness of the linguistics of representation as "the key carrier of conceptual dynamics and change," and the structuring and restructuring of society, social reality, and history (Krzyżanowski 2016, 312). We need a replacement for the non-agentic term *Nakba*, and increased awareness of Palestinians to the instrumental role lexical (and thereby discursive) representations play in both "colonialism and the process of becoming emancipated from the strictures of foreign domination" (Divine 3).

The Palestinian narrative needs a *counter-discourse* renaming and restructuring the world's understanding of key events in the continued ethnic cleansing of Palestine. Palestinians need to tread a novel trajectory: a language-conscious and critical one. We need a *J'accuse* (Morris 1988; Masalha 1992; Pappé 2006a/b) against the perpetrators of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine. Get rid of signifiers that do not work. Project and foreground the paradigm of occupation, settler-colonialism, and ethnic cleansing, in place of paradigms that objectify and naturalize human actions. Palestinian intelligentsia, expunge such misnomers from Palestinian consciousness, from Palestinian literature and school and university curricula, and replace them with the paradigm of ethnic cleansing. Palestinian narrative needs to feature the Palestine question as an anti-colonial-occupation struggle. A narrative that exposes Israel worldwide as an apartheid regime.

In closing, one cannot but admit that there are many forces working against the Palestinian people, not merely discourse. Nonetheless, discourse remains crucial, instrumental in initiating the first step, mobilizing the nation behind a national cause. Discourse is a rallying and mobilizing tool for resistance and renaissance.

Biography

Aladdin Assaiqeli is a Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Languages and Communication, Sultan Idris Education University, Malaysia. He has more than fifteen years of international and interdisciplinary experience of teaching, research, and engagement, in particular in the field of TESL, CDA, and Linguistics. He holds a Bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature, a Master's degree in TESL and a Doctoral degree in Applied Linguistics. His research interests include L2 pedagogy, language learning and language acquisition, bilingualism and multilingualism, critical discourse analysis (CDA), visual communication, and the Palestine Question. He has published scholarly and interdisciplinary articles in various international journals, as well as poetry.

Notes

1. See Note 4.
2. Referred to earlier—a 51-day barrage of Israeli bombardment of the be sieged enclave.
3. Present homelessness is approximately 80% (Finkelstein 2003).
4. According to Ghada M. Ramahi in *Who Gives the Right to Resist?* (Merali and Sharbaf 82) Islamically speaking, in Arabic there is a specific word that is used to mean Right. It is the word *haq*, with *hoqook* for plural. Strictly, the word word *haq* connotes only a "just Right." This is so because the word *haq* as Riht is derived from the Absolute *Haq*, Allah the Almighty. The Absolute *Haq* is also the root of the word *Haqeeqah* which means the Absolute Truth. *Haq* is one of the Ninety Nine Divine Atributes. Hence, one's *haq* implies a divinely bestowed "Just Right." Unfortunately, lately in the Arab world the words *haq* and "right" have been confused and used interchangeably which has resulted in further confusion. Not every right is *Haq*, but every *Haq* is right. No language is necessary to know one's Haq, but plenty of it is needed to know one's rights. *Haq* cannot be understood mechanistically nor does it follow science, technology, economic growth, or tourism. *Haq* cannot be affected by any man made laws and regulations. *Haq* cannot be crushed by any military supremacy. No power can deny one's *Haq* but power can deny one's right. A world agency might decide some rights in favour of one over the other but it does not make these rights just. Those who are unjustly awarded some rights at the expense of others will always know that they have cheated. The *haq* to resist defies negotiations, road maps, and high concrete walls. The *haq* to resist is the driving force behind Palestinian uprising, behind Hamas, Islamic Jihad.
5. It is estimated that "some 430,000 Palestinians" were further displaced, half of whom were from the areas cleansed in 1948 and were thus twice refugees (Al-Jazeera).

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