

**ON THE PERMISSION, COURAGE,  
AND PRIVILEGE TO NARRATE**

**The Forgotten Palestinians: A History of the Palestinians in Israel**, by Ilan Pappé. New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2011. 275 pages. Appendix to p. 276. Notes to p. 292. Bibliography to p. 316. Index to p. 336. \$30.00 cloth.

*Reviewed by Magid Shihade*

In his latest work, Pappé attempts to bring attention to the history of the Palestinian citizens of the state of Israel, an ignored group that “has been dubbed traitors both by the Palestinian movement in the 1950s and by current Israeli political forces” (p. 10). For Pappé, theirs is a story of almost impossible navigation in a sea of “[Zionist] colonialism, [Jewish] chauvinist nationalism, [Jewish] fanatic religiosity and international indifference,” and a history of “discrimination and dispossession but also of self-assertiveness and steadfastness” (pp. 12, 7). According to Pappé, it is important to study the ’48 Palestinians because “it is only through a history of the Palestinian minority of Israel that one can examine the extent to which the long-lived Zionist and Israeli desire for [Jewish] ethnic supremacy and exclusivity” explains the Israeli position vis-à-vis all Palestinians (p. 11).

Pappé argues that the presence of a Palestinian minority after the 1948 war on Palestine and creation of the Israeli state was not envisaged by the leaders of the Zionist movement. Thus those

Palestinians who remained withstood a continuous ethnic cleansing campaign. They were able to remain only because of their resistance and the fatigue of the Israeli army, as Pappé deduces from the Zionist archival evidence. The book is a history of this community from 1947 to the present, which is the outcome of dialectics between events in the Arab world and those within the different Palestinian communities making their own history of steadfastness and resistance.

Early Zionist settlers referred to native Palestinians as aliens, and “the perception of the Palestinians as unwanted and unwelcome has remained a potent part of Zionist [and Israeli] discourse and attitude, and [they] continue to be regarded and treated as a dangerous threat in their own homeland.” Pappé continues, “This attitude permeates the Israeli establishment, and is expressed in various different ways” (p. 2). Palestinians have been the object of policies of discrimination and exclusion in all aspects of their lives, and the repression they face, including arrests and imprisonment among other forms, amounts to a system of latent apartheid. In Israel the discourse of transfer not only is tolerated, but also garners electoral support from the Jewish public.

There is likewise a constant discourse of the “threat of Arabs’ takeover of land in the north and south of Israel,” and Palestinian citizens of Israel are presented as a “demographic time bomb”—a projection and reflection of the original sin haunting the Israelis and their leadership (pp. 2–3). It is an anxiety that even led to the banning of public commemoration of the Nakba. Indeed, the war on Palestinian memory and national identity is central to the Israeli project.

In this context, one can better understand the military rule the Palestinians in Israel lived under from 1948 to 1966: a system of political repression, with checkpoints and permits required to leave one’s own village. While the military regime ended officially in 1966 and was transferred to areas colonized in 1967, its basic parameters, along with discrimination and repression, continue to this day by other means. As Pappé argues, there remains an “apartheid legal structure favoring Jews, and a ‘legal’

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system that left room for Israeli officials to act outside the law to repress Palestinians supported by a racist public mood" (pp. 97–8). Israeli Palestinians also have lived through massacres, such as Kafr Qasim in 1956, repressive military policies, and dispossession, in addition to the invisible economic and other policies aimed at marginalizing their community. Furthermore, "inside and outside Israeli academia, the Palestinian minority was not only considered to be primitive and non-modern, but also as one which would never become modern unless it was de-Palestinized and de-Arabized, echoing Patrick Wolfe's analysis of European settler colonial policies towards native peoples in the 'new' world" (p. 278).

The Israeli state has been not only Jewish, but anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian in its ideology and practices. An Israeli phobia of Palestinians, which is better understood as not just a projection, but also the nightmare of seeing evidence of one's own crime, is reflected in the policies of gates and enclaves. Rather than an ethnic democracy or ethnocracy, Pappé defines Israel as an oppressive state, a "Jewish secret service state," or a "hybrid between settler colonial state and secret-service (security-mukhabarat) regime" (pp. 13, 266).

Although Pappé is correct to argue that little attention has been given to this community in scholarship, he charts in the appendix major works by some Palestinian writers from '48 who have been writing on the subject for decades. Pappé's book builds on this scholarship to cover more recent events, framing his analysis as a history of the people rather than an abstract study of Israeli policies or a theoretical discussion of the Israeli political system.

The academic discourse about Israel/Palestine runs between the difficulty of the "permission to narrate" (to quote Edward Said) and the privilege to narrate, especially when access to high-profile academic publications is never given to a Palestinian. There is also, with rare exceptions, a timidity among many scholars in the field in terms of pushing the limit of what is "accepted." After all, discourse is a very powerful tool of domination. But it is also, as Said reminds us, a very powerful tool of liberation. Defining Zionism as a racist

settler-colonial ideology, and the Israeli state as a supremacist ethnic Jewish state, is not about sloganeering, and for that purpose the book is an essential contribution.