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Article abstract

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Many of the Palestinian villages and heritage sites were destroyed by Israel in 1948 and onwards, or were gradually dilapidated due to lack of official care. Large-scale Palestinian roots tourism does not exist, due to the impossibility of most Palestinians to gain access into Israel.

This paper explores an unusual form of roots tourism: the encounter between Jewish-Israelis and Palestinian depopulated villages that are located today within the boundaries of Israeli tourist sites. The paper demonstrates that the villages are largely ignored or marginalized in the information given to the public. The tourism authorities therefore underestimate the roots of the Palestinians in the country and portray an overall picture of a Jewish country, with very minor Arab heritage.

Roots Tourism – Whose Roots?

The Marginalization of Palestinian Heritage Sites in Official Israeli Tourism Sites

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ABSTRACT: Israel is the contested homeland of both the Jewish-Israeli and the Arab-Palestinian peoples. In the practice of tourism, Israel highlights sites of Jewish history and tends to neglect those of Palestinian history.

Many of the Palestinian villages and heritage sites were destroyed by Israel in 1948 and onwards, or were gradually dilapidated due to lack of official care. Large-scale Palestinian roots tourism does not exist, due to the impossibility of most Palestinians to gain access into Israel.

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Key words: Israel, Palestine, memory, nationality, tourism.

Israel is the contested homeland of two peoples, the Jewish-Israelis and the Arab-Palestinians; each holds the land dear and central in its collective memory and national narrative. In the practices of archaeology, preservation, and tourism, Israel emphasizes sites of ancient Jewish history, as well as those of recent Zionist history, where it invests in archaeological digs, preservation, and development of tourist sites. Those sites, disseminated all over the country, attract Jewish visitors from Israel and abroad.

After 1948, most of the Palestinians became refugees outside their country. Many of their villages and heritage sites were destroyed by Israel during the war and afterwards, or were gradually dilapidated due to lack of official care. While some of the Palestinians who are Israeli citizens go on a pilgrimage to Palestinian depopulated villages and heritage sites, large-scale Palestinian roots tourism does not exist, due to Israel's lack of interest to develop it, and the impossibility of most Palestinians and Arabs to gain access to Israel, and therefore to these sites.

This paper deals with an unusual form of roots tourism. It explores the encounter between Jewish-Israeli visitors and Palestinian heritage sites and, more specifically, sites of

Palestinian villages that were depopulated and demolished in 1948. Many of these villages are located today within the boundaries of Israeli official tourist sites, such as national parks, nature reserves, recreation forests.

The encounter between the visitors and the sites is mediated by the very authorities who manage the sites. This paper examines whether these authorities, in the information given to the visiting public, acknowledge the existence of Palestinian heritage sites within their tourist sites and, when such is the case, what is the information given to the public.

Background – Nationalism, Conflict, and Tourism in Israel

On November 29th, 1947 the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution that calls for the division of Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab. The next day, Arabs began attacking Jews in the cities and on the roads. Jewish underground forces reacted with retaliation operations. Due to the hostilities, Arab residents began to leave their houses in the cities. Flight from nearby villages ensued. Following an increase of Arab attacks, the Jewish forces changed their strategies in April 1948 and began attacking Arab villages in order

to evacuate them prior to May 15th, the day of the withdrawal of the British mandate. Many villagers escaped in the course of these operations, and the rest usually were deported. On May 15th, Britain withdrew, and the State of Israel was established. Military units from five Arab countries joined the battles. In July, Israel announced that the return of the refugees would not be allowed. In August, the Israeli government agreed, among other things, to demolish depopulated Arab villages in order to prevent the return of their residents. In November, Israel conducted census, and later appropriated the property of anyone who was absent (Morris, 1991; see also Fischback, 2003; Golan, 2001, 201-209).

After the end of the 1948 war, over 400 empty Arab villages remained in Israel. Most of them were destroyed by Israel, whether during the war or later. In some of them only ruins or piles of stones remained and many were completely erased from the landscape (Khalidi, 1992). Most of the villages were demolished by mid-1949; a combination of military, political, and economic reasons fuelled these destructions (Morris, 1991: 213-214). In the 1950s and 1960s, what was still left of the villages was demolished, for reasons that revolved around the character of the landscape and the wish to erase the ruins that served as a reminder of the refugee problem, which Israel preferred to ignore (Benvenisti, 2000: 168, Kletter, 2006: 57-62; Shai, 2002: 151-158).

Israeli leaders expressed uneasiness regarding the existence of the ruins in the landscape: Prime Minister Ben Gurion said in cabinet meeting, on January 20, 1952: "I think all the ruins that were left in the Negev should be erased [...] why at all should they have to stand there? People pass in the area of Julis and other places and see empty ruins. Who needs that?" (in Shay, 2002: 155-156). The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Golda Meir, said in 1957 that ruins of Arab villages "evoke hard associations, that cause substantial political damage," and that they stand in "sharp contrast to the new landscape." She urged the authorities to "get rid of ruins," especially in certain cases, including ruins that are visible to the public and those located within tourist areas¹ (Kletter, 2006: 56-57).

In 1959 the Association for the Improvement of the Landscape in the governmental tourism authority adopted a plan intended to beautify the road to Jerusalem. That plan included instructions to demolish the depopulated village of Qalunia and to plant a forest on its remains, in order to "prevent by-passers on the Jerusalem road the pleasure of seeing a ruined landscape, that which raises certain questions among tourists"² (Kletter, 2006: 62).

In 1965 the Israel Lands Authority launched a campaign for levelling what remained of around 100 depopulated Arab villages, claiming that the villages scar the landscape. Prime Minister Levi Eshkol decreed in the Knesset: "not destroying the depopulated villages would be contrary to the policy of development and revitalization of the wasteland, which every state is obliged to implement" (quoted in Benvenisti, 2000: 168). The decision to conduct the demolition project was accepted by several official bodies, including the Association for the Improvement of the Landscape that claimed that only architecturally handsome structures would be left in the villages (Shai, 2002: 155-159).

The demolition of the depopulated Palestinian villages by Israel can be seen as part of a wider pattern of a national ideology and practice: many national conflicts are characterized by a contest over a certain territory by two national groups. In these cases, the two groups have overlapping historical claims to certain regions because they occupied them for different past periods—Germans and Poles, Serbs and Albanians, Jews and Palestinians. The exclusive nature of national identity prevents each group from compromising and fully recognizing the other's rights on the contested territory (Herb, 1999: 20). The dominant national group tries to control the territory and to push the other out, physically and/or symbolically.

Sometimes, following wars, the winning nation wages war against the architecture and structures of the defeated people, and "cleanses" the landscape of the cultural mark left by the "others." This is what happened in Israel after 1948 and also, for instance, when the Serbs demolished Moslem mosques and villages in order to create a national Serb area. Beyond preventing the physical return of the defeated, demolition was done in order to erase the memories, history, and identity connected to the architecture and the place (Bevan, 2006). Demolishing structures—or preserving them—plays a role in the creation of collective memory, because structures that cease to exist in the landscape are dimmed to be forgotten, while the decision to preserve historical buildings determines their need to be remembered (Groag, 2007: 33; Rotbard, 2005: 15).

Part of the formation process of a national identity is the creation of a hegemonic collective memory, which presents the common past of the members of the nation, legitimizes the present, and justifies its members' aspirations for a common future (Halbwachs, 1992; Paasi, 2000: 101; Zerubavel, 1995: 6-11, 214). The hegemonic narrative uses history selectively; it emphasizes certain past events, while other aspects of the past, which are considered less important to a group's identity or disruptive to the flow of the narrative and ideological messages, are marginalized, suppressed, rejected, or fall into oblivion (Anderson, 1991; Halbwachs, 1992; Hobsbawm, 1990; Said, 2000: 179, 185). Groups on both sides of a national territorial conflict tend to shape their collective memories while repressing aspects and past events that might support the narrative that ties the other group to the contested territory.

In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, too, each side has created its own ideological narrative, which emphasizes its prolonged connection to the land and underestimates that of the other (Rabinowitz, 1997: 15-16). Highlighting the ancient roots of the Hebrew nation and its ties to the land of Israel, the Zionist collective memory represses memories and experiences of other groups, who have lived on the same land after the Jews had exiled from it. Meanwhile, the "Arabness" of the country for hundreds of years was marginalized, and Arab historical sites, including the Arab depopulated villages, were ruined and neglected after the 1948 war, since Israel did not assign any archaeological or heritage value to them. In what became Bar'am National Park, for example, the depopulated Arab village of Kafr Bir'em was demolished in order to highlight the ancient renovated synagogue (Kletter, 2006: 58-61).

The remains of Arab villages that were built in the last 200-300 years are not included in the definition of antiquities

according to the Israeli law, which claims that only items dating prior to 1700 are antiquities (Israeli law of antiquities, 1978). Many villages therefore are not perceived as deserving preservation by the archaeological establishment. The Israeli institutions that are responsible for the preservation of heritage sites in Israel tend to focus on Jewish-Israel memory and heritage sites, and generally to ignore the Palestinian built heritage in Israel (Fenster, 2007: 196; Groag, 2006: 14-15). The archaeology establishment in Israel participated in the demolition projects of the villages in the 1960s, it reviewed the sites and ordered to protect ancient structures. It did not consider that the Arab structures themselves deserved being saved from demolition and protected (Shai, 2002: 162-169), while certain monuments were preserved only after having first been “cleansed” of the identity of their former Arab inhabitants (Benvenisti, 2000: 168-169, 299-303).

Geographer Ghazi Falah (1996: 277) claims that most remaining structures of depopulated Arab villages, which indicate rich history and illustrate community life, are in a state of neglect and decay, because they became state property, of “government authorities who are generally ignorant of or disinterested in the history and significance of such cultural items.” He adds that such negligence serves a political goal of diminishing the Palestinian past and weakening Palestinian claims to the land, while erasing them from the collective memory: “Places that were the loci for Palestinian culture and national identity, the vessels of a collective memory of the region’s cultural landscape, were obliterated” (p. 257).

Not only does the Israeli-Zionist collective memory suppress the long-lasting existence of Arabs in the land before Zionism, it also denies the events that happened to the Palestinians following the establishment of Israel, such as depopulation and dispossession. These events are not referred to as a central fact in the history of the country and of the Zionist enterprise; rather, the Israeli-Zionist collective memory denies the fate of the refugees and the drastic changes in the landscape of the country following the war, and renounces its responsibility for them (Raz-Krakožkin, 1993: 47-48; Yiftachel, 2000: 83).

Also activities for nature conservation in Israel, even though based on the concern for preserving the landscape, the flora and fauna, are influenced by national ideologies. According to a prevalent perception in Israel, the Arabs have neglected the land prior to the establishment of Israel, and they are responsible for the ecological problems in that country, while Israel’s challenge is to overcome the damage done by the Arabs (Benvenisti, 1988: 146). Naama Meishar (2003: 307-310, 321) claims that through practices of nature conservation, Israeli Jews try to establish their local positive identity, in contrast with the negative local Palestinian identity, while giving preference to the Jewish national landscape and ruining the connection of Palestinians to the environment.

The organizations responsible for creating and managing most of the nature, heritage, and recreation sites in Israel are the Jewish National Fund (JNF) and the Nature and Parks Authority (NPA). These bodies are influenced by national Israeli-Zionist ideas, and in turn bequeath such ideas to the visitors at their sites. This is detailed in the following descriptions of these two authorities.

The Jewish National Fund (JNF) was established in 1901 in order to purchase land in Palestine for the purpose of settling Jews. Today it is responsible for planting, forestation, settlement, agriculture, and tourism. The latter is now its main activity, with over 1000 recreation areas and parks in planted forests and opens areas (JNF, 2010a). The JNF (2010b) defines its historical goals as: “developing the lands of Israel, improving the environment and cultivating the values of Zionism, on behalf of the Jewish people and for its sake”. It develops heritage sites in order to convey Zionist messages or, in its words, “to strengthen the public affinity to the land of Israel and its landscapes through the connection to the roots and the history” (JNF(a), not dated). Besides its practical purposes, the extensive forestation project of JNF—that included planting of over 220 million trees by 2007—symbolizes the connection of Jews to their land and serves as an actual attempt of “putting roots” in the land. Many of the forests were planted on sites of depopulated Palestinian villages in order to hide their remains (Michal Katorza, responsible for JNF’s signs, in *Eretz Israel Shelanu*, 2008.)

Several authors noted the ideological role of JNF in bequeathing Zionist national ideology and contributing to the Judaization of the country, by hiding remains of depopulated Arab villages, planting in order to prevent Arabs from using lands, connecting Jews from Israel and from abroad to the land through rituals of planting, developing Jewish heritage sites for tourism, and exposing visitors in its parks to its Zionist ideology (Azaryahu, 1993: 105; Bardenstein, 1998: 7-8; Ben Yehuda, 2000; Cohen, 1993, 62-67; Falah, 1996: 272; Slyomovics, 1998: 234).

The NPA is in charge of protecting nature, landscape, and heritage in Israel, in 380 nature reserves and 115 national parks (NPA, 2010a). Nature reserves are areas in which natural features and landscapes are being preserved; national parks are used for “recreation in nature” or for the “commemoration of historic, archaeological, architectural, natural, and landscape values.” Among the national parks are historic and archaeological sites “of high significance from a historical point of view,” and “nation sites,” which are structures of “national historic significance in the development of the settlement in the country” (Israeli law of national parks, nature reserves, national sites and commemoration sites, 1998). Only a handful of all the national parks in Israel were established in sites whose history does not precede the early Arab period, unless they have crusaders’ remains. One division of the NPA is the “Green Patrol,” whose role is to guard state lands in open areas from “invaders,” on behalf of the government (NPA, 2009). These “invaders” are usually Bedouins from the Negev who live and herd their goats in areas that once belonged to them and were later confiscated by the state. From time to time the Green Patrol uses force in order to evict Bedouins from “state lands” (Tal, 2006: 484-490).

Joel Bauman (2004: 207) notes the ideological aspect of the NPA, and describes it as an organization “charged with creating an imagined national identity through archaeological sites and national parks.” He adds that Israeli national parks are “institutions where versions of history and heritage are selected, institutionalized, displayed, and popularized,” and



FIGURE 1: Palestinian Depopulated Villages in Tourist Sites in Israel (source: Mapa Publishers in Kadman, 2008, Tel Aviv, Israel).

that in addition to making claims about Israeli Jewish identity and citizenship, they are “a significant force in the process of both physical and symbolic displacement of Palestinians in Israel” (Bauman, 209; see also Benvenisti, 2000: 168-169, 299-303; Meishar, 2003: 307-310, 321).

Depopulated Palestinian villages in Tourism and Recreation Areas

Most of the depopulated Palestinian villages in Israel are located today in open areas and in many of them remains of the village can be seen (Abu Sitta, 2001: 18). With the years, in many of these areas, forests were planted, parks were established, national parks, and nature reserves were declared, and hiking paths were paved. Today, the previous built-up area of almost half of the depopulated Palestinian villages (182 out of 418) is included within the boundaries of tourism and recreation

sites. Many sites of depopulated villages became accessible to the public this way. Therefore, encounters between Israelis and these villages, which are important heritage and roots sites for the Palestinians, take place while Israelis travel in the country and visit these sites. This encounter is mediated by the authorities who manage tourist sites—mainly the JNF and the NPA. These two bodies are in charge of tourist sites that contain most of the depopulated village sites in tourist areas (149 out of 182); the rest are administered by private operators (5), or are crossed by hiking trails (28). In the two last categories, no information is offered to the public in the tourist sites. Therefore, I chose to focus on sites of the JNF and NPA, covering 149 village sites—over one third of the total 418 depopulated villages—in order to examine how depopulated villages are presented in tourist sites in Israel.

I visited the 149 village sites located in tourist areas of the JNF and NPA, checked for posted explanation signs, and—if any—read and documented their content. I also reviewed all the relevant official publications distributed to the public by the JNF and NPA—brochures available in the parks, including descriptions of the nature, history, and different sites within each park, a JNF guide book providing information on all the JNF parks, and information posted on these organizations’ websites regarding the parks. While signs in the NPA parks provide information in Hebrew, English, and Arabic, those in JNF parks are mostly in Hebrew only. The majority of the brochures of the two bodies are exclusively in Hebrew.

Based on these primary sources, I examined whether—and in what way—the JNF and NPA present to the public the depopulated Arab villages that are located within the tourist sites they have established. This was done by visiting the place. Israelis can learn about the identity of a village, its former residents, their roots, and the circumstances of their depopulation.

The following findings refer to the information that appears in—or is absent from—texts of signs and publications of the JNF and NPA regarding the depopulated villages. The quoted passages from these texts are originally in Hebrew and were translated by me. I examined JNF and NPA texts separately, and the numbers and percentages reported here are based on my calculations and refer to either the depopulated villages in the JNF and NPA sites (total of 87 villages each, that is 63 villages in the NPA or JNF sites, plus 24 villages in areas managed by both bodies).

On the whole, I found that out of the 418 depopulated Palestinian villages, only 25 are mentioned in signs, and 46 are mentioned in publications of the JNF and NPA, the main Israeli authorities who deal with signing and spreading information on Israel’s sites. Many villages are not mentioned in signs and publications that describe the site they are included in, while others are included in sites on which no publications are produced and no signs are posted. The JNF publications ignore 60% of the villages located within parks for which publications are available (NPA – 56%); the rate of ignoring villages is higher in signs posted by the JNF on the ground, even though they are physically located near the village remains: the signs ignore 75% of the villages that are located within the signed parks (NPA – 48%). In addition, 85% of the names of the villages are not mentioned in signs of either the JNF or



FIGURE 2: Sataf recreation area managed by the JNF, in the depopulated village of Sataf (photo: Noga Kadman).

NPA that direct visitors to different parts of the sites, and 80% of the names do not appear on maps adjacent to the JNF publications or on signs.

In the minority of cases, when texts of the JNF and NPA do mention Palestinian depopulated villages, they usually do so in a partial and casual way, as specified below.

Details Regarding the Villages and their Inhabitants

The JNF and NPA texts give little information to visitors in parks, forests, and reserves regarding Arab villages and their inhabitants. Many villages are not presented as Arab—and never as Palestinian—and at times even their names are not mentioned. Information is rarely provided regarding the date of establishment of the villages, their population, their income sources. In very few cases the JNF and Nature and Parks Authority texts provide other information regarding the lives of the village residents, in which case it is done in an anthropological manner, describing religious and other customs. The fact that the villages ceased to exist after 1948 is not mentioned, and the violent circumstances by which it happened are totally absent.

Publications and signs of NPA tend in most cases to refer to the village remains that were left on the site, such as structures, cemeteries, flour mills, orchards, and springs. The JNF publications tend to mention structures and other physical remains of the village, more often than they describe people that lived in the village. Sometimes the only mention of a village and its residents is in the context of a still-standing structure, such as a room where the women of the Sataf village washed their clothes, or a school that served the children of the village of Bayt Jiz, according to the brochure (JNF, 2006: 186; JNF(b) not dated). In half of the villages where structures remain, the nearby JNF signs ignore these structures.

Sometimes texts of the JNF and NPA describe an Arab structure with no mention of the village to which it had belonged,

and without providing details on the people that used it. Such is the case, for example, in a JNF brochure that describes a tour in the Biria Forest:

The Fighters' Path continues and arrives to a big abandoned structure of two stories. In the southern part of the structure, under an arched dome, flows the spring of Ein Zeitim (Ayn Zaitun). Orchard trees stand all around. (JNF(b) not dated):

The text fails to mention the village whose name is the same as that of the spring, whose residents used its water and built the structure above it.

Mentioning Villages in the Sequence of History

In general, the JNF and NPA focus on ancient sites, especially those with Jewish history, as well as on sites of Zionist history. The history of the Arab villages located in their sites is marginalized and ignored, similarly to the physical erasure of their structures.

The boundaries of 17 sites of NPA correspond to a single depopulated village. In almost all of these cases the village was built on a more ancient site, to which the national park is now devoted. Therefore, depopulated villages that are located on ancient sites, whose historical values are considered by the NPA as worthy of being declared national parks, “find themselves” included in the parks and “enjoy” tourist visits. Except for one case (Sidni ‘Ali National Park, established in the site of the depopulated village of al-Haram), no national park was created due to the historical importance of the Arab village itself.

Even though most publications and explanation signs of the NPA refer to the ancient history of the site they describe, less than half of them also mention the Arab village that was located in the same place. Village sites that were in the past the loci of ancient Jewish settlements are usually referenced in NPA texts,



FIGURE 3: Remains of the depopulated village of al-Zib, now in the Achziv National Park (photo: Noga Kadman).

but this mention is directed to the Jewish settlement, while the Arab village is mentioned only incidentally. The Dana village, for example, is mentioned as the dwelling of an ancient Jewish site, and not as a village in its own right, which existed in the same place for hundreds of years:

Among the ruins of Dana village [...] were found architectonic items which testify to the existence of a Jewish settlement in the site during the periods of the Mishna and the Talmud. (NPA, 2003).

The explanation signs of the Bar'am National Park refer only to the ancient Jewish history of the place, while completely ignoring Palestinian Kafr Bir'em, even though its remains—church, houses, and alleys—can be clearly seen within the park boundaries.

The choice to focus on the Jewish past in this site and others is a political one; in the words of Jonathan Boyarin (1996: 249-250), “the excavations of the synagogue [...] are not only a tourist attraction, but also a symbol to the Jewish claim to this area and to the continuity of the Jewish settlement in Palestine after the second temple period.” He adds: “the attempt to impose the meaning of the place as clearly Jewish is challenged in practice by the remains of the Arab village” (p. 251). Arab villages that were built on the remains of older settlements are usually mentioned in JNF texts along with the description of the ancient sites. Texts in which the JNF does not refer to ancient sites tend to ignore the villages in those places.

Sites of depopulated Arab villages that are thought to have been inhabited during biblical times, and remains of villages that are perceived as representing biblical ways of life—such as flour mills, water canals, terraces, and fruits orchards—are often combined in tourist sites in Israel. The most famous example is Sataf, a demolished Arab village near Jerusalem, which was established on an ancient site. The JNF preserved there a few structures, springs, and terraces of the village as

remains of ancient Jewish agriculture. In its park brochure, the JNF presents the agricultural activity in the place—which was accomplished lately by Arab farmers about 60 years ago—as very ancient and as carried out by Jews:

two spring water agricultural terraces, remains of an ancient Hebrew culture thousands of years old, which almost passed away. Here people tended, just like the sons of Israel at the time, irrigated gardens and non-irrigated orchards [...] This is Sataf, a hidden charming place, where time stopped moving. (JNF (b) not dated)

The focus on the ancient past of depopulated villages erases their Palestinian character and roots and neutralizes their contemporary and political contexts. Several JNF brochures highlight the past layers of certain sites which are biblical and Jewish, and completely ignore periods when there were Arab villages in the same places as well as the remains of these villages. Regarding Tel Gamzo, for instance, the brochure's authors choose to focus on the ancient site of the place, and to overlook the Arab village of Jimzu that stood in the same spot for hundreds of years, until its 1500 inhabitants became refugees in 1948:

East of Gimzo there is an ancient settlement with carved graves. There is a notion that this is the location of biblical Gimzo. Clay from the Roman and Hasmonean periods was found there. (JNF (b), not dated)

The other examples are those of the villages of Haditha (JNF, 2006: 148); Sar'a (JNF(b): Zora'a Forest); Qabu (JNF(b): Begin Park); Lubia (JNF(b): Lavi Forest); Hawsha (JNF(b): Gush Alonim); Suba (JNF website); Zir'in (JNF(b): HaGilbo'a); and Sataf (JNF, 2006: 184).

The existence of crusaders remains in Arab village sites increases the chance of a village being mentioned in texts of the JNF and NPA, similarly to the connection found between the existence of more ancient remains and mentions of villages in



FIGURE 4: The only remaining structure of the depopulated village of Ayn Ghazal, now within the Carmel Beach Forest (photo: Noga Kadman).

JNF publications. In certain cases, JNF texts refer to “structures of the Othman period,” without saying these are structures of an Arab village that was located there in the Othman period and also beyond, until 1948. Using the term “Othman” and emphasizing the crusader period of village sites fit well the tendency to present the historical periods between The Jewish exile to Babylon up to the establishment of the state of Israel as a sequence of foreign occupations, while ignoring the local Arab population who lived in the country at the same time (Benvenisti, 2000: 303).

Other JNF texts try to tie ancient sites to Zionist history. This is done, for example, in the general description of the Rabin Park:

In addition to battles’ sites, in the park there are historical and archaeological sites, agricultural terraces, and remains of ancient agriculture that testify to the historic continuity of Jewish settlement in the place (JNF, 2006: 170).

Other examples are the villages of Qadas, Hunin, and a-Nabi Yusha (JNF(b): Naftaly Hills); Biria and Ayn a-Zaitun (JNF(b): Biria Forest); Kafrin, Abu Shusha, Bteimat, Khubeiza, Rihania, Daliat a-Ruhaa, and Abu Zreik (JNF(b): Ramat Menashe Park); and Haditha (JNF website).

The five depopulated Palestinian villages in the park boundaries (Bayt Jiz, Bayt Susin, ‘Islin, Saris, and Bayt Mahsir) are not part of the Jewish settlement continuum and do not appear in that text.

Rarely there is a detailed reference to the history of the Arab villages themselves in JNF and in NPA texts, even when they do mention a village. In a few cases, the existence of a village—even if it existed hundreds of years—does not appear as part of the historical sequence that is provided to describe the place, and is mentioned only in a brief and casual way, as explained above. Another example is the brochure of

the Achziv National Park, in which the NPA mentions the Palestinian village of al-Zib that stood there, but ignores it in the opening paragraph that provides a general description of the settlement history of the place:

The historical and archeological sources point at settlements from the Canaanite, Israelite, Persian, Hellenistic, Roman, and Crusader periods. (NPA, 2003)

The village of al-Zib, which was established in the 13th century and continued to exist through the Mamluk, Othoman, and British periods that followed, does not appear as part of the historical sequence of the site, even though the most visible remains in the site go back to these latter periods (see below).

The Villages as Part of Nature

In the analyzed texts, the JNF and NPA tend to write about the parks and nature reserves they manage in a language that describes the atmosphere there as calm and ideal, while often using superlatives such as “magical” and “picturesque.” Not once do these texts refer to the village sites themselves as part of the calm, picturesque nature: the remains of Ayn Ghazal are described as “ornaments of the slope” (JNF, 2006: 104), the ruins of Dana as “adorned with cactus fences” (NPA: 2003) and the site of the depopulated village of Kudna is defined as a “picturesque ruin” (JNF (b), not dated).

In the texts that describe nature reserves or hiking trails, the NPA and JNF tend to present the villages as signposts in the landscape, along the rivers, hills, and springs, without elaborating. The remains of Dayr al-Shaykh are described in the hiking trail of NPA as landscape items hikers will encounter, without giving any information regarding the village, or any explanation on how the remnants came to be ruined:

further down the road, a big stone wall “blocks” the trail.

It is the contour wall of the mosque of the village of Dayr al-Shaykh. The trail bypasses the compound from



FIGURE 5: The remaining structure of the depopulated village of Dayr al-Shaykh (photo: Noga Kadman).

the right. It's possible to enter the mosque yard by a stairway. The structure remained almost intact. In the yard—a water hole. Around the mosque—terraces and abandoned orchards (NPA, 2001).

In a few cases, the name of a village appears as a signpost in a hiking trail, without providing further details on the village and its residents. The JNF instructs hikers: “we’ll head for a circular hiking trail in Yitle scenic trail, to the remnants of the village of Bayt Thul” (JNF, 2006: 167). In such cases, the text gives no indication that the travel destination is a depopulated Palestinian village.

JNF texts tend to mention the depopulated villages’ orchards, and to describe them as part of the natural landscape. Often, it is done while ignoring the villages, whose residents tended to the orchard trees and made their living from them. A hiking trail in Zora’a Forest, which appears on the JNF website, describes the combination of conifers planted by the JNF and ancient orchards. The village of Sara’a, owner of the orchards, is absent from the text:

The pine trees, planted in the forest in the 1950s, have grown very high today, and through their needle leaves shine the beams of light. Among them, bloom orchards of very old fig and olive trees. It is recommended to look for quiet intimate corners, hidden beneath the forest trees. (JNF(c), not dated)

In other texts the orchards are presented as a type of vegetation; the text that describes Britain Park even defines the Arab orchards as a “flora unit” that tends to grow beneath terraces, and whose “vitality and importance are extraordinary” (JNF, 2006: 224). The text lacks any reference to the villages of ‘Ajur, Dayr a-Duban, and Kudna, whose inhabitants tended to the orchards and terraces in the past.

Sometimes NPA publications that mention depopulated villages depict the orchards apart from the description of the village. For example, after a description of the customs of the residents of al-Qubayba, which “stood near the hill until 1948,” the text mentions another site of the national park: “The Bustan [orchard]: orchard with olive, almond, and prickly pear trees, rehabilitated by the NPA for the enjoyment of travelers” (NPA, 2000). The orchard here is presented as a separate site located in the national park, as if it was not related to the village.

The 1948 War and the Depopulation of the Villages

In most of the signs and in about half of the JNF and NPA publications that refer to depopulated Palestinian villages, there is some kind of reference to the 1948 war; however the battles, the occupation, the circumstances of depopulation, the uprooting of the residents, and the demolition of each village are portrayed in the text only partially, if at all.

The JNF describes the hostility or the aggressiveness of villages against Jews during the 1948 war and before in texts of half of the villages mentioned in its signs, and in over one quarter of the villages mentioned in its publications. Villages described as “hostile” in JNF’s publications are all identified as Arab, except for one (Bayt Jiz, in JNF(b), not dated). Moreover, most of the villages that are not presented as hostile are also not presented as Arab. Some of JNF’s texts refer only to the aggressiveness of the villages and to their occupation in 1948, without attributing to them other sides, more civil and “innocent,” of an agricultural community, daily life, and family life, as illustrated below. This way, the JNF has created an equation between Arab national identity and violent behaviour, and between violent opposition to the Jewish dominance and absence of normal civil rural life. The Bashit village, for example, is described in a

JNF sign as hostile, and as a destination for Israeli occupation, and nothing more:

The village of Bashit, located between Kibbutz Yavne and the big village of Gedera, was an obstacle to our forces and a security provider to the Arab transport between Masmia and Isdud. On 11 of May 1948 the village was occupied [...] This operation paralyzed the Arab transportation in the area.

Other examples are the villages of Jaba' and 'Ayn Ghazal (JNF(b): Hakarmel Beach Forest); Dayr Ayub (JNF(b): Canada Park); Lubyā (JNF(b): Lavi Forest); and JNF signs in Bayt Mahsir (Rabin Park), Suba (Tel Zuba), and Bayt Daras.

Almost in all cases, the signs and publications of the JNF and NPA are silent regarding the circumstances that led to the depopulation of the Arab villages, or they relate to them only vaguely. According to historian Benny Morris, in Ayn al-Zaytun units of the Palmach Jewish forces deported women, elderly, and children by shooting over their heads; around 70 men from the village and surrounding villages were massacred in a nearby riverbed, their hands tied, following instructions of the local battalion commander. At the same time, Palmach units exploded and burned houses in the village (Morris, 1991: 144). The JNF gives no information on these events, and found it sufficient to put a sign that defines the village as “a base for Arab fighters,” which was occupied by a Palmach force.

The military attacks against Jaba' and Ayn Ghazal included, according to Benny Morris (1991: 285-286), bombardment of “heavy fire from mortars and airplanes” on the villages, by the end of which their residents were deported. These attacks, defined as “not justified” by the United Nations (UN), are not described by the JNF (2006: 105), which only says that Israeli forces “acted” there and that the villages “were abandoned and their residents escaped, without battle.” In almost no other cases do texts of JNF talk about artillery attacks by the Jewish forces or the Israeli Army during the 1948 war against the villages, even though such events led to the depopulation of a vast majority of the villages mentioned in JNF texts (Morris, 1991).

In many cases texts mention a village while completely ignoring the fact of its depopulation and the circumstances behind it. A JNF sign describes, for example, a “structure that served up to 1948 as the school of the village Bayt Jiz,” without explaining why the school ceased to operate that year and what had happened then to its pupils and the rest of the village residents.

Most of the villages that are mentioned in NPA texts were depopulated due to artillery attacks; residents were deported from a few other villages, and residents fled from still other villages in fear of being attacked (Morris, 1991: 586-592). None of these events are cited in NPA texts, except the evacuation of Kafr Bir'em (see below). The first planned deportation executed by the Hagannah Jewish forces, which caused the depopulation of the village of Qisarya in January 1948 (p. 82), is not included in signs or publications about the place. The entrance sign of the Caesarea National Park only says that the village that stood there “did not last long,” without any other explanation. This village is mentioned in the park brochure, but with no hint that it no longer exists (NPA, 1998). Similarly, the sign that the NPA



FIGURE 6: A JNF sign presenting a hiking trail with mention of the name of the depopulated village of Bayt Thul (photo: Noga Kadman).

posted in the Gvar'am Nature Reserve is silent on the deportation of the villagers of Simsim (p. 592), and only points out that the village “was abandoned in 1948.”

The only instance for which the NPA explicitly describes depopulation circumstances in its publications is the Kafr Bir'em village. According to the Bar'am National Park brochure, the residents were “evacuated from the village during the war of independence.” The NPA's website adds that in 1948 the villagers “had to abandon their houses by IDF [Israeli Defense Forces] instructions, for security reasons” (NPA, 2010(c)). It specifies that the village church functions today as the “spiritual centre of the community members,” who are not described as “Arabs” but as “Maronite Christians.” NPA documents disregard the fact that the former villagers of Kafr Bir'em are Israeli citizens, ignore the order of the Israeli High Court of Justice to allow them to return to their houses, and their struggle, lasting dozens of years, to make the state implement the court's decision. They are also silent regarding the political struggle conducted by the villagers for their return to their village of origin, which accompanies also their visits in the village and in its church, and they ignore as well the role of these visits in commemoration and memorial activities related to the depopulation of their village (Boyarin 1991: 251).

The NPA does not explain the depopulation of the rest of the villages, even though it is sometimes mentioned: according to that organization, the residents of Khirbet Karaza “lived here until 1948” (sign in Korazim National Park); Qubayba “stood near the tel [hill] until 1948” (NPA, 2000) and the village of Suba “existed here until 1948” (NPA, 2010b). In all of these instances, no information is given on why the villages ceased to exist.

All the depopulated Palestinian villages were occupied by Jewish forces or by the IDF, before or after their depopulation. Nevertheless, in most cases NPA and JNF texts overlook the

occupation of the villages. When such occupation is mentioned, there is neither reference to the uprooting of villagers nor to the fact that the villages ceased to exist following their occupation. The brochure that mentions the village of Dayr al-Hawa, for example, cites its occupation, but the fate of the village and its inhabitants later on remains unknown:

during the War of Independence stood here the Arab village of Dayr al-Hawa, whose name (in Arabic: the dwelling of winds) was given to it due to the strong winds that blow here. In 1948 the village was occupied by the Palmach Harel brigade, during the Mountain operation. The visit of the mountain at sunset is incredibly beautiful! (JNF, 2006: 206)

In several cases NPA and JNF texts describe villages being abandoned by their residents: for example, Simsim “was abandoned in 1948” (sign in the Gvar’am Nature Reserve); Saffuriyya “was abandoned by its inhabitants” after its occupation (NPA, 2005); the villagers of Bayt Jibrin “abandoned it during the war of independence” (NPA, 2002). In all of these cases, and others, nothing is written regarding the reason for abandonment, and no occupation, military attack, or deportation is mentioned. The fact that Saffuriyya residents, for instance,

have “abandoned” their village after it was bombed from the air (Morris, 1991: 269) is ignored, and so is the deportation that caused the “abandonment” by the residents of Simsim (p. 592). JNF texts that mention “abandoned” villages do not say explicitly that all of these villages, which are presented as “Arab,” were occupied by Israel, and they do not describe the attacks against them that led to such abandonment.

NPA and JNF texts give almost no information regarding the fate and the whereabouts of the villagers after they “abandoned” their villages or after they were occupied. Except for the “abandoned” villages, NPA and JNF publications do not mention explicitly that also the rest of the villages ceased to exist as a result of the occupation. This fact can only be concluded from the texts regarding most of the villages, which are called “ruins” or “remains,” or are talked about in the past tense. Most of JNF signs specify that the depopulated Arab villages they mention were occupied by Israel, but they give no hint to the fact that these villages ceased to exist afterwards—which is obvious by looking at the space around the sign.

Even though the existence of “ruins” or “remains” is evident on the ground, and is presented in most of JNF and NPA publications, texts very seldom explain how the village came to be ruined, why, and by whom. In the NPA brochure that describes the history of Achziv, for instance, the remains of the village of al-Zib are mentioned, but nothing is said about how they turned into remains, and what happened to the villagers:

The Mamluk Sultan Baibars conquered Achziv in 1271. Since then there was a small village here by the name of al-Zib, which kept the sound of the name of the former settlement [...] most of the remains seen today on the ground, including the structure of a mosque, were left of the abandoned village al-Zib and from the crusaders’ castle that stood here. (NPA, 2003)

The JNF explanation signs do not mention ruins at all, even when ruins surround the sign. Only one JNF sign writes “remains,” that of the Ma’alul village. NPA signs refer only to Bayt ‘Itab, Simsim, and Bayt Daras as “remains” or “ruins.” They do not detail the circumstances that led to the demolition of these villages, and do not talk at all about the demolition of the rest of the villages in their sites.

Conclusion

The tourist sites in Israel include many historical and archaeological sites, which reflect the rich and prolonged Jewish history. Among the tourist sites, many are remains of Palestinian heritage and history, including hundreds of villages that were depopulated in the 1948 war, some of which were hundreds of years old. Many of those villages are included in Israeli official tourist sites, managed by the JNF—responsible for forestation and recreation—and the NPA—in charge of nature preservation and historical sites.

In the texts that these authorities present to the public, the depopulated villages are mostly ignored. When they are mentioned, it is done abruptly, ignoring the villages’ history, in texts that focus on more ancient sites, mostly Jewish, that stood on the same spot. The texts tend also to emphasize Zionist history, while attributing building and settling activities only to Jews and never to Arabs. The villages themselves are not presented



FIGURE 7: The church that remained of Kafr Bir'em, now within the boundaries of the Bar'am National Park (photo: Noga Kadman).

as historical sites or as modern settlement sites. This way, the texts reflect the common Israeli-Zionist collective memory, which highlights the ancient periods when there was Jewish presence in Israel; they portray the country as if it had been mostly empty until Zionists arrived and settled it in modern times, and ignore a long period of Arab presence in the country, between ancient and modern times (Rabinowitz, 1997: 15-16).

Many villages are mentioned in the context of the “battle legacy” of the 1948 war, either as hostile elements or as occupation destinations, but their depopulation circumstances are almost always kept silent. The texts obliterate acts of mortar attacks, massacres, and deportation against the villages and their residents, do not tell explicitly the fact of the termination of the villages, ignore the fate of the residents who became refugees, and do not refer to the village demolition policy. This attitude matches the hegemonic Israeli narrative, which shakes off responsibility of the refugee problem and suppresses the issue from the public agenda (Raz-Krakożkin, 1993: 47-48; Yiftachel, 2000: 83).

Another form of reference to the villages’ ruins is to consider them as if they were an intrinsic part of nature—as a-historical sites in the landscape, such as rivers and springs, or a signpost in a hiking trail. War and depopulation that cut the existence of these villages are not mentioned in this context. In general, referring to structures and orchards is more common than referring to the village and its people, and at times the former can be found without mention of the latter, who used the houses and tended to the fruit orchards.

The JNF and NPA are both ideological apparatuses of mediation between Israelis and their country. National values affect the way they present the country, its history, and its characteristics. Like other institutions, they bring nationality to the daily lives of people and this way they cultivate their identification with national ideas and strengthen their national identity (see Anderson, 1991; Hobsbawm, 1990; Paasi: 2000). The historical sites they cultivate and the information they present in them can be seen as “realms of memory,” which create the feeling of a collective identity in the present, through demonstrating memories of the group from the past (see Nora, 1993).

The JNF and NPA choose to ignore most of the depopulated Arab villages within their tourist sites, and to treat the rest of them in a partial and selective way. This attitude reflects several ideas that are the base of the Israeli-Zionist discourse: Judaization of the country, its population, its space, and its history, marginalization or silence of its Arab history, shaking off responsibility for the refugee problem, and a one-sided view of the 1948 war (Raz-Krakożkin, 1993: 47-48; Yiftachel, 2000: 83).

By silencing the depopulation of the Palestinian villages and by not providing most of the information in this regard, the JNF and NPA underestimate the events experienced by Palestinians in 1948. They do not mention any contemporary political context around the depopulation of the villages; they refrain from turning sites of depopulated villages they manage into memorial sites of the ruined villages and of the uprooting and dispossession of the villagers, and therefore avoid officially commemorating what is called by Palestinians the *Nakbah*

(catastrophe) of 1948. By avoiding the use of the Arabic language in sites that include depopulation of Arab villages in NPA and JNF brochures and in JNF signs, the authorities further strengthen the message that these sites no longer belong to Arabs, and perhaps should not interest Arabs.

The practices of touristic signing and information distribution in sites that used to be Arab villages can be seen as another arena—a symbolic one—in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, just like other symbolic arenas in this, and in other national conflicts, such as mapping and naming of places (see Azaryahu, 1993: 99; Benvenisti, 1998: 136; Falah, 1996: 256; Herb, 1999: 23-24; Jacobs, 1996: 22; Katz, 1998: 105). The marginalization of the depopulated Arab villages in tourist sites in Israel can be seen as a victory of Israel in this arena, which was enabled by and followed the military victory of Israel in 1948. This marginalization can be seen also as a reflection of the power relations in Israel, equally created in 1948. As Maurice Halbwachs (1992) argues, when a past layer is being forgotten, it is because of the disappearance of the groups that perpetuated the corresponding memories. ■

Notes

- 1 Letter from Avraham Dotan, Public Relations Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to Yizhak Eilam, director, Ministry of Work, August 13, 1957 (see Kletter 2006: 56-57).
- 2 Letter from Ya’cov Yanai, secretary of the Association for the Improvement of the Landscape, to the Jewish National Fund, June 28, 1959 (see Kletter 2006: 62).

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