

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Material mnemonics and competing narratives in Palestine-Israel

Since 1948 the re-designation of depopulated Palestinian villages as national parks has evoked Lippert's 'cartography of nowhere', as ruins and unmarked sites are subsumed in the process of material forgetting. Juxtaposing narratives and material mnemonics, this article assumes the villages of Deir Yassin, Suba, Kufr Bir'im and Iqrit as case studies to determine the extent to which memory infuses ruins with the ability to counter contemporary narratives. The article subsequently explores the use of debris in the sustenance of national memory, and questions how far 'haunting' the land through commemorative tours and *in situ* story-telling renders the ruins *noeuds de mémoire*, as opposed to *lieux de mémoire*. Finally, the transition of the ruins from sites of history to sites of activism is charted through the use of theatre and technology that draw on the past and present as forms of cultural resistance.

Keywords: memory; space; commemoration; politics; postmemory; trauma.

Introduction

When we reach that period when we are unable to represent places to ourselves, even in a confused manner, we have arrived at the regions of our past inaccessible to memory.

(Halbwachs 1992, 15)

The act of remembering takes place in informal and formal settings, travelling down and across generations, passing through communities, entering the rhetoric of leaders and the curricula of schools, informing the tales narrated to visitors and the flora that emerges from the land. It changes street and place names, adding layers as the official name is overlaid on an ‘unofficial’ one and language is subsumed in the politics of naming becomes a marker of an individual’s identity and origin. Days of remembrance and commemoration bind the masses in expressions of banal nationalism (Billig 2010, 8), while monuments and memorials are erected and the imbalance between the presence of silence and the silencing of the absent is enacted. Amidst collective memory and communal remembrance stand the silent and unmoving, the inanimate objects that take a role in remembrance and forgetting, with selective remembrance being practised in spite of ongoing or past trauma(s), or asserting one narrative over another that sustains the past and challenges the dominant national discourse.

In Palestine-Israel, history is counted in layers as events are retold in various ways depending on the experience, proximity and perspective of the narrator. The land and the remnants of past dwellings, now in various states of disrepair, assume a role in the narratives and present themselves as material mnemonics that are reminders of a time when an area of land was not a picnic ground, but a home; when the flora were olive trees and not pine, and of the interim period of several hundred years between a locale being a Crusader’s haunt and a twentieth century kibbutz. As the landscape evolves, so too does it evoke a ‘rupture in the “cultural geography”’ brought about by modernisation in the first instance and culminating, in certain cases, with a ‘dehistoricization’ that ‘impoverish[es] the living memory of the landscape’ (Ingold 1997, 16), as the socio-political changes are inscribed on the terrain. In turn, the land serves as a mnemonic in three ways: first, while standing ruined but intact, the presence of steps, doorways and roofs provide silent testimonies that counter the accounts inscribed on the information boards marking the entrance to the sites. Second, in instances where neither commemorative nor informative signs exist and the space is erased and/or rebuilt, the events that unfolded are sustained through written and spoken records that provide

an alternative reading of what passed before. Finally, the sites offer a platform from which to address the impact of 68 years of occupation through cultural acts of resistance, such as plays, songs and story-telling. In turn, memory is no longer a passive act, but something that can “actively and mindfully produce in conversation the traces of the past and their spectres” (Harrison 2013, 293).

For Halbwachs, the physical surroundings hold imprints, whether it is the minutiae of the home that distinguishes between individuals and enables us, as the dweller, to define the structure as ‘home’, or the architecture that bears traces of the past not only through decorative choices, but also the knocks, scrapes and holes incurred down the centuries (Halbwachs 1992, 234). However, once the possessions have been removed, the doors and windows have fallen, the inhabitants gone and the names all but forgotten, the question of how far what remains retains its power of remembrance emerges in place of the absent inhabitants. In turn, the paper first considers the concept of dwelling in the context of former villages in Palestine-Israel, which currently stand in various stages of ruination or have disappeared through the passage of time and nature. Assuming the depopulated Palestinian villages of Deir Yassin, Suba, Kufr Bir’im and Iqrit, the paper charts the events that lead to the expulsion of their residents and the status of the villages today. The four villages were selected to reflect the singular ways in which memory and material mnemonics intersect at the sites. In the case of Deir Yassin, the site evokes Abu El-Haj’s concept of ‘territorial self-fashioning’ as the village experiences commemorative neglect. Alternatively, Iqrit and Kufr Bir’im speak to Keane’s ‘bundles’, sites that were once neglected, but in recent years have re-emerged as locations of remembrance, activism and art-activism that link to the larger narrative of return. Lastly, Suba provides an example of narrative layering, as the site is not commemoratively neglected, but rather selectively so, as the narrative provided on the information boards details an account of the site’s history, while omitting the Palestinian presence. While each site represents an alternative dynamic between memory and narrative practices, they are bound through their capacity to nurture and realise ‘unscripted and loose engagement[s]’ (DeSilvey and Edensor 2012, 476; Edensor 2005, 846) through performance art and the use of technology, which facilitates the peeling back of the layers of time and narrative.

In turn, the question of how significant remembrance stands as an act of resistance will be considered through the lens of haunting, combined with Nora’s *lieux de mémoire* and Rothberg’s *noueds de mémoire*, as the act of walking draws on physical presence and movement to re-imagine the surroundings as they were 68 years ago. The data for this paper

was data gathered over the course of two years of research and interviews conducted in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Jenin, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Haifa and Acre, and is part of two broader, ongoing projects that look at the role of cultural and religious activism in peace-building in the region. The respondents were drawn from advocacy organizations and contacts were established with local community members through faith-based and cultural organizations, who were asked to reflect on issues displacement, activism and space.

Counter-sites and layered narratives

They drank carefully, in little sips, like ghosts that haunt the soil, which is soaked in blood, where vines stretch out over ruins and persist like the claims – big sweet green grapes, rich in seeds, tall fig trees – of the farmers we drove away.

(Shelach 2003, 77)

For the four villages, the descent into decline varied in terms of time, the process of depopulation and the degree of deterioration that followed. In Kufr Bir'im and Iqrit, the depopulation was prolonged and marked by conflicting advice, court appeals and displacement. For the inhabitants of Deir Yassin and Suba the occupation was swift, and in the case of the former, resulted in multiple fatalities. Over the course of six months – between April and October 1948 – approximately 2,800 people were displaced from the four sites and 100 killed, while the survivors fled to nearby towns or temporary sites that would become permanent homes. In contrast with the dearth of commemorative markers, Deir Yassin is present in the narrative of *an-Nakba* (the Catastrophe): between 9 and 11 April 1948, over 100 Palestinians were killed (Duffy 2001, 10) and 150 captured. Following the massacre, 55 surviving orphaned children were left along the Old City walls (Stark 2008, 19-20) while 25 adult captives were carried through West Jerusalem as trophies during the ensuing 'victory parade' (Hogan 2001, 324). The details of the attack are bleak, the residents of the village having, until that point, adhered to the mutual nonaggression pact with the nearby settlement of Givat Saul, and has proved amenable to balancing relations between the Haganah in Jerusalem and the Arab Liberation Army base in Ein Kerem (McGowan and Hogan 1999, 22).

The balance was short-lived, however: once the site proved more valuable as an airstrip for Givat Saul, the villagers' amicability declined and in the Irgun discussions that preceded April 9, the majority concluded in favour of "the liquidation" of those who sought

to impede the project, regardless of whether they were “old people, women or children”.¹ The subsequent joint attack by the Irgun and Stern Gang (LEHI) was haphazard: of the 132 members, most were inexperienced teenagers with limited arms, while the truck that was anticipated to have warned the residents of the impending assault was stuck in a ditch too far from the village for the announcement to be heard (Hogan 2001, 316). After the villagers fled, the houses remained and were incorporated into the Kfar Shaul Mental Health Center in 1951. The remaining buildings have become warehouses or family homes (Khalidi 1992, 292) and the cemetery is overgrown, nature’s passage being blighted further by building debris and vandalism (Wiles 2014). *In situ* information on what passed is scant: memorials to the victims of the massacre are located in New York, East Jerusalem and Glasgow, but not Deir Yassin.

Walking through the site the visitor passes basketball courts, rubble and the hospital, possibly unaware of its past. For the families and workers who reside permanently in the area, the lack of acknowledgement, whether wittingly or otherwise, results in a steady omission of the event from Israeli history, an act that contributes to “the erasure of memory” in the absence of sustained remembrance (Wiles, 2014). The erasure however, is not restricted to the act of remembrance nor the recounting of the events in school textbooks. Extending to the physical realm, the gradual decay of the sites, albeit in certain sites more than others, reverses González-Ruibal’s use of archaeology in the vocalization of the Other, the alternative narratives being lost, rather than reflecting ‘destruction and the abject, the less gentle face of the world we live in’ (2008, 248). However, by virtue of the village’s absence, the ‘less gentle face’ continues to be represented, albeit through the omission of the artefacts, rather than their presence. To take this a step further, in the instances where the structures remain and their history is known, the sites present locales of emancipatory archaeology, the doors, rooms and alcoves ‘offer[ing] many alternative perspectives on the past (and present) [...] that is completely demythologized and independent’ (Greenberg 2015, 26). What emerges in the space of the former villages is evidence of the land being re-made, whether as a nature reserve or a basketball court and hospital, in a manner evocative of Abu El-Haj’s application of the concept of ‘making place’ or ‘territorial self-fashioning’ (2006, 157). In turn, while the landscape alters, erasure and absence do not necessarily denote the end of the sites, as the narratives are recalled and added to the contemporary understanding of the sites, providing a layered environment that is conducive to competing interpretations of the locales.

Said’s suggestion that the conflict is intensified by the layering of landscape, buildings and streets by Jews, Muslims and Christians (Said 2000, 180) could be applied on

not only a macro-level – that is, to the city as a whole – but also on a micro-level, the smaller sites such as Deir Yassin that remain unresolved, physically and commemoratively neglected, a reflection of the everyday challenges that extend to remembrance and memorialisation in an area where memorials mark losses for one community, but not the other. The result is the physical manifestation of Harrison’s asymmetrical power relations (Harrison 2013, 592), in which material mnemonics could be used positively through inclusive remembrance or negatively through exclusion. The absence of a memorial at Deir Yassin – and other sites – reinforces the negative power relations and constitutes an additional stratum to Said’s concept of the layered landscape as a site of resurgent conflict.

Iqrit and Kufr Bir’im

In contrast, the remains of Iqrit and Kufr Bir’im, villages northeast of Acre and 23 km apart, have not been built over, but rather have become sites of solidarity, resistance and more recently, restoration. Six months after the massacre at Deir Yassin, Operation Hiram continued the expansion of the Israeli occupation along the state’s north-eastern border and in November 1948 the residents of Kufr Bir’im and Iqrit were informed that the sites would be temporarily evacuated, for a matter of weeks at most (Strickland 2014a). Taking only the essentials, the combined 1,392 inhabitants travelled to the nearby villages of al-Jaysh and al-Rama, 11 miles south (Ryan 1973, 59). Shortly after, the area was declared a military zone and the inhabitants were forbidden to return (ICA 2013). Over the next three years the villagers contested the occupation of the land, only to be met by further destruction when warplanes bombed the homes and buildings of Kufr Bir’im (Ghantous 2014), leaving just the church and local cemetery intact, while in Iqrit sappers destroyed all buildings, except for the church. The destruction was emblematic of the dichotomy between the state rulings and the military action taken: despite an earlier ruling by the High Court of Justice that recognized the residents’ right to return to the villages as Israeli citizens (but not as refugees) (Ryan 1973, 61), in September 1953 Iqrit was transferred officially under Israeli control (63) and the 568 residents who were expelled in November 1948 were resettled in Al Rashidiya refugee camp in Lebanon and al-Rama. In the same year, the land surrounding the ruins of Kufr Bir’im was divided between the Jewish kibbutzim of Dovev and Baram (Strickland 2014b), and the remainder is currently a national park and retreat, while the former residents live in the refugee camps of Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine/Israel.

In Iqrit, fragmentary mosaics, bits of pottery, remnants of cisterns, wine presses and tombs are scattered about, but the destruction of the villages did not equal the demise of the

site as a location of resistance. Since the early 1970s, Iqrit and Kufr Bir'im have hosted sit-ins and camping protests, demonstrations that draw support from Palestinians, Israelis and solidarity movements outside the region. Starting in July 1972, writers, clergymen, kibbutzim, academics and students convened at Kufr Bir'im and Iqrit to protest the government decision to decline the right of return for the residents of the villages, transforming the ruins into a platform to condemn the then Prime Minister Golda Meir's decision, as well as to question the State's approach to morality and justice (Ryan 1973, 68). The 1972 decision was the first of many false starts: in 1977 Menachem Begin promised that the future government would allow the villagers to return to both sites, but their return failed to transpire. In 1992, Yitzhak Rabin appointed a ministerial committee to look into the return of the villagers and after 18 months the Libay Committee concluded that there was no reason that the Uprooted could not return; that the Israeli government should acknowledge this right and rebuild the village, and that compensation should be provided by the government to the displaced and their descendants (ICA 2013). It was a brief moment of progress, however, the recommendations languishing through Rabin's assassination in 1995 and the subsequent governments led by Benjamin Netanyahu in 1996 and Ehud Barak in 1999 (ICA 2013). The third government ended hopes that the recommendations would be implemented, when Ariel Sharon rejected the terms in 2002 and the villages resumed their status as sites of resistance, rather than return.

Over the past 44 years the ruins have provided a location of protest in recurrent and innovative ways, evoking Hatuka's suggestion that space can represent the dynamic between citizens and the state. While Hatuka explores the concept in the context of the 1933 Jaffa demonstrations, the scale of the protests among the ruins of Kufr Bir'im and Iqrit (at times hosting 1,000 activists) indicates the significance of debris as symbol of memory and resistance. Certainly, the placards held aloft by activists could have been held in Haifa or Tel Aviv where public interaction would have been increased. However, as in the case of Jaffa, the buildings and the ruins in the villages present reference points (Hatuka 2008, 103) that question the (in)justice meted, while re-claiming the forcibly emptied space as an inhabited location and a site of remembrance in the spite of forced forgetting.

As both ruins and sites of resistance, the locations prompt three further considerations: first, they present bundles that alter their "relative value, utility, and relevance across contexts" as the former homes "offer privileged sites for the expression or concretization of social structures and cultural meanings" (Keane 2003, 414; 420). In the context of the Palestinian villages, Keane's concept of 'bundling' demonstrates that the value

and relevance of the ruins is dependent on the context of those viewing them, while the social structures and their evolution can be seen in the re-making of the landscape. Second, by unpacking the idea of ‘cultural meanings’ and considering Keane’s interpretation of bundling as the “objectualization of ‘the house’ [...] as the object of reference” (2003, 421), the houses can be located in a broader ‘cultural structure’, rather than just the recipients of ‘cultural meanings’. As Hall notes, the former presents the

“invented, received, synthesised, reworked, and otherwise improvised idea-patterns by which individuals and social groups attach significance to their actions [...] [that] are neither monolithic nor immutable [...] specific in their content and sources’, while the latter ‘undergirds the meanings at work” (Hall 2000, 341).

The result is a symbiotic mechanism that enables the greater cultural structure, that is, the *Nakbeh* and the dispossession that followed, to determine the cultural meanings that frame the site as both one of past violence and contemporary resistance.

While the relationship is symbiotic, the ruins must be considered alongside the actors in the broader cultural and socio-political structure. That is, the inhabitants who were exiled, the organisations that carried out the eviction orders, the bearers who transferred the history of the sites to their successors, the archivists and cartographers who record the names and topographies of the past and present, and finally, the activists who transform the sites into dwelled spaces for a duration of time. By factoring in these actors the ruins, however symbolic they might be, are rightfully denied of agency. For Halbwachs, the stones could influence memories, but as Keane notes, ascribing agency risks turning the inanimate “into entities that too closely mimic the (flawed) self-understanding of humans”, not to mention the introduction of “teleological thinking and [the projection] our own assumptions onto others” (Joyce 2011, 164; 160-161). To stymie this, in the context of this article the ruins are considered as sites of resistance, as well as reference points within a broader cultural and socio-political structure. That they are able to feature within mnemonic practices is due to the actions of those holding agency, including the protestors who harness the land and its contents, and the spectators who bear witness through walking and collecting the narratives attached to the sites.

Suba

The final case study differs again: neither a site that has been converted nor one that is the location of resistance or renovation, Suba was built within the remains of the walls of a Crusader fortress that was destroyed in 1832. The village was one of the larger sites of the four, comprising 110 houses in 1931 and a population of 719 in 1948. In July 1948, Operation Dani brought the conflict to the hilltop village, its location near the Jerusalem highway rendering it a strategic point of interest. After a series of attacks by the Haganah and the Palmach, those who remained were expelled and the Tzova kibbutz was built on the land nearby, while the ruins are now part of a broader national park. For many of the displaced, the expulsion from Suba did not represent the end of their plight. While temporary stasis was provided in 1952 by a housing project southwest of Jerusalem funded by the Anglican Church (Dhaher 2014), the 1967 war forced many to seek refuge in Jordan as the events of 1948 raised doubts about their future security in Jerusalem. Today, the lofty location is still sought after, albeit by tourists and those seeking a picnic with a view. At the entrance, an information board sketches a basic history of the site, with a focus on the valour of the Palmach, rather than the displacement that followed.

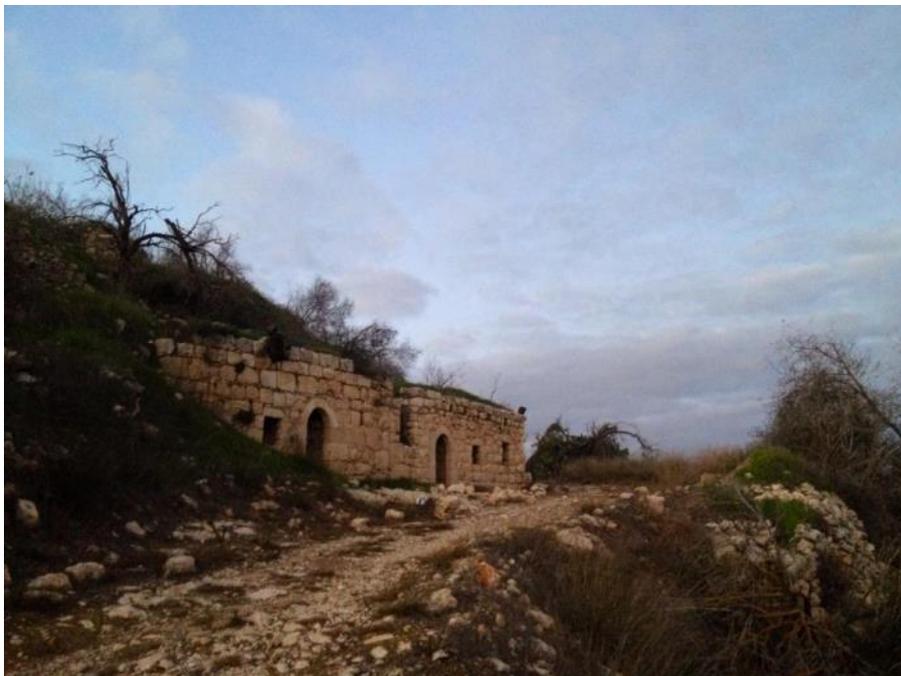


Figure 1: Suba, December 2014.



[Figure 2: Suba, December 2014]

As visitors scramble up the steep paths, scale house walls and take in the views from the domed roofs, the layering of history pushes aside questions that should be asked, as “certain memories live on; the rest are winnowed out, repressed, or simply discarded by a process of natural selection which the historian, uninvited, disturbs and reverses” (Yerushalmi 1996, 95). The tiled floors, worn alcoves, rusty-barred windows and doors lying on the dusty, cool floors of the interiors reside in a no man’s land between the fall of the Crusader fort and the designation of the site as a park and backdrop to Tzova. The physical duality presented by Suba’s violent past and tranquil present evokes Foucault and Miskowiec’s counter-sites, on which “a kind of effectively enacted utopia [...] [is] simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (1986, 24). The national park represents a utopian space within Israel, a site where battles were hard-fought and won; on which new lives have been built and a new horizon on which Israel has flourished, as represented by the new towns and villages that dot the hills, and the pine trees that have been planted in the stead of olive and cacti. The site is also contested: Said’s concept of layering extending to the depopulated sites as, in the case of Deir Yassin and Suba, aspects of Palestinian and Israeli history are omitted and forcefully forgotten, lost in the dominant state narrative. Despite this, the standing of the ruins challenges the utopian layer that does not flatten the village, but shrouds it, not quite removing it entirely from the visitor’s view. The result is an inversion of

the site as the buildings that served their designated purpose as dwellings are transformed into “fairy-tale” structures (Said 2000, 188), both aesthetically and conceptually.



Figure 3: Suba, December 2014.

Haunting, growing

‘I know that the day will deliver me
And I watch
The shadow of a shadow
That I leave behind me
The last glimmers of night go out
And all is calm...’

(In Your Absence, 2014)

Beyond the counter-site lies Nora’s *lieux de mémoire*, “mixed, hybrid, mutant, bound intimately with life and death, with time and eternity; enveloped in a Möbius strip of the collective and the individual, the sacred and the profane, the immutable and the mobile” (Nora 1989, 19). Nora’s definition of memory sites is vast and oscillating: from the intangible (commemorations and celebrations) to the tangible (monuments and memorials), they are “in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting [...] vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived”

(1989, 8). Akin to memory itself, the sites discussed in this paper are in a state of perceptive flux, each having been chronologically constructed on top of the other. Thus, Suba is layered three times, first as a Crusader fort, then as a Palestinian village and later as a national park and kibbutz. Kufir Bir'im likewise holds three layers, first as a Jewish village called Kfar Bar'am abandoned in the thirteenth century, subsequently as the Palestinian village, and currently divided between the kibbutzim Dovev and Baram. Iqrit, akin to Suba, was occupied by Crusaders; Deir Yassin was part of a sixteenth century Ottoman settlement, Khirbet Ayn al-Tut.

On first sight, Nora's suggestion that "memory attaches itself to sites, whereas history attaches itself to events" (1989, 22), cuts not only between the context in which memory is practised and history recited, but it also locates the depopulated sites at the junction of *lieux de mémoire*, one being the site at which memory is practised and the other a utopia created through an alternative interpretation of past events. The junction, however, is problematic by virtue of its static precision, for in the context of Palestine/Israel memory and history, events and experiences, suffuse the discourse so that sites such as Deir Yassin, Suba, Kufir Bir'im and Iqrit are not ancient ruins devoid of memory and connection, but sites sustained by collective memory that recall Halbwachs' observation that "the relationships established between stones and men are not so easily altered" (Jones 2011, 97-98). While the sites fit the essential definition of *lieux de mémoire*, the distinction between 'real', 'true', 'distance' and 'archival' memory squeezes a capricious entity into a restrictive category, causing "the artificial reconstructions of postmodern memory sites [to be] divorced from any organic community of remembrance" (Rothberg 2010, 4). Perhaps an ideal answer would be, as Rothberg states, *noeuds de mémoire* that avoid categorization along lines of territory, time, communities and identities, thereby freeing the villages to become clusters, or 'knots', located across memory (ibid., 7). A third approach would be Passerini's 'synchronic plane' where diachronical events are 'clumped', and,

[The] imaginary and real are superimposed, e.g. a physical landscape and a mental geography are elided to produce an interpretation of landscape through memory, along the lines of the collective history of a people, of its religious struggles and political resistance, re-elaborated by tradition and projected toward the present and the future. (Passerini 1983, 195)

The sites, akin to the *noeuds de mémoire*, are sustained by an ongoing process of memory (8) that practices memory through oral narratives, literature and physical actions such as walking, educational tours, *in situ* story-telling, demonstrations, mapping and restoration.

In recent years, cultural resistance has proved a powerful mechanism of both protest and remembrance, and through the use of music, dance and street theatre, the artist collective *Insiyab* has brought performances to the depopulated villages, including Kufur Bi'rim and Iqrit, to explore themes of loss, memory and return. *In Your Absence* (2014), a five-minute short by Mohamad Khalil, Yazid Sadi and Laura Hawa was filmed among the ruined homes of Kufur Bi'rim and is a tale of absence and the quest to retrieve what that has been lost. The short commences with the musicians seated on the rubble of broken walls at dusk, as the first of two dancers, Samaa Wakeem, looks towards the horizon. As she wanders through the ruins, Wakeem is tagged by the second dancer, Ayman Safia, and a choreographed chase begins. As both gain pace, hurtling through the roofless corridors, Wakeem's expression and gestures denote a sense of loss, being lost and the search for something that has been lost.

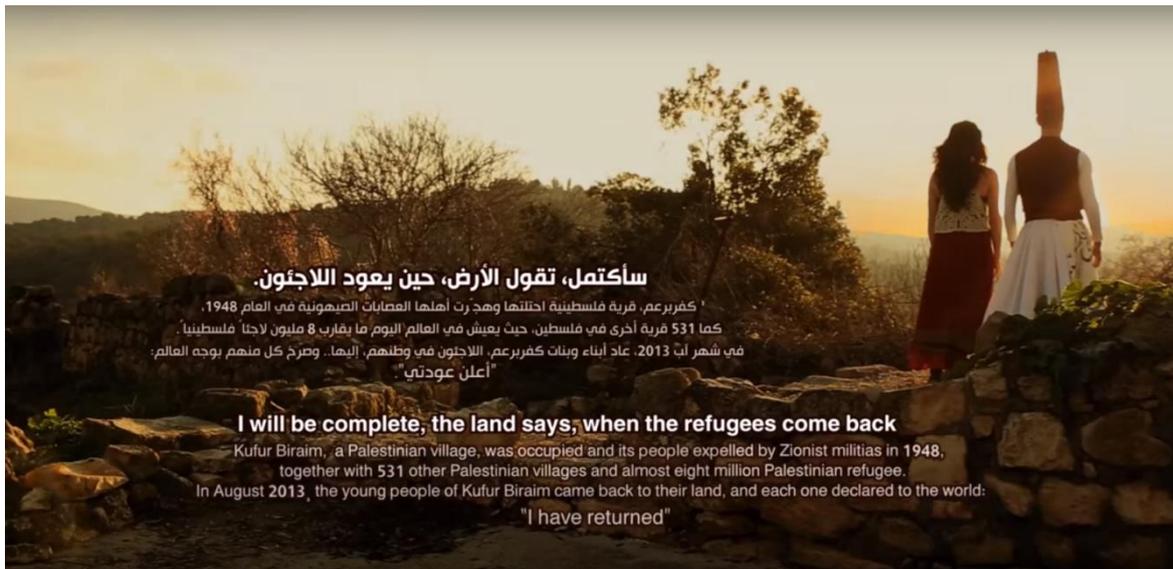


Figure 4: *In Your Absence*, by Insiyab, 2014.

Overlaying the visuals are two narrations, one delivering a spoken word poem in French, the other in Arabic. The first touches upon absence, describing a fading city, the possession of the horizon by night, loss of light and a night removed from sleep, as thoughts of the departed convene ‘in your absence’. In a similar vein, the second poem reflects on awareness in a time of absence, “Oh Lord, how beautiful / People are when they are aware of / My true self / And I hide my tears in your absence” (Insiyab, 2014). The poems reflect on

two points of memory: the community that has dispersed and the village that held them. In doing so, they evoke Hall's cultural meanings as they stand as symbols of the broader cultural structure that lead to the depopulation of the sites. To this however, a third cultural meaning can be added, as the act of returning to the site becomes part of a broader endeavour to "contribute to the recovery of Kufr Bir'im's stolen spirit and the restoration of its life" (Ibid.). In turn, while the stones lack agency, they are viewed to be symbolic of 'spirit' and 'life', elements that have been absent and whose return remains contingent on the continued awareness of the site's past, as well as the presence of a Palestinian community on the land itself.

A cartography of activism

The physical practice of remembrance counters Halbwachs' idea that history is a 'dead memory' that is "artificial because it conform[s] to the external constraints of the calendar and clock [and] introduce[s] cuts and slices absent from forms of collective memoration" (Harootunian 2007, 492). In contrast, the 'organic' relation is sustained through the presence of subsequent generations who provide an experience to which the visitors can relate and in turn, history is kept alive through formal and informal commemorations and celebrations (Olick and Robbins 1998, 111). While the groups discussed in the subsequent section work to preserve the past, since 1948 the Israeli state has used the synchronic plane as a site of re-interpretation, redrawing maps and renaming Palestinian villages with Hebrew, or 'Hebrew-sounding', names (Lesham 2010, 163). Established during the British Mandate and put into action after independence, the Hebrew Space Project used the landscape to "provide a material and physical reflection of the Zionist entitlement to temporal priority, mainly over the Palestinian claim" (162). In turn, the process not only symbolised the endeavour for the creation of a new space and a new identity that would be tied to the land, but it also indicated the role of the land in the storytelling that accompanies a nation's growth, as the land (re)presents the landscape, by telling a 'story [...] of the transformation of the land into a landscape, a process that has both an economical and a social, mental or symbolical dimension' (Ingold 1997, 12). To date, flora has provided a means to silently claim the land and assert an alternative identity, the 'treescapes' rendering the land a site of hegemonic erasure (Braverman 2014, 164), the clusters of cacti presenting a thorny 'X' to mark the spot of the now absent villages and hamlets.

In addition to traditional cartography, technology has assumed a role in the process of remembrance of the land prior to 1948 and in the case of *iNakba*, commemoration transcends film and photography to become a quasi-virtual experience that enables a traveller in 2014 to visit a site that once held a community and now bears few to no traces of their presence. Launched in April 2014, *iNakba* is part of the Zochrot organisation's endeavour to enhance awareness of *an-Nakba* among the broader Jewish public. Established in 2002, the name of the organisation was carefully chosen: Hebrew for 'remembrance,' it was posited that the word, in its present, female tense, would be perceived as active, but not intimidating (Farber, 2014). Comprising Jewish and Palestinian activists who organise walking tours and collate resources on *an-Nakba*, its members ensure that attempts to restrict the annual commemoration of the event are stymied (Gandolfo, 2014).

By reducing the group tour to an individual experience through an iPhone app, individuals use GPS to locate more than 500 Palestinian localities that were "ruined, destroyed, obliterated after their capture, partially demolished, or remained standing but were depopulated and their residents expelled" (Zochrot, 2014) during and after 1948, with features to add comments, images and video clips in English, Arabic and Hebrew. In doing so, even if only for one day at a time, the landscape experiences a temporary dwelling, as "the world [is] imbued by human presence of a certain duration [...] totalized by a human gaze" (Ingold 1997, 5). In certain cases, no trace remains of the former community, yet by drawing on archival records, the app facilitates remembrance and addresses a subject that would otherwise fade from the contemporary national narrative. In turn, Foucault's 'space of emplacement' is enacted through the juxtaposition of technology and commemoration to reimagine utopia – not as a lost idyll, but as a counter-site, that "unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface" (1984, 6).

The notion that Palestine was, prior to 1948, a land that was not only uninhabitable, but uninhabited continues to be put forward today. Last year, Omer Ben-Lev, a member of the Israeli Labor Party, stated that when his parents arrived, "Most of Palestine was swamps [...] the newcomers came to Israel, and some of them died drying those swamps" (Booth and Eglash 2014). As the land is contested, remembrance and commemoration promotes counter-narratives that ensure that the land was – and continues to be – recorded. While Boullata questions the means by which Palestinian activists can articulate their space amidst the physical constriction of the land (2004, 77), an answer could reside in acts of remembrance that are mapped and physically traced by visitors through apps such as *iNakba* and *Insiyab*. In September 2014, a group of artists, musicians and activists continued the tradition of

resistance by convening in Kufr Bi'rim and working alongside al-Awda to preserve Palestinian heritage through enacting the right of return. As members of al-Awda established a camp in Kufr Bir'im in August 2013, the set-up mirrored a similar one in Iqrit the previous year. Over the course of three days the workshop, coordinated by the Freedom Bus initiative of the Freedom Theatre in Jenin, incorporated 'playback theatre' that dramatizes real-life experiences and enables spectators to engage on an emotional and visual level. The utilization of street theatre as a means to engage members of the public, as well as convey stories from Palestinian daily life, continues the tradition of Boal's 'theatre of the oppressed'² and has been used previously by the Palestinian-Israeli peace movement, Combatants for Peace. Zochrot, Insiyab and Combatants for Peace share not only the goal of enhancing awareness of the narratives that are, intentionally or otherwise, overlooked, but they also assume a role in the act of remembrance, whether it is of events and spaces past and lost, or contemporary acts of aggression and dispossession. In turn, the land becomes a stage on which Halbwach's united acts of remembrance is practiced and a message of resistance is articulated that extends beyond the immediate community and movements.

Conclusion

The (counter)sites discussed in this paper are marked by multiple narratives, but the layers that distinguish them are not organic: rather, they are the result of decades of construction, dissemination, contestation and re-imagination. In Ram's study of Israeli nationalism, he observes the four points of 'the regime of forgetting': the narrated, the material, the symbolic and the physical (2011, 93). Each could stand alone, but as a whole, they represent the process that has facilitated the erasure of streets, villages, towns and areas. The 'narrated' re-imagines the land as shaped by events told by the narrator, who omits certain elements and adds others, a process that speaks to Connerton's forgetting as an act of annulment that permeates from the mechanisms of government to the 'structure of feeling' (2008, 65). To take this practice of forgetting further, to the articulation of new narratives silence must be added, for when shared en masse, silence consolidates not only new, collective memories, but also new identities (2008, 63). Second, the 'material' removes the physical evidence, enabling a 'new symbolic map' to be created: one in which the names are altered, the boundaries shifted and the aesthetic of the land rendered anew, a process that "purges their past and 'domesticates' them into the dominant narrative" (Ram 2011, 93) through an act of 'repressive erasure' that to a degree denies 'the fact of a historical rupture' (Connerton 2008,

60). Finally, the physical erasure culminates in the removal of all traces of the lives lived on the sites: the inhabitants removed, buildings demolished, names erased/changed, the land re-sculpted and the cartography re-drawn (Ram 2011, 98). Since 1948, around 400 villages and 11 cities have, to varying degrees, disappeared (Kadman 2011), but they are not entirely forgotten as authors and organisations continue to map their locations,³ providing a counter-regime of remembrance.

Likewise, technology has afforded new ways to preserve the sites on an international level,⁴ a mechanism that goes beyond the physical into the virtual by enabling visitors to transcend the reality of the ruins and enter the layers beneath. The result is a reconsideration of the limitations of the ‘real environments’ that mark collective memory, as social media augments the articulation of the past in the present (Weedon and Jordan 2012, 146). The sites do not stand alone, however; as the generation that witnessed *an-Nakba* diminishes, so too, does the proximity to the early acts of dispossession decrease. While the historical/political narrative survives, the risk of losing details of the everyday could be equally detrimental as the stones, in time, are reduced to names and locations, rather than hubs of heritage and remembrance. Speaking to this need, organizations such as the Danish House in Palestine address this through the Living History project that takes visitors to the sites, where former inhabitants, or their descendants, relate stories that evoke the minutiae of pre-1948 daily life, as Bilal Al-Issa observes,

The olive-picking songs are not there anymore. Not really. When we went to Ras Karkar and met an old woman who was 80 years old, she remembered the songs and tried to repeat them. [...] It was more to show that there was a Palestine before 1948, that there were people living here, that they had a normal life and how that life was at that time.⁵

The necessity to record not only names, but also the everyday, returns to Nora’s concept of the archival memory that deliberately recollects and commemorates, as well as celebrates and eulogises (1989, 12), while at the same time doing so through an unsystematic approach, resulting in archives that are “material, fragmentary rather than fungible, and [...] call out for human interpretation [...] through mutations of connection and disconnection” (Foster 2004, 5-6). The sites do not stand as isolated *lieux de mémoire*; rather, they are commemorated and remembered through the physical acts of dwelling, re-enacting, walking and restoration. The act of remembering then, is extended: no more a hazy recollection on an unmarked site, physical enactment invokes an act of resistance, as well as one of resurrection. Together, they

enable the absent and/or silent to become present and active components in the political, social and historical discourse of Palestine-Israel today.

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