



WOMEN FOR PALESTINE

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The Ghosts of Deir Yassin

Israel has long played on its heroic beginnings to stir up support for its less than heroic exploits today. The problem is that those heroic beginnings have always been a fiction. Israel's bloody birth and subsequent actions were crimes against humanity which continue to this day. The veneer of Israel's manufactured "legitimacy" cannot hide the rot eating away at the core of its existence - its original sin of violent dispossession and its current colonialist and apartheid policies. And, without acknowledgement of, and reparations for, the atrocities committed against the Palestinians, the ghosts of Deir Yassin and elsewhere in Palestine will continue to loom large in any peace talks.

It was 9 April 1948, that a Jewish terrorist gang entered the quiet rural village of Deir Yassin on the outskirts of Jerusalem with the express purpose of destroying it. There were 750 people living in the village at the time, mostly stonecutters. Their houses had been built from limestone with arched doors and windows and these homes had stood that way for centuries. The villagers knew that massacres had been carried out earlier in the year in other villages and had, therefore, entered into a non-aggression pact with the Jewish Hagana, another terrorist group. But this pact was worthless: Deir Yassin had already been marked for extinction and to avoid being held accountable the Hagana called on two terrorist groups, the Irgun and Stern Gang, to execute the plan.

Zionist leaders had in March of that year, devised a military strategy they called Plan Dalet or Plan D, the express purpose of which was to clear all of the Palestinians from the cities, towns and villages and allow for a Jewish state to come into being. Their first operation known as *Nachshon* was designed to empty the rural villages along the route between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv by occupying, expelling and/or killing their inhabitants - and Deir Yassin lay within their plan. Although not the largest of the massacres committed in that year, Deir Yassin became a turning point because the publicity given to it was designed to spread an atmosphere of terror throughout the land, hastening the ethnic cleansing that followed. Before that plan, some 30 villages had already been destroyed, but once it was finalised, *Operation Nachshon* served as a blueprint for future Zionist campaigns which ended up destroying 531 villages and 11 urban neighbourhoods. And, in that year alone, the Zionist groups (which collectively became known as the Israeli Defence Force) committed 33 documented massacres with some historians putting the figure as high as one hundred. Those Palestinians not killed, either fled or were forcibly expelled.

And who would not flee given the chance on seeing or hearing of the atrocities being committed? Women were raped, men tortured, children made to watch and no age or gender was spared from being killed, their mutilated bodies then stuffed down wells or left heaped in mounds of mangled flesh and blood. At least a hundred villagers of Deir Yassin suffered that fate, although the original number was much higher – 254 deaths – the number supposedly inflated by the Zionists themselves to terrorise Palestinians everywhere. Regardless of how many died, killings of unarmed men, women and children were commonplace, so it was no wonder that Palestinians fled once they heard that bands of Zionist terrorists were in the vicinity of their towns and villages. Food was left still warm and uneaten on tables, clothes left hanging in cupboards, and toys, photos and papers were all left behind in the rush to escape. But the 750,000 Palestinian refugees, who barely locked the doors to their homes behind them, all thought that they were coming back.

Today, in the most tasteless, despicable irony, the Israeli museum commemorating the Jewish holocaust, Yad Vashem sits on top of a hill overlooking the graveyard of Deir Yassin, while the limestone buildings of the former Palestinian village are used as an Israeli mental institution. Is it any wonder that the ghosts of Deir Yassin still haunt the collective memory of Palestinians and all those who know that Deir Yassin was the catalyst in the plan to create a Jewish-only state of Israel? In the meantime, the millions of dispossessed in the camps of Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan and Lebanon are waiting to return and/or receive compensation for their immeasurable losses and nobody has the authority to trade away their human rights in order to submit to a racist state born out of Palestinian dispossession and misery. To agree to anything less without their consensus would betray the 60-year Palestinian struggle for recognition and self-determination in defiance of Apartheid Israel. - SK/WFP

Reference: Pappé, Ilan – *"The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine"*, Oneworld Publications, England, 2006