

Appendix II

Propaganda as History: What Happened at Deir Yassin?

A number of actions of the IZL and LHI, not Plan D, frightened the Palestinians in April 1948 and generated panic that spread swiftly across the country. The most notorious* was the joint assault of the militias of the two dissident organizations, IZL and LHI, on the village Deir Yassin, west of Jerusalem. It is an uncontested fact that this attack inflicted heavy casualties on the inhabitants of Deir Yassin. However, what happened that day in the village — a bloodstained battle or a cold-blooded massacre — has remained highly disputed. Although the onslaught was not a glorious operation by any standard, a wide gap separates what happened in the village from the stories that spread at the time and persist to the present. These stories were the nucleus for a narrative — in this case both Palestinian and Israeli — that has since been invented and embellished. The Palestinians' objective has been to besmirch Israel in the eyes of the world and make it responsible for the refugee problem. The Israeli Left has exploited Deir Yassin to slander "the dissidents" and blame them for continuing international condemnation of Israel on account of the massacre and for violating *tohar haneshek* — the principle of Purity of Jewish Arms (a code of behavior that originated during the Palestinian rebellion of 1936-1939, whose ethical standard held that Jews should not retaliate against women, children and old people.)

Both narratives, the Palestinian and the Israeli, have been partisan and apologetic — each covering up guilt feelings of the authors. The *Haganah* wished to play down its own role in the affair — previous knowledge of

* Objectively, the occupation of Lydda in July 1948 was bloodier, but never received the publicity and never attained the symbolic, almost "iconic" stature Deir Yassin has held for Palestinians.

the mission and assistance in the latter stages of the battle. The IZL and LHI wanted to justify its choice of an insignificant village as their objective and to refute or at least mitigate accusations of barbarous and disgraceful conduct leveled against them. The Palestinians sought to divert attention from abandonment of the villagers to their fate by neighbouring villages, the ALA detachment in Ain Karim and the emergency committee in Jerusalem by focusing on Jewish atrocities, inflating them and later turned events in the village into a symbol of the *Nakba* and an excuse for their mass flight. Even the British bore 'sins of omission' they wished to dodge – having stood on the sidelines and not intervened.

Beyond the polemic narratives of all sides, what really happened and what did not happen at Deir Yassin?

Already in January 1948 the dignitaries of the village and representatives of the adjacent Jewish neighbourhood Giv'at Shaul signed a good neighbours pact. The accord was concluded after the villagers had summoned the police to drive a group of *al-Najada* combatants out of their village. The *al-Najada*'s objective was to establish a base in the hamlet from which they could set out to ambush traffic on the Jerusalem–Tel Aviv road.¹ Deir Yassin's dignitaries were reluctant to be involved in hostilities and undertook to either frustrate on their own future attempts by gangs to use their village, or to report the *al-Najada*'s presence to the Jews if they could not expel them. In return, Giv'at Shaul guaranteed the villagers' right of transit to Jerusalem, on foot or by vehicle, through the Jewish suburb. The *Haganah* district command approved the pact, and the village's Mukhtar reported it to the emergency committee of Arab Jerusalem. No steps were taken against the Mukhtar, and he was not ordered to cancel the agreement.²

A few days after the pact was signed, a group of *Mujahidin* tried to settle-in at Deir Yassin but had to leave the hamlet due to the villagers' objection to their presence.³ A month later, another group of *Mujahidin* asked to use the village as a platform for attacking Givat Shaul and was turned down. Late in March the villagers refused to admit an ALA detachment as well to their village. Nevertheless, it is highly doubtful whether at the beginning of April the pact, which had been signed in January under totally different circumstances, still held water. By late March, intensification of hostilities didn't leave the villagers of Deir Yassin with the luxury of sitting out the conflict on the sidelines.

On 2 April a lengthy exchange of shooting took place between Deir Yassin and the Jewish neighbourhoods of western Jerusalem. In the following days the adjacent Jewish community Motza and Jewish traffic on the road to Tel Aviv came under fire from the village. On 8 April, the day before the assault, Deir Yassin youth joined the Arab counterattack on al-Qastel in which Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni was killed. The names of

a few Deir Yassin residents appeared in a CID list of Arab wounded who had been evacuated from al-Qastel to hospitals in Jerusalem. Participation of the village's youth in the battle for al-Qastel was later cited by Deir Yassin refugees themselves (though erroneously), as the reason for the attack.⁴

The conquest of two Arab villages by the *Haganah* at the outset of operation NACHSHON spurred the IZL and LHI to demonstrate that they too were capable of occupying an Arab village. The IZL commander and his deputy related years later, in oral testimonies, about the talks between the two organizations that had taken place before the action. They both said that in the wake of the "convoys crisis" at the end of March (pp. 70–71 above) their men wanted revenge and LHI people spoke about killing all men in an Arab village, but the IZL objected and its supreme commander, Menachem Begin, vetoed the LHI's radical suggestions.⁵

The *Haganah* commander of Jerusalem district, David Shealtiel, would have preferred that the IZL and LHI occupy Qalunya or Ain Karim and thereby assist operation NACHSHON and the defence of occupied al-Qastel. The IZL and LHI insisted on attacking Deir Yassin, probably because their deputy commander in Jerusalem and the planner of the attack was a resident of Giv'at Shaul.⁶ Ultimately, Shealtiel complied with their choice, but demanded that they would either garrison the hamlet after its occupation or refrain from expelling the inhabitants or demolishing their houses. He explained that the attack would be counter-productive if it led to an abandoned and ruined hamlet that might serve as a convenient base for Arab armed gangs.⁷

Shealtiel's letter contradicts his later version, in which he did not deny previous knowledge of the action, but claimed that it was forced upon him against his will and he could not prevent it. Itzhak Levy, at the time the head of the *Haganah* intelligence service (SHAY) in Jerusalem, asserted that he had tried to persuade Shealtiel to withdraw his approval or, at least, warn the villagers to evacuate the site, but in vain.⁸

According to the latest mandatory statistics, Deir Yassin had 610 residents, all of them Muslims. This figure is more reliable than others, such as those given by the International Red Cross (IRC) representative (400), or Begin's biographer (800–1,000).⁹ Later testimonies inflated the village's population at the beginning of April to 1,200 inhabitants, including refugees from Jerusalem and a few adjacent villages. This is probably a gross exaggeration and the true figure was about half this number. The IZL and LHI assembled 110 combatants for the mission. They planned to attack the hamlet from two directions and leave an open avenue of escape to nearby Ain Karim.

A series of mishaps accompanied the assault from the outset. One of

the sub-forces was spotted by an Arab sentry before zero hour. The loudspeaker that should have encouraged the villagers to leave did not work. The vehicle that carried it was stuck in a ditch on the outskirts of the village, and the shouts of the loudspeaker's team were not heard in the village's houses. The inhabitants had no idea that the purpose of the attack was conquest (still an unfamiliar contingency at that time), and they thought it was just a hit-and-run raid. Therefore, they did not hasten to leave their homes and take refuge outside the battle zone. The fighting inside the village had not been planned in detail and encountered unseen tactical problems. At first light, the attackers were exposed and drew fire from the houses. Five were killed, and 35 wounded including a number of commanders. Other commanders lost control of their men and the fighting continued in small groups and without any central guidance.¹⁰

The field training of the IZL and LHI fighters was inadequate for the task. They had no experience in attacking an Arab village in daylight. In the absence of support weapons to silence fire from the village's houses, they were forced, at great risk, to close in on the Arab positions and throw hand grenades through the doors and windows. Contrary to some testimonies, the houses were not blown up on their residents.

Late in the morning, the IZL asked the *Haganah* to help in rescuing their casualties from the village. A team of PALMAH members arrived around midday at the village, assisted in the evacuation of the wounded and fired a 2 inch mortar bombs at the Mukhtar's house, which was the stronghold of enemy resistance. The shelling, however, was ineffective, and the Arab combatants inside continued fighting after the rest of the village was occupied by Jewish forces and the villagers had surrendered or fled. The occupation was followed by intensive plundering of the houses and the person of escapees.¹¹

The Arab emergency committee of Jerusalem learned of the attack around 9 in the morning of 9 April. The early reports told of the killing of women and children and the flight of the residents. The committee approached the British army and requested its intervention, but did not take any further steps. While the battle raged in Deir Yassin, the Arabs of Jerusalem were preoccupied with preparations for the funeral of their leader 'Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni. Several hours passed before the leaders in the Old City grasped what had occurred at Deir Yassin. In the late afternoon hours, word spread that women and children from the village had been brought by the Jews to downtown Jerusalem and had arrived at the Musrara quarter. The emergency committee sent them food and appealed again to the British army, urging it to intervene.¹²

The neighbouring Arab villages — Ain Karim, Malha and Suba — did not extend any aid to their neighbours. The villagers, shaken by the fall of al-Qastel and terrified by the horror stories of the refugees from Deir

Yassin, were afraid to leave their hamlets. It is also possible that they evaded helping Deir Yassin because its residents had been “infamous” for their good ties with the Jews.

Contrary to the IZL and LHI claims after the action (apparently generated by the desire to justify or ‘spread the blame’ for the tragic outcome) there is no evidence of foreign combatants — ALA’s or others — in Deir Yassin. Menachem Begin asserted in his memoirs that Iraqi troops who were stationed in the village prevented the residents from escaping at the beginning of the assault. However all contemporary and later Arab testimonies described the villagers themselves as the only combatants in the hamlet, and there is no reason to question this account. According to the SHAY’s Arab sources and the refugees’ testimonies, the Iraqis were stationed in Ain Karim, not in Deir Yassin.¹³

Unlike the occupation of al-Qastel prior to that of Deir Yassin, or the conquests of many other Arab villages later in the war that were found deserted by their inhabitants when Jewish forces arrived, the battle in Deir Yassin took place with the civilian population still present. The villagers had not abandoned the village before the attack, nor did they do so after the battle began. This was the primary reason for the high number of casualties among non-combatants, much greater than civilian casualties at other villages.

Although numerous, the number of casualties was far below the figure that the IZL and LHI boasted to have killed, in an announcement published immediately after the battle (240). The Jewish Agency and the *Haganah* willingly adopted this figure and used it successfully for domestic consumption in their rivalries with their political adversaries. The BBC, too, reported 240 victims, and the *Daily Telegraph* put the figure at 200. The number 254 was accepted as the final figure, after the *New York Times* published it on 13 April 1948, adding to the IZL’s figure the severely wounded Arabs who had been hospitalized in Jerusalem.

The real number of Arabs killed in Deir Yassin was much lower. After the battle, SHAI Arab sources reported 100 to 110 Arab casualties. Only the dissidents’ section that dealt with the IZL and LHI, adopted IZL and LHI figures at face value. Arab eyewitnesses and scholars have mentioned numbers similar to those of SHAI informers. Makhfud Samur, who took part in the battle, said that the figure did not exceed 99. Walid Khalidi mentioned one hundred. Sharif Kan’ana, whose study is the most thorough and up-to-date, put the figure at 107. All these sources contradict the figures of contemporary and later Palestinian propaganda that inflated the numbers to 300 and even 400 victims of a cold-blood massacre. The input from the SHAI informers also contradicts the figures used by Israeli journalists and historians who throughout the years, until the outset of the present decade, accepted the figure 254 as correct.¹⁴

In inter-communal wars between civilians without uniforms, discerning who is a soldier and who is a non-combatant is extremely difficult, at times impossible. At Deir Yassin, every young man was a potential combatant. According to Kan'ana, one hundred villagers had weapons, but only 11 of them were killed in the battle. Kan'ana claims that 70 percent of the victims were non-combatants. The other victims were killed when the attacking force demolished houses on the heads of their inhabitants

Indeed, those who were killed were combatants and non-combatants alike, however, most of the civilians casualties were killed inadvertently in the assault and clearing pockets of resistance, not by “demolition of houses by the Jews on the heads of their Arab occupants,” as the Palestinian narrative claims. In fact the IZL and LHI forces carried no explosives since Shealtiel had insisted the village not be destroyed. The attackers did throw hand grenades into houses to silence enemy fire and those houses accommodated combatants and non-combatants alike.

An IZL officer testified years later that the IZL and LHI killed 80 Arab prisoners after the battle.¹⁵ This figure is highly inflated and has not been corroborated by any other source, Jewish or Arab. Kan'ana and several Arab witnesses claim that 25 young villagers were executed after the battle, most of them in a nearby quarry. This charge is apparently true, although none of the Arab witnesses who reported this was an eyewitness. The situation on the ground, battles in the context of inter-communal warfare, needs to be kept in mind: In the early months of the war, with British governance still in operation, it was impossible for protagonists on either side to maintain underground POW camps under the noses of British authorities. The captors' had only two alternatives: to kill combatants who fell into their hands alive, or release them knowing they would soon return to the enemy's fighting ranks. Already in January 1948 Yigael Yadin instructed the *Haganah* formations that “the decision whether to release a prisoner or liquidate him after his interrogation requires the approval of the brigade commander.” At the same time, specific orders issued before operations forbade maltreatment of prisoners.¹⁶ The IZL and LHI adopted similar principles, but in these organizations, the decisions were taken on a lower level.

The change of circumstances in April 1948 — the acceleration of the British evacuation and the greater freedom of action that the adversaries enjoyed compared to January 1948 — necessitated stricter orders. Such new orders were issued by the *Haganah* high command a few days after Deir Yassin and probably as a lesson from the killing of prisoners there.¹⁷

The surviving villagers fled to Ain Karim, and later arrived in Jerusalem. They were accommodated in the Old City and in the village

Silwan. Their main concern was the burial of the bodies that they had left behind in the village. The emergency committee, however, feared the impact that a mass funeral might have on the residents of Jerusalem, particularly after the funeral of Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni the day before. They preferred to bury the corpses in the village, far from the *Shabab* (mob) of the Old City, and asked the IRC to handle the burial.¹⁸ Jacques de Reynier, the IRC representative in Jerusalem, approached the IZL and asked them to bury the corpses in the village, to make a list of their names and hand the list over to the IRC together with the victims' identity cards. The IRC took responsibility for informing their next-of-kin.

Immediately after the battle, and throughout the following years, Arab propaganda spread rumours about cases of rape, maltreatment and mutilation of bodies that had occurred in Deir Yassin. One source of these rumours was a series of three reports written by the CID officer Richard Catling — an old and bitter enemy of the IZL and LHI — on the 13, 15 and 16 April 1948. The report of the 15 April was written after Catling had paid a visit to a group of women refugees in Silwan. The visit, in the company of an Arab doctor, a nurse and an activist from the Arab women's union, took place five days after the battle, when the Arab propaganda machine had already disseminated horror stories about the massacre. Catling questioned the women what happened to them. Their answers were irreconcilable with the vivid descriptions emanating from Arab propaganda organs, and Catling's own expectations. He therefore decided that either the women were too ashamed to speak about what they had undergone, or they were in a post-traumatic state of denial, repressing their memories. Therefore he completed their stories from his imagination and own biased outlook. In their popular narrative of the Jerusalem campaign in 1948 *O Jerusalem*, Dominique Lapierre and Larry Collins referred to Catling's report. Palestinian historians often quote them, but do not refer to the original document. The authors of *Oh Jerusalem!* claim to have deposited the document in the library of Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island along with the rest of their raw data, but so far it couldn't be found there or elsewhere.

The IZL and LHI made no effort to conceal their actions in Deir Yassin. Moreover, they openly boasted about the mass killing, admitted to plundering, and willingly let journalists and the IRC representative tour the site. On Sunday, 11 April, De Reynier came to the hamlet and explained to the IZL people on the spot that his duty was to transfer the killed and the wounded to the Arab sector of the City. He took with him one wounded girl and returned to Jerusalem. He immediately went to the Jewish Agency offices and protested against the atrocities that had been committed in Deir Yassin but did not condemn them publicly, explaining that his role was that of a mediator, not a judge.¹⁹

De Rayniere's memoirs focused on himself rather than on what transpired in the village. Moreover he lacked accurate background information, and was not even familiar with basic facts such as the number of residents in the village. On most essential points, De Rayniere's memoirs are at odds with his own 1948 report and with later testimonies from Jewish witnesses, primarily Dr. Alfred Engel and Moshe Barzilai — a Red Magen David doctor and the LHI intelligence officer who accompanied De Rayniere on the tour.²⁰ A Jewish Agency's medical team that visited the village on 12 April checked the still unburied corpses and did not find any signs of maltreatment or mutilation.²¹

Several testimonies of refugees from Deir Yassin appeared in Arab websites in 1998, dedicated to commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the massacre. The witnesses described the organization of the village and its preparations for the war (i.e. purchase of weapons and erection of fortifications). They portrayed the fighting and mentioned several cases where non-combatants and women were killed, but their testimonies did not convey that there had been a massacre of horrific scale, as claimed immediately after the battle by the Palestinian press and radio and some biased Jewish observers, primarily the *Haganah's* anti-IZL squad in Jerusalem.²²

In some cases, the picture portrayed by Arab witnesses has been close to that contained in testimonies from IZL and LHI members who participated in the battle. The Arab witnesses confirmed the attackers' excuse for the killing of women — that men had attempted to escape from the village disguised as women — and even cited the names of those who wore women clothing. The witnesses relayed how they had fled from the hamlet to Ain Karim and summoned the Iraqi ALA soldiers who were stationed there. The Iraqis, however, refused to extend aid, claiming that they had been called to attend the funeral of al-Husayni.²³

One witness, Ali Yussuf Jaber, a resident of the refugee camp al-Amari near Ramallah, emphasized that no cases of rape had occurred in Deir Yassin. He insisted that the rumours about raping were part of the propaganda campaign that local Palestinian leaders in Jerusalem waged after the battle. The rumours angered the villagers, who protested to the emergency committee against the unfair exploitation of their wives and daughters, sacrificing their honour and good name for propaganda purposes.

A second Palestinian witness, identified as "Abu Mahmud", confirmed Jaber's testimony. Three other Arab witnesses described the execution in the quarry, but none claimed to have seen the atrocity with their own eyes, and all had heard the story second-hand from others.²⁴ Another witness insisted that the execution took place in the village and not in the quarry. He added that he had not seen any sexual abuse that day, and throughout

the years had never heard about this kind of mistreatment from other survivors.²⁵

These testimonies were not entirely new. As early as 1955 a refugee from Deir Yassin asserted that apart from the execution in the quarry, no atrocities had been committed in the village. In his testimony, published by the Jordanian newspaper *Al-Urdun*, he charged that the Palestinian propaganda apparatus had spread horror stories about the conquest of the village. The purpose, he added, was to encourage the Palestinians to fight for their lives and their honour, but the exaggerations boomeranged generating panic that led to mass flight.²⁶

In an interview in 1998 for a BBC TV series, Hazam Nusseibeh — who was news editor of the Arab radio station in Jerusalem in 1948, spoke about the guidelines that Hussayn Khalidi, the deputy chairman of the Higher Arab Executive in Jerusalem, had given him — to exploit the massacre to the utmost. Upon Khalidi's instruction, a press release was worded that described the killing of children, the raping of pregnant women and other war crimes, concocted by the formulators of the announcement. Nusseibeh's testimony explains the background of Khalidi's statement to the press on 12 April 1948, in which he declared that the victims included 25 pregnant women, 52 mothers of babies and 60 girls of various ages.²⁷

Palestinian scholar Salim Tamari confirms Nusseibeh's account. He explains that horrific stories about the massacre were spread by Jews and Arabs: by the Jews — to shake the Arabs' morale and weaken their resistance, and by the Palestinian leadership — to provoke international pressure on the Zionists. According to Tamari, the Palestinians initially inflated the number of victims because of errors in counting. Subsequently, however, the inflated numbers were used deliberately to dramatize the tragedy.²⁸

A CID report on the conquest of Deir Yassin remarked that during the battle, attacking Jewish forces held dozens of village women and children as hostages. After the fire ceased, the IZL people transferred them to Jerusalem, held a "victory parade" and finally released them on the Prophets Street, pointing the way to Jaffa Gate. Jewish journalists in Jerusalem corroborated the story about this "parade". According to some testimonies, the few men among the group were not released to cross the lines into the Arab-held parts of the Old City, rather, they were taken back to the village and executed in the quarry. The sources, however, knew this as hearsay and were not eyewitnesses. The whole allegation is incompatible with what is known about the execution in the quarry from other sources and sounds very improbable.²⁹

The residents of the Old City were astonished by the arrival of the women and children from Deir Yassin who roamed the narrow streets,

wailing in distress. People gathered to hear their stories. Leaders and officials promised help, but several days passed before real assistance was actually extended to them.³⁰

The occupation of Deir Yassin occurred while the British were still sovereign in Palestine and had plenty of troops in Jerusalem. A few days earlier the British army had forced the *Haganah* to retreat from another occupied Arab village, Deir Muhayzin, and undertook to garrison the hamlet until the end of the mandate, which it did. The British suggested a similar solution to al-Qastel, but the Palestinian leadership rejected the offer. This pattern begs the question: Where were the British during and following events at Deir Yassin?

Hussayn Khalidi accused the British army and police of ignoring his appeals and refusing to rescue Deir Yassin. His charges are justified. Initially, British authorities didn't grasp the significance of the hamlet's conquest. Their current reports on that day and the next ignored the event or mentioned it as but another routine incident between Jews and Arabs, adding that Arab casualties were believed to be heavy.³¹

A week later, however, the British adopted the IZL's figure of Arab casualties and the horror stories in the Arab newspapers. Apparently they were also influenced by Catling's visit among the survivors in Silwan and De Reynier's report. According to the High Commissioner's report to London, in one cave, the IRC representative was purported to have seen 150 corpses of Arab men, women and children, and in a nearby well 50 more corpses were found. Yet, in De Reynier's report and later memoirs there is absolutely no mention of a cave, a well or a similar numbers of victims.

Unlike the *Haganah*, the IZL and LHI might have fought back, had they been attacked by the British. Apparently, however, the British were not keen to sustain casualties engaging IZL and LHI soldiers for the sake of the Arabs. Lapiere and Collins described vividly, apparently relying on a late interview with the chief of police Pollock, how High Commissioner Sir Allan Cunningham received news about the massacre while chairing a meeting of the government's defence council. Lapiere and Collins maintain that the commanding officer, General Gordon Macmillan, rejected Cunningham's response — urging that troops be sent to Deir Yassin; Macmillan underscored that he would risk the lives of his men only for strictly British interests. Cunningham turned to the RAF commanding officer, who replied that he was prepared to fire rockets on the Jews in the village. Unfortunately, the light bombers had been sent the day before to Egypt and the rockets to Iraq, and an immediate bombing was impractical.³²

In face of growing criticism of the authorities' conduct during the battle, Cunningham had to excuse British inaction. He claimed that the

RAF prepared to bomb the IZL and LHI in Deir Yassin and brought a squadron of Tempest aircraft from Iraq for this purpose, but since the *Haganah* took command of the village and garrisoned it, he decided to cancel the bombing.³³ On that same day, 13 April 1948, the Arabs took their revenge for Deir Yassin on a convoy to Hadassah hospital on Mount Scopus. Once again, Cunningham faced criticism for the military's inaction — this time from the Jews (though less justified, since a British major and his men tried hard to rescue some of the convoy's people).

What was the impact of Deir Yassin's conquest on the Arabs? On 10 April the SHAY learned from Arab informers in Jerusalem that 25 women and children from the village had arrived in the Old City and that the emergency committee was looking after them. Probably this was the same group that was marched by the IZL through the streets of Jerusalem in their "victory parade", and afterwards released in order to seek shelter in Arab-held territory. The informers also conveyed that 100 bodies were left in the hamlet and the Jews had captured eight prisoners. These initial reports from survivors soon spread panic within all Arab neighbourhoods outside the walls of the Old City and Arab villages west of Jerusalem, particularly Ain Karim and Malha.

A few days after the battle, as the Palestinian propaganda machine labored to spread horrific descriptions of the massacre, an Arab informer in Jerusalem told the SHAY that Deir Yassin had been a hot topic in the Old City. Rumours highly exaggerated the atrocities and people were telling horrendous stories about the cruelty of the Jews.³⁴

The facts of what really transpired at Deir Yassin were soon drowned in an ocean of hysteric rhetoric on both sides. The Jewish Agency hastened to condemn the massacre publicly. The IZL and LHI denied the accusations and published Shealtiel's letter, in which the *Haganah* commander of Jerusalem district approved the action. The declarations and revelations found their way to the Arab press, alongside exaggerated descriptions of the atrocities allegedly committed by the Jews.³⁵

Rumours surrounding events — actual, manufactured and imagined — that took place at Deir Yassin might have encouraged Palestinians to flee when the fighting approached their homes in the coming weeks. However, the role of Deir Yassin in the whole mechanism of Palestinians' mass flight has been highly inflated. The conquest of Deir Yassin did not testify to any high policy. Even the perpetrators did not anticipate the outcomes of the attack and had not planned them in advance. There is no logic in the charge that dissident groups such as the IZL and LHI were acting in the service of any Jewish Agency or *Haganah* strategy. And in any case, no pattern of similar incidents involving Jewish forces entailing mass Arab civilian casualties ensued. The attempt by Palestinian scholars and propagandists to portray Deir Yassin as

'proof' of a planned conspiracy of the Yishuv to expel Palestinians in the course of the war is totally groundless.

The massacre at Deir Yassin, if what happened in the village deserves this definition, was an almost inevitable outcome of circumstances – the nature of the combatants on both sides, their organization and location, level of training, deployment and mastery of command and control, the absence of proper military targets, the presence of a large number of civilians, and overarching exigencies and special stresses inherent in this kind of intra-communal warfare. Certainly, it was not the bloodiest massacre of the war. The killing of 240 Jews in Gush Etzion after their surrender, and 250 Arabs during the occupation of Lydda and its aftermath were more extensive by far.

- 4 Plan D, 10 March 1948, HA 73/94.
- 5 Ibid. The quotations are from pp. 3–4. The revised plan, 11 May 1948, BGA.

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- 1 Jerusalem district log, 12 January 1948, IDFA 2504/49/16.
- 2 A report on the pact, 21 January 1948, HA 704/1.
- 3 Jerusalem district log, 28 January 1948, IDFA 446/48/20.
- 4 CID daily summary, 9 April 1948, PRO, CO 537/3857; A report of an Arab deserter, 29 May 1949, PA.
- 5 Benzion Cohen and Yehuda Lapidot's testimonies, Jabotinsky Institute.
- 6 Itzhak Levy, *Tish'a Qabin*, Tel Aviv 1986, p. 340.
- 7 Shealtiel's identical letters to "Shapira" (Zetler of the LHI) and "Greenberg" (Ra'anana of the IZL), 7 April 1948, IDFA 922/75/343.
- 8 Shealtiel's testimony in *Hed Hahaganah*, October 1959, and Levy, *Tish'a Qabin*, pp. 341–2.
- 9 A list of the Arab villages in Palestine, prepared by the Jewish Agency's Arab section, October 1947. The data was taken from the Palestine government's villages survey of 1945/6. Cf. also Walid Khalidi (ed.), *From Heaven to Conquest*, Beirut 1971, p. 764.
- 10 For a description of the battle from the attackers' viewpoint see: Yardena Golani, *The myth of Deir Yassin* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv 1976, pp. 19–36, and Menachem Begin, *Hamered* (The Revolt), Tel Aviv 2003 (new edition), pp. 221–3. Levy, *Tish'a Qabin*, pp. 342–3.
- 11 Ibid. pp. 343–4; Eric Silver, *Begin: The Haunted Prophet*, New York 1984, pp. 88–95.
- 12 Yavne daily bulletin, 9 April 1948, IDFA.
- 13 Begin, *Hamered*, introduction to 1974 edition, pp. e-f.
- 14 Rosemary Sayigh, *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries*, London & New Jersey 1979, p. 75; Sharif Kanaana Kan'ana, 'Reinterpreting Deir Yassin', April 1998, in the University of Bir Zeit's website; Levy, *Tish'a Qabin*, pp. 342–3; Meir Avizohar, *Moryia Biyerushalayim* (the history of the Moriya battalion of the Jerusalem brigade in 1948), Jerusalem 2002, pp. 89–92.
- 15 Testimony of Yehoshu'a Gorodentchik, Jabotinsky Institute.
- 16 Yadin's circular letter, 18 January 1948, and orders of NACHSHON HQ, 4 April 1948, IDFA 661/69/45.
- 17 Galili's circular letter on "Arab Prisoners", 13 April 1948, IDFA 959/49/227; Shealtiel's special order of the same date, CZA, J 3/9.
- 18 Yavne daily bulletin, 10 April 1948, IDFA.
- 19 Dominique Guneau, *The International Red Cross in Palestine, 1948–1952*, London & New York: Kegan Paul International, 1997, pp. 128–31. W. Khalidi (ed.), *From Haven to Conquest*, Beirut 1971, pp. 761–6. Khalidi brings a five pages passage from memoirs that De Reynier published under the title *A Jerusalem un drapeau flottait sur la ligne de feu* (Neuchâtel 1950, pp. 69–74). Guneau's description is extremely different from De Reynier's

memoirs. She refers to his report to the IRC center in Geneva from 13 April 1948, which she found in the organization's archives. Her contemporary source appears more authentic and reliable from the later memoirs that were effected by subsequent events and confrontations between the author and the Israeli authorities in the course of the war.

- 20 Uri Milstein, *History of the War of Independence*, Vol. IV: *Out of Crisis Came Decision*, Lanham MD. 1998, pp. 370–2.
- 21 Dr. Avigdori and Dr. Droyan's report on their visit to Deir Yassin on 12 April, 18 April 1948, IDFA 500/48/35; cf. also David Shealtiel, *Jerusalem 1948* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv 1981, pp. 139–41.
- 22 Yavne report to Tene/D, 12 April 1948, IDFA 5254/49/372; Meir Pa'il's testimony, 10 May 1971, HA 167/15. Pa'il gave another testimony to the website *Deir Yassin Remembered* on 11 December 1996. In both testimonies it is impossible to isolate Pa'il the eyewitness (At that time he was attached to the anti-IZL squad and claims to be present at Deir Yassin during part of the battle) from Pa'il the historian and politician.
- 23 Musa Budeiri, 'A Chronicle of a Defeat Foretold: The Battle for Jerusalem in the Memoirs of Anwar Nusseibeh, in: *Jerusalem Quarterly File*, 11–12, 2001 (an electronic journal).
- 24 Testimony of "Abu Mahmud", Jerusalem Report, 2 April 1998. The testimonies of Abu Tawfiq al-Yassini of Jericho, Muhammad Assad Radwan al-Yassini of the Old City of Jerusalem, and Ali Yussuf Jaber of al-Amari camp appeared on 10 April 1998 on the website arabicnews.com. Excerpts from these testimonies appear on several other Palestinian websites, but in edited and censored form. Paragraphs that do not serve the present line of Palestinian propaganda were omitted.
- 25 Testimony of Muhammad Arif Samir, Kol Ha'Ir, Jerusalem 1 May 1981. Cf. also: Silver, *Begin: The Haunted Prophet*, p. 95.
- 26 Testimony of Yonas Ahmad Assad al-Yassini, *Al-Urdun*, 10 April 1955.
- 27 Nusseibeh's interview as cited in *Jerusalem Report*, 2 April 1998.
- 28 Salim Tamari, 'The City and Its Rural Hinterland', in idem (ed.), *Jerusalem 1948: The Arab Neighbourhoods and Their Fate in the War*, Jerusalem and Bethlehem 1999, pp. 82–3.
- 29 CID daily bulletin, 10 April 1948, PRO, CO 537/3857. Cf. also Harry Levin, *Jerusalem Embattled*, London 1950, p. 57 and Silver: *Begin, The Haunted Prophet*, pp. 93–4.
- 30 Minutes of the interrogation of an Arab deserter, 19 May 1949, and Yavne daily bulletin, 13 April 1948, IDFA.
- 31 CID daily summary of events, 10 April 1948, PRO, CO 537/3857; The high commissioner's weekly intelligence estimate of the same date, PRO, CO 537/3869. The MELF weekly report, 13 April 1948, did not mention Deir Yassin.
- 32 Lapierre and Collins, *Oh Jerusalem*, p. 279.
- 33 High commissioner's weekly intelligence estimate, 17 April 1948, PRO, CO 537/3869; Hector McNiel's reply to a question in parliament about Deir Yassin, 19 April 1948, PRO, FO 371/68504; RAF report on the withdrawal from Palestine, PRO AIR 23/8350, pp. 9–10.

- 34 Yavne daily bulletin, 10 April 1948, IDFA, and Yavne special report, 12 April 1948, HA 105/31.
- 35 A survey of the Arab press, 13 April 1948, IDFA 4944/49/504; The Haganah's statement about Deir Yassin, 12 April 1948, ISA P/573/1; The Jewish Agency letter to king Abdullah, 12 April 1948 and Samir al-Rifa'i's reply of the same date, CZA, S 25/5634. Cf. also Kirkbride to Bevin, 16 April 1948, PRO, FO 816/117.

Appendix III *Folklore versus History: The Tantura Blood Libel*

- 1 Teddy Katz, 'The Exit of Arabs from Villages in Carmel Foothills in 1948' an MA thesis submitted to the Department of Middle East History at the University of Haifa, March 1998. Though the University withdrew the thesis' approval and removed it from the library, it can be read on the personal website of Professor of Electronic and Computer Engineering Dan Censor, at <<http://www.ee.bgu.ac.il/~censor/katz-directory/>>.
- 2 Notes on the occupation of Tantura (no date, but from end of may or early June 1948), Zichron Yaacov archives, Epstein's file. Cf. also the testimonies of several Arab witnesses who relate to Epstein's arrival and cation in the village, on the website <<http://www.palestineremembered.com/Haifa/al-Tantura>>.
- 3 Shitrit to Ben-Gurion, 31 May 1948, ISA C/307/48; Tene/A daily bulletin, 9 June 1948, HA 105/147. Cf. also Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York 1987.
- 4 Epstein's report, 21 June 1948, Zichron Yaacov archives, Epstein's file. Cf. also: ICRC, *The International Red Cross in Palestine*, Geneve, July 1948, p. 12.
- 5 Hilel Cohen, *The Present Absentees: The Palestinian Refugees in Israel Since 1948* (Hebrew), Jerusalem 2000, p. 37; Yihya Mahmud al-Yihya, *Al-Tantura* (Arabic), Damascus 1998.
- 6 Epstein to the Ministry of Minorities Affairs, 21 June 1948, Zichron Yaacov archives, Epstein's file. The handing over was reported on the same day by the Arab radio station in Ramallah and the BBC Near East radio. Cf. the surveys 'Palestine in the Arab Broadcasts', 21–22 June 1948, IDFA 4944/49/504.
- 7 Shimshon Mashbatz's report to Shitirt on moods in Tulkarm, 22 July 1948, IDFA 2384/49/10, and intelligence report on the Iraqi troops in the Tulkarm area, 13 August 1948, IDFA 1041/49/3.
- 8 Nimr al-Hatib, *The Nakba of Filastin* (Arabic), Damascus 1951.
- 9 Arif al-Arif, *The Nakba of Filastin*, Kufr Qar'a 1989, Vol. VI, p. 109 (the book's six volumes were first published in Sayda, Lebanon, between the years 1956 and 1962).
- 10 Yihya Mahmud al-Yihya, *Al-Tantura* (Arabic), pp. 117–26. The list of killed and wounded, *ibid.* pp. 143–6.
- 11 *List of the Arab Villages in Palestine* (Hebrew), October 1947, p. 17.
- 12 Amir Gilat, "Hatevach bTantura," *Ma'ariv* weekend magazine, 21 January