

On History, Folk-tales and In-between

Ilan Pappé's "discourse" in response to my last posting reminds me of an old story about the English courtier who bet he would succeed in driving the Duke of Windsor (formerly king Edward the 8th) up the wall. During a ball at the palace, he approached the Duke and asked him: "Excuse me Sir, where are the toilets?" The Duke, in absolute calm, turned his head and said: "Go through that gate over there to the corridor; turn right, go straight, and when you see a door with the notice **Gentlemen** don't hesitate — even you may go in."

In view of its style, elusiveness and contents, Pappé's response is not much worthy of further detailed arguments and neither he nor the "grades" he benevolently grants deserve an answer. Before quitting this exchange, I would like, however, to make a few remarks on certain facts of the case (all boldfaces are mine):

1. Pappé reiterates endlessly that a massacre took place in Tantura. Unfortunately, saying it does not make it so. Reiterating slogans has nothing to do with historiography or truth. I have re-read the testimonies of the three Jewish witnesses alleged by Pappé to confirm the massacre (Ambar, Vitkon and Lishansky) only to find that despite Katz's aggressive manner of questioning them (contrary to the teachings of all Pappé and Firro's authorities on oral history) they all denied the allegation.
2. Pappé's version of Sheikh Nimr al-Khatib's whereabouts in 1948 is absolutely baseless except for one fact — the Sheikh was indeed a member of the National Committee of the Arabs in Haifa until the attempt on his life. Al-Khatib's presence in Haifa later than 19/2/1948 (the date of the attempt), however, is not mentioned in any document. If Pappé has such a document as he claims, let him scan it and put it on the web. Since he regards the al-Khatib story as a cornerstone of his argumentation, his nonsense illustrates the validity of the entire case.
3. The General Staff's document in question is now on the web (see: <http://www.ee.bgu.ac.il/~censor/katz-directory>), and the readers are invited to look in it for a "mass grave" that Pappé now declares was mentioned by the sender. A "minor" detail indeed.
4. To correct another minor error — regretfully, I am Pappé's peer. Muhammad Baraka and 'Isam Makhul as well as some radical anti-Zionists academics abroad are his comrades.
5. Pappé has not been on any "black list" of any archive. Any document that I have seen in the IDF archive in Giv'atayim is open to anyone. By contrast, however, to Benny Morris, Moti Golani and other historians who spend much of their life in archives, Pappé renounces working on archival material out of idleness and not because of any persecution.
6. Jonathan Berg's posting last night has shown the degree of Pappé's credibility in a simple matter of properly giving the true identity of a journal. His answer to Jonathan testifies to his integrity.
7. In view of some nasty remarks Pappé made on Publishing houses, I have decided to bring extracts from the following letter from St. Martin's press. This letter concerns the publication of a book by an Israeli colleague, which deals with cultural history and has nothing to do with the Arab-Israeli conflict. It explains, however, why Pappé could publish one of his books in that infamous publishing House and other Israelis cannot:

Dear Mr.:

I found Dr. ----'s book **fascinating**, but regret to say -- after a long and animated discussion about the book with my colleagues in editorial -- that I've decided to pass on it. Let me elaborate.... I'm a little worried that the author's **pro-Zionist slant** may turn US readers away from this book -- both Jews and non-Jews. The debate over Israel -- and Zionism -- is enormous in this country, particularly of late, given the political situation over there. The author may not find his US audience as receptive to his rather obvious biases as he may expect. I really regret passing on a book with such **exciting potential**

Sincerely,

Debbie Gershenowitz

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This letter speaks for itself and does not need any explanation on my part.

In the following extract from a letter posted by Pappé to Alef, he calls on historical associations abroad to settle his own personal accounts with the University of Haifa if and when their members will be approached for recommendations on promotions of Haifa's faculty:

To the president of the American Historical Society
To the president of the British Middle Eastern Society
To the president of the American Middle Eastern Association

Dear madam/sir,

I appeal to you as a member and as a colleague to voice your opinion and protest against a shameful decision taken by Haifa University on November 18, 2001. On that date, the university decided to disqualify an MA thesis that has originally passed cum laude in the department of Middle Eastern History.

[...]

The Israeli academia depends very much on the opinion of your members and association (if not for anything else, you are badly needed for the completion of promotion and tenure procedures). You cannot possibly allow them to evade the basic rules of decency and honesty even when the issue at hand is the Palestinian catastrophe, the history of which has bearings on the present conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

Your intervention and assistance would be most welcome and appreciated at these dark hours when Israeli academics can not find in themselves the courage to remain loyal to the basics rules of academic research and freedom.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Ilan Pappé
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Apropos ranks and truthfulness, I would like to put on record:

1. When Pappé is a co-editor with other Israeli scholars (i.e. Prof. Nevo or Prof. Ma'oz), he is a humble **senior lecturer** (his true rank). When he is alone, such as in the case of his famous article in the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, or his edited book *The Palestine Question* (London 1999), he promotes himself to **Professorship** (don't tell me it's the publishing house. Such items are always checked by the author).
2. Pappé claims to have written a book by the name of *A History of Modern Palestine and Israel*. According to the back cover of Pappé's *The Palestine Question*, *A History of Modern Palestine and Israel* appeared in 1997. According to the short notes on the editor inside *The Palestine Question*, the new book is still in the status of "forthcoming" (in 1999!). So far (fall of 2001) no one has seen the mysterious *History of Modern Palestine and Israel*.
3. These false presentations indicate a pattern. Pappé's show on Tantura is not his first delusion.
4. Defining Pappé as charlatan is therefore not just name calling. Combined with the points raised in my previous message, this imposture is sufficient basis for justifying this adjective in conjunction with his name.

Since I do not invent non-existing books and have to spend a lot of time in archives before writing them (and enjoy it much more than I enjoy arguing with charlatans), I close here my part of the discussion about Tantura and Pappé pending Katz's revised thesis (if we shall ever see it). I leave for everyone's individual judgment the question whether Pappé's allegations have any basis and if not — what conclusions should be drawn from his behaviour.

Yoav Gelber