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Eye of the Beholder

**His colleagues call him a traitor**

By Tom Segev



**Ilan Pappé: He describes the dean of the humanities faculty as "the chief of the Zionist thought police."**

(Photo: Roni Shitzer)

This story was supposed to have been top secret; there are not many state secrets that are guarded with the fanaticism with which the universities hide their internal squabbles. But Ilan Pappé, a senior lecturer in political science at Haifa University, is a very well-publicized individual, and therefore it was impossible to conceal for very long the fact that the university has started disciplinary, quasi-legal proceedings that could lead to his dismissal.

Yossi Ben-Arzi, dean of the humanities faculty, who has filed the complaint against him, said this week that his e-mail has been overflowing with letters and protests. "A world war," says Ben-Arzi. The university spokeswoman has also been getting queries from the foreign press. Pappé said this week that they are plotting to expel him for political reasons; he attacks the university with harsh words. Ben-Arzi says that he must be dismissed because he is impudent: "If it is so bad for him among us - he should go," says the dean. But Pappé is fighting for his place in the best way he knows: The Internet is on his side.

It seems like just a matter of insults, a passionate battle between people with huge egos at a local university, fighting each other tooth and nail. But their war is raging in the shadow of another war, a war with which Israel has not yet learned to live - the War of Independence. It all goes back to Tantura, a small village whose story has been haunting Haifa University for some years now - like the Palestinian Nakba (the Catastrophe) has been haunting Israel as a whole; and the university is getting more and more entangled.

A reminder: About four years ago, Theodore Katz, an MA student in the Department of the History of the Middle East, submitted a thesis at the center of which was a chapter on the occupation of the Arab village of Tantura, located at the foot of the Carmel, in May, 1948. Based on what Katz declared was recorded testimony of former inhabitants of the village, he came to the conclusion that soldiers of the Alexandroni Brigade of the Israel Defense Forces had apparently murdered several dozen villagers after the occupation. The thesis earned him a grade of 97; his supervisor

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was Prof. Kais Firro.

Alexandroni veterans filed a libel suit. During the trial, which was widely covered in Israel and aroused interest abroad, Katz retracted some of the main points in the chapter on Tantura. But immediately thereafter, he changed his mind and went back to maintaining his original claims. Haifa University set up a review committee; its members heard the recordings on which Katz had based his thesis and which contained the testimony of the witnesses he had interviewed. Discrepancies were found between the content of the tapes and what was written in the thesis. The university has allowed Katz to submit a revised version of the paper, and Katz is still working on it. In the introduction to the paper, Katz thanked Ilan Pappé for helping him "make this work what it is."

Pappé was also at Katz's side during the public scandal engendered by the thesis. Recently he made an effort to prove that indeed there had been a massacre at Tantura and that the university had done Katz an injustice when it set up the review committee. "When cowardice and stupidity meet - the result is usually on the fine line between farce and tragedy," he wrote. He attributed to the committee "ignorance or intellectual laziness." None of them is an expert on the Nakba, he complained.

Pappé's name is well-known worldwide as one of Israel's "new historians"; apart from Prof. (and novelist) A.B. Yehoshua, there is no lecturer better-known than Pappé. He is 47 years old, an expert on the history of the Palestinians, and very involved in researching their catastrophe of 1948, the Nakba. Known as the bad boy of Israeli historiography, he is one of the most popular lecturers at the university, famed for his sharp tongue and his political positions: He is a member of Hadash. This week he denied that he is working on an attempt to get elected to the Knesset, though he says that many people are urging him to do so. In the meantime, the exchanges of accusations between Pappé and his colleagues have grown harsher; there are those who see him as a "traitor." His main rival is Prof. Yoav Gelber, from the Department of the History of the Middle East, an expert on the history of the IDF. Gelber has identified himself as a supporter of Tsomet.

Sometimes it seems as though this is a methodological dispute about the use of oral testimony, but beneath the professional disagreements throb politics and personal enmity. Gelber tends to be stricter with people who transmit their memories and their knowledge to historians, arguing that often there is nothing more to what they have to say than "gossip."

Pappé: "For Gelber, the witness is a figure taken from the interrogation chambers of the Shin Bet or police headquarters ... Were oral testimony just 'gossip,' it would be difficult to reconstruct the Jewish Holocaust in Europe."

Predictably, Pappé has been accused of comparing the Palestinian tragedy to the Holocaust. He says the two are not identical, but there are several lines of similarity, among them the fact that both have given rise to "deniers." He sees Gelber as a "Nakba-denier." According to him, Gelber represents an ideological Zionist position that a priori rejects any possibility of Jewish war crimes in 1948.

Pappé tends to lash out a lot, and doesn't always hit the mark. Commenting on one of the members of the committee that reviewed Katz's paper and who expressed his opinion in the daily newspaper Ma'ariv, he wrote that this had been done before the committee member had had the opportunity to read the thesis; but this is not so. Of another member he wrote that in the work of the committee he had "sown the discourse common in the Israeli security services, where he served and is still serving."

(Pappé said this week: "So maybe he doesn't work for the Shin Bet, but interrogates prisoners in the army. So what? It's the same thing.") Of

committee member Prof. Ibrahim Geris, Pappe wrote that he had been brought onto the committee because "there was a need for an Arab as a fig-leaf."

On the press conference called by Haifa University Rector Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, to announce the review committee's conclusions, in the presence of lawyers and Alexandroni veterans, Pappe said: "The rector was bored ... The rector, it seemed, enjoyed torturing Teddy Katz a bit." According to him, the rector presided over a "nasty and mendacious campaign" in the Tantura affair. Pappe described the dean of the humanities faculty, Yossi Ben-Arzi, as "the chief of the Zionist thought police."

Pappe on the Land of Israel Studies Department: "The department does not evaluate its members by their achievements abroad (...) but contents itself with publications in the Hebrew language in journals edited by Gelber's friends from the Israeli army or partners to his ideological path ... In a department where almost all the members are not speakers of Arabic, they present the history of this country as if they were getting their salaries from the Jewish Agency, and they have not produced even a single critical research study, as compared to dozens of biased studies on the 1948 war."

The attack on the faculty of the Land of Israel Studies Department touches a sore point: The list of publications by the members of this department is quite modest; most of them are unknown abroad, and none of them is as well-known as Pappe. Pappe has heaped scorn on the people in the department for the fact that there is only one publisher, which is relatively new and not yet very prestigious, that accepts their work for publication in English. The books that Pappe has written have come out with more prestigious publishers. In the charge sheet against Pappe, Dean Ben-Arzi wrote that the members of the department have published their works in many languages.

Ben-Arzi said this week that Pappe's major sin was that he sent a letter to the American Historical Association, the Vatican of all the historians in the world, in which he called upon its members to protest against the way the university has dealt with the Katz affair. Pappe is a member of the association, as are some of his colleagues, who are against him. Ben-Arzi says that the appeal to the AHA could damage chances for advancement of members of the department, since they need recommendations from abroad, and could also affect their chances of publishing abroad and receiving invitations to conferences and sabbaticals. Apparently, the appeal to the AHA angered Ben-Arzi even more than the fact that Pappe is a signatory to the call to deny the universities in Israel their preferred status in Europe, because of the government's policies in the territories. The request to kick Pappe out of the university does not mention his involvement in this affair.

Ben-Arzi, a geographer of 52 who is a specialist in the history of the city of Haifa, identifies himself with the positions of Peace Now. He says that this is not a matter of freedom of speech or an attempt to attack Pappe for his anti-Zionist opinions. "This is a matter of non-collegial, unethical and immoral conduct, lies, badmouthing and impudence," says Ben-Arzi, and this is enough to justify Pappe's expulsion from the university. Some of the things Pappe has written have appeared only on the Internet; as he says, no one on the network is fussy about etiquette, and anyway, "Anyone who sticks to the rules of etiquette in an Israeli argument - will not manage to survive here."

The process of expelling Pappe was supposed to have been internal and secret. The university has a law faculty, but the "president of the academic disciplinary court" is Prof. Jacob Barnai, a historian who specializes in the history of the Jews in the Ottoman Empire. He is a member of the Land of Israel Studies Department, which Ben-Arzi feels has been insulted, and formally he is subordinate to Ben-Arzi. The "president of the academic

disciplinary court" can decide that there is no substance to the complaint and reject it outright, in part or in full. For there to be a "trial," two additional "judges" must be appointed, one of them a "public figure," a member of the university steering committee. In the case of a conviction, the "court" has a range of punishments at its disposal, the lightest of which is a warning and the most severe - expulsion.

This could become a quasi-political trial that arouses great interest and is well-publicized, centering around the question of how to be a non-Zionist Jewish historian in an Israeli university, political, opinionated, famous and not a little arrogant - without breaking the rules of the game. Pappe would gain worldwide publicity as a persecuted freedom-fighter and Haifa University would find itself on the list of international lepers. Jacob Barnai is not enthusiastic about the whole matter and on Tuesday decided that there is no call to discuss the accusation "in the form in which it has been submitted": Claims concerning badmouthing, blackening of reputations and slander must be clarified in a civil suit, or through the police, he ruled. The university's disciplinary court does not have the tools to investigate such claims. However, Barnai is prepared, in principle, to discuss claims of lack of collegiality or ethical deviations, such as appeals to organizations abroad, insults to colleagues and harm to their academic reputations. If a new charge sheet is received, he will consider it, he announced. In effect, it appears that Barnai has given his dean a chance to climb down from the tree.

### **The man who wanted to succeed Hitler**

On July 20, 1944, some of Adolf Hitler's opponents failed in an attempt to assassinate him. Had they succeeded in killing him, they may have appointed in his stead Carl Goerdeler, who had previously been the mayor of Leipzig. When he heard that the rebellion had failed, Goerdeler fled from his home, but several days later he was identified by a young woman who turned him in to the authorities. He was sentenced to death and executed. This week, the Institute for German History at Tel Aviv University played host to Goerdeler's daughter, Marianne Meyer-Krahmer. She has something to say about the limits of obedience, and about the insults she suffered after the war because of her father's deeds; in the small village where she applied for a job as a teacher, there were those who called her a "traitor."

She is a tall, blue-eyed woman of about 83; for most of her life she taught history and English and since her retirement she has been researching the story of her father's life. This is not a transparent story, nor is it entirely a story of heroism and nobility. Goerdeler was elected mayor of Leipzig in 1930; he was a royalist patriot who had been deeply hurt by the German defeat in World War I and found it hard to adopt the values of the Weimar Republic. But he was not a Nazi, although he belonged to a bourgeois nationalist party. The Nazis did not put him at the top of their list of enemies and he did not resign from his position immediately upon their election. He saw the Nazis as rabble and hated their thuggery, but initially managed to get along with them. In his capacity as mayor, he signed certain orders that were aimed at expelling Jews from public life, such as an order that prohibited them from using municipal swimming pools and the like. Anti-Semitism was a part of his cultural world, not an expression of ideological racism.

For four years he served in his post under the Nazi regime; the disagreement that finally led him to quit was a typical combination of a political-cultural dispute and a dispute over authority. The Nazis demanded that he get rid of a statue of Felix Mendelssohn, the composer of Jewish ancestry; Goerdeler refused, but once when he returned from a trip abroad he found that the statue had been whisked away in his absence. Goerdeler resigned and went to work for Bosch, the famous electrical appliance company.

He was allowed to travel abroad often on company business, and used his

trips to meet with diplomats and politicians. He told them that Hitler was planning a war. One of the heads of the British Foreign Office scolded him for badmouthing his country; this is not the behavior of a gentleman, he admonished. Once Goerdeler sent a memorandum to Chaim Weizmann, with a warning to British prime minister Neville Chamberlain not to continue his policy of reconciliation. Weizmann mentioned the document in his memoirs, but despite all efforts to locate it in archives, it has not yet been found.

In 1939, Goerdeler visited Palestine. It is not clear on whose behalf he came and for what purpose. His daughter assumes that the trip to the Land of Israel, like all his trips, was aimed at informing some of the heads of the military about the situation in the world; the plotters against Hitler were impressed and slated him for the job of the next chancellor, after Hitler was eliminated.

The report Goerdeler wrote on his return from Palestine has been preserved. He liked what he saw in Tel Aviv, a charming town on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea that did everything possible to look like a European city, with men in fedoras and women in white gloves. The streets and the shops and the people Goerdeler saw also caught the eye of Rudi Weissenstein, the photographer. His works, many of which are captivating, are now on display in the turbine hall of the Reading power station in Tel Aviv and have thus far been visited by about 50,000 people; apparently they are attracted by the force of nostalgia for the old days. Goerdeler was also impressed by the Zionist hope.

His daughter said this week that she admires her father's ability to overcome the culture of obedience, and to bring himself to a position in which he could work against the regime, in utter contrast to his basic worldview, whereby the first obligation of a citizen is to obey the law.

This is the objector's first problem, said Meyer-Krahmer: to extricate himself from "the rule of law." Somehow Goerdeler managed to maintain connections with the Nazis even when he was in prison; before he was executed he wrote down his plan for the reconstruction of the cities of Germany after the war. His wife and his daughter and other members of his family were also arrested and sent to the Buchenwald concentration camp and other camps, but their conditions of detention were not as terrible as those of the other prisoners.

The greatest shock struck her after the war, she said, when she found that despite the fall of the Nazis, and perhaps because of it, many people linked her to her father's "treason." She found it hard to make friends with people, and tended to conceal her identity; when they discovered who she was they hung back from her, she says. This is the objector's second problem: very often the nation on whose behalf he acts does not support him. Meyer-Krahmer has also experienced the hypocrisy that she says characterizes Germany to this day: The authorities, including the education authorities - have glorified the opposition to Hitler, in contrast to the position of the general public, and have exaggerated its dimensions, as though it had reflected the stance of the German people as a whole. In reality, only very few opposed Hitler.

After the war, most Germans evaded a real reconsideration of history, said Meyer-Krahmer, and they ignored the guilt of many circles, among them jurists and professors. In Germany to this day, there is no mass culture of political refusal, she said. The Germans' attitude toward opponents of the regime is similar to Israeli attitudes toward Jewish attempts to fight the Nazis. As in Germany, in Israel they have tended to glorify the importance of the very few who tried to revolt; to this day they say "Holocaust and heroism," as if the two were of equal weight. At the conference held by the Institute for German History, they also discussed the revolt in the ghettos, as though it were part of a single subject, refusal and revolt.

Meyer-Krahmer visits Israel frequently, and also often meets with groups of

Israeli youth who come to Germany. She tells them that the individual's obligation to act against the regime in his country begins at the point at which the regime demands that he commit crimes that are not essential for self-defense. Yes, it is not always easy to know when this happens; the Devil often hides inside a golden robe. She believes that the obligation to refuse the Devil's orders is the obligation of the individual to his people and to his state, himself and his children. She is very grateful to her father for having done what he did, but no, she said, the German experience does not promise objectors that they will ever be considered heroes.

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