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Comment about 6-3-02

Comment Header: Ilan Pappé and the Tantura Blood Libel
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1. Ilan Pappé reiterates indefatigably that a massacre took place in Tantura. Unfortunately, saying it does not make it so. While there is a consensus that around 80 Arabs and 14 Israeli soldiers were killed in a battle when the village was occupied, Pappé's allegation about a cold-blooded massacre after the conquest that raised the number of Arab victims to 250 is a vicious and unsubstantiated blood libel.
2. Pappé consistently conceal his true role in the thesis about Tantura. He appears as the innocent who set out to defend poor Teddy Katz against the forces of evil. In fact, Pappé instructed Katz and he defends mainly himself, not his protégé.
3. The legal decision in the Tantura case was not on a matter of procedure as Pappé claims, trying to minimize its significance. It emanated from the falsifications and distortions that had been revealed during Katz's testimony in court and cross-examination - more numerous than Pappé admits. Subsequently, Katz voluntarily withdrew the charges he had made and undertook his yet unfulfilled public apology.
4. The rest of the proceedings concerned Katz's attempt to go back on his commitment, apparently under pressure of those radical anti-Israelis who financed his defence. Of course, they did not raise the money for him to apologize, but to fight the Nakbah trial, and he let them down.
5. The university committee consisting of experts on Middle Eastern history and the Arabic language that re-examined Katz's thesis has no connection with the trial as Pappé asserts. The rector appointed it upon a demand from within the university.
6. The historiographic-methodological issue in this case has not been a choice between oral and written evidence. It has been the unprofessional manner in which Pappé and his protégé, Teddy Katz, has handled oral evidence and documentary material alike, and their tampering with both testimonies and documents.
7. The university's committee has exposed several instances of this juggling around. Consequently it abolished the thesis but allowed Katz to present a revised version. So far, he has not done it.
8. Pappé compares "Jewish" and "Arab" testimonies, or "Villagers testimonies" as opposed to IDF reports and other documents. He

asserts that Tantura villagers' stories should be accepted as conveying the "truth" (while on other instances he denies the existence of "truth" altogether) and dismiss off-hand the version of the Israeli veterans or contemporary reports. There are plenty of contradictions and inconsistencies among the villagers' stories, so how can they be accepted en bloc?

9. By claiming that testimonies of Arab refugees should be accepted just as those of Jewish Holocaust survivors, Pappé attempts to create a comparative paradigm that puts the Holocaust and the Nakbah on the same level. Pappé implies thereby that the Palestinians deserve compensation for the Nakbah - politically and financially - as the Jews were compensated for the Holocaust. This comparison is particularly irritating and spreads a strong odor of Holocaust denial. Obviously, there can be no comparison between the Holocaust and a war fought mutually by two armed adversaries that occasionally perpetrated atrocities against each other. Not surprisingly, Pappé ignores systematically massacres perpetrated by Palestinians such as Gush Etzion, the Hadassa convoy or the refineries in Haifa, etc. *A la guerre comme la guerre*, and the war of 1948 was a contest that the Palestinians should not have started in the first place. They have only themselves and their Arab allies to blame for its consequences. No one would say the same of the European Jews in 1933-45.

10. Pappé claims that four documents from the IDF archives "prove" the massacre in Tantura. Pappé's selective quotations from these documents are a simple deceit. None of the documents mention or hint at a massacre. For example, Pappé interpreted the word sabotage (Khabala), as massacre (Tevakh). This is something that the present Hebrew language, all the more so the Hebrew of 1948, would not accept.

11. Pappé also relies on the memoirs of a Palestinian writer who tells the story of "a survivor who arrived in Haifa after the massacre and conveyed to the writer [of the book] what he had seen with his own eyes." Haifa had been occupied a month before Tantura. No survivors from Tantura could arrive in the town and the writer was at the time in a hospital in Beirut. These details, cast a heavy shadow on the credibility of the story as well as on Pappé's competence as a researcher.

12. Pappé and Katz disregard a contemporary report of an eyewitness that categorically refutes their libel. Tantura refugees were handed over to the Red Cross delegates. Free from possible Israeli pressures, they nonetheless did not complain to the delegates about a massacre. They also did not complain about it to the Iraqi army when they arrived in its territory (upon their own request). Two months after the fall of the village, a woman from Tantura recited the events of that night in a broadcast on Ramallah radio. She described alleged rapes and destruction but did not say a word about a massacre. All these

contemporary sources are far more reliable than fifty years old fantasies of witnesses or of their manipulative interviewers.

13. Pappe has covered up his fiasco in the Tantura blood libel by complaints of virtual persecution, by screaming for international protection from attempts to discipline him and by nasty verbal hooliganism against his critics. His arguments in the Katz case as well as his personal comments on the consequences of the Tantura affair should be taken not with a grain - but with a mountain of salt.