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Comment about 6-3-02

Comment Header: Dr. Pappe and truthseeking, the oximoron.
Posted By: Comment
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Motto: "... Indeed the struggle is about ideology, not about facts. Who knows what facts are? We try to convince as many people as we can that our interpretation of the facts is the correct one, and we do it because of ideological reasons, not because we are truthseekers..."

Pappe in "AN INTERVIEW OF ILAN PAPPE", By Baudouin Loos, Brussels, 29 November 1999,
<http://msanews.mynet.net/Scholars/Loos/pappe.html>

In response to Pappe's posting (6-3-02, "Why the University of Haifa Wants to Get Rid of Me") and Gelber's detailed comments (6-6-02, "Ilan Pappe and the Tantura Blood Libel"):

I have no personal stake in the the Tantura Blood Libel--Neither am I a historian, nor am I employed by Haifa University, nor am I politically committed to any identifiable political persuasion. I am your garden variety of an aging professor of Electrical Engineering, who devoted his better years to research Maxwell's theory of Electromagnetism.

Presently I am maintaining the listserv list "Academia" (academia@techunix.technion.ac.il). When the Teddy Katz Masters thesis came to light, the question of academic fraud in the service of a political agenda came up. The "blood libel" as it was dubbed, relates to the ensuing libel case brought by the Veterans of the Alexandroni Brigade against Katz and others. These are the very people, only a handful still alive, who were accused of a wanton bloody massacre of defenseless villagers. Now this is per excellence the stuff modern academic issues are made off! History, academic intrigue, alleged fraud, politics, the law courts, and the interaction of all these in the societal environment of Israel entangled in a war against terrorism. To help the list subscribers to sort out the issues, I have collected every scrap of information related to the issue. This unprofessional (but very comprehensive, I dare say) archive can be found at <http://www.ee.bgu.ac.il/~censor/katz-directory>. It contains the thesis,

the court minutes, affidavits, media articles and much more. Naturally much of the material is in Hebrew, but there is enough in English to interest international readers.

Dr. Pappé's involvement in the Katz thesis per se and in the whole imbroglio is very deep and personal. While trying to depict himself as the surgeon who stands over the patient in the operating theater and deals with the malignancy, he is in fact the patient himself. I read his articles in the Journal of Palestine Studies about the alleged Tantura massacre and the Katz thesis, and if I were not afforded to the broader canvas, they would seem to me as legitimate academic research work (I hasten to say that I am not qualified to referee articles in this academic discipline, so this is only the layman's common sense opinion). As I understand it, Dr. Pappé is the AUTHOR of the massacre story, not the NARRATOR.

In order to understand Pappé's methods and methodology, it suffices to read the motto above. Even a dumb researcher in the physics of Electromagnetism understands that historical research cannot be conducted by applying the razor of Popperian falsificationism. But from there to waving any claim of pursuing historical fact, the distance is measured in parsecs.

It appears to me that what has happened in the Tantura historical case is that Dr. Pappé and Mr. Katz even superseded themselves: not only is the historical methodology of event interpretation unrestricted by any rules (the narrative itself is the truth, so to speak, and everybody have their own truth), even the modification of oral testimony to streamline it with the ideological/political agenda should not be despised. Or am I wrong? Please Dr. Pappé, please Mr. Katz, correct me if I am wrong.

It is against this backdrop that we have to see the disciplinary proceeding initiated in Haifa University against Pappé, and meanwhile stopped in its tracks. Dr. Pappé cleverly cultivates a horde of enemies, mainly academics and officials in his university, and plays brinkmanship in badmouthing and ridiculing them, in order to prove that they are after his hide because of his dissenting anti-zionist and anti-israeli statements. To me it was amusing to see how these otherwise smart people fell for his shenanigans.

Of course you can see that I am not a great admirer of Dr. Pappé, but I do my utmost to separate fact from personal opinion, and thus conscientiously trying to be truthful. My overall impression of the trial fiasco is that it is a tempest in a teacup. Nobody so far has been defrocked of his/her tenure in Israeli universities.

Dan Censor

Professor of Electrical Engineering,
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev,
Beer-Sheva, Israel.
censor@ee.bgu.ac.il

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