

Israel's Secret

On the Side of the Road - The story of Israel told through the memories of those who participated in the Nakba

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Here in Virginia, U.S.A., I'm aware that the native people were murdered, driven out, and moved westward. But my personal connection to that crime is weak, and frankly I'm too busy trying to rein in my government's current abuses to focus on the distant past. Pocahontas is a cartoon, the Redskins a football team, and remaining Native Americans almost invisible. Protests of the European occupation of Virginia are virtually unheard of.

But what if it had just happened a moment ago, historically speaking? What if my parents had been children or teenagers? What if my grandparents and their generation had conceived and executed the genocide? What if a large population of survivors and refugees were still here and just outside? What if they were protesting, nonviolently and violently — including with suicide bombings and homemade rockets launched out of West Virginia? What if they marked the Fourth of July as the Great Catastrophe and made it a day of mourning? What if they were organizing nations and institutions all over the world to boycott, divest, and sanction the United States and seek its prosecution in court? What if, before being driven out, the Native Americans had built hundreds of towns with buildings of masonry, hard to make simply disappear?

In that case, it would be more difficult for those unwilling to face the injustice not to notice. We would have to notice, but tell ourselves something comforting, if we refused to deal with the truth. The lies we tell ourselves would need to be much stronger than they are. A rich mythology would be necessary. Everyone would have to be taught from childhood onward that the native people didn't exist, left voluntarily, attempted vicious crimes justifying their punishment, *and* were not really people at all but irrational killers still trying to kill us for no reason. I'm aware that some of those excuses conflict with others, but propaganda generally works better with multiple claims, even when they can't all be true at the same time. Our government might even have to make questioning the official story of the creation of the United States an act of treason.

Israel *is* that imagined United States, just formed in our grandparents' day, two-thirds of the people driven out or killed, one-third remaining but treated as sub-human. Israel is that place that must tell forceful lies to erase a past that is never really past. Kids grow up in Israel not knowing. We in the United States, whose government gives Israel billions of dollars worth of free weapons every year with which to continue the killing (weapons with names like Apache and Black Hawk), grow up not knowing. We all look at the "peace process," this endless charade of decades, and deem it inscrutable, because we've been educated to be incapable of knowing what the Palestinians want even as they shout it and sing it and chant it: they want to return to their homes.

But the people who did the deed are, in many cases, still alive. Men and women who, in 1948, massacred and evicted Palestinians from their villages can be put on camera recounting what they did. Photographs of what was done and accounts of what life was like before the Nakba (the Catastrophe) exist in great volume. Towns that were taken over still stand. Families know that they live in stolen houses. Palestinians still have keys to those houses. Villages that were destroyed still remain visible in outline on Google Earth, the trees still standing, the stones of demolished houses still nearby.

Lia Tarachansky is an Israeli-Canadian journalist who covers Israel and Palestine for the Real News Network. She was born in Kiev, Ukraine, the Soviet Union. When she was a child, her family moved to a settlement in the West Bank, part of the ongoing continuation of the process begun in 1948. She had a good childhood with a real sense of community in that “settlement,” or what we would call a housing subdivision built on native farm land in violation of a treaty made with savages. She grew up not knowing. People pretended nothing had been there before. Then she found out. Then she made a movie to tell the world.

The film is called [*On the Side of the Road*](#) and it tells the story of the founding of Israel in 1948 through the memories of those who killed and expelled the people of Palestine, through the memories of survivors, and through the perspectives of those who have grown up since. 1948 was a 1984 year, a year of doublespeak. Israel was created in blood. Two-thirds of the people of that land were made refugees. Most of them and their descendants are refugees still. Those who remained in Israel were made second-class citizens and forbidden to mourn the dead. But the crime is referred to as liberation and independence. Israel celebrates its Independence Day while Palestinians mourn the Nakba.

The film takes us to the sites of vanished villages destroyed in 1948 and in 1967. In some cases, villages have been replaced with woods and made into national parks. The imagery is suggestive of what the earth might do if humanity departed. But this is the work of part of humanity attempting to erase another human group. If you put up a sign commemorating the village, the government removes it quickly.

The film shows us those who participated in the Nakba. They recall shooting the people they called Arabs and whom they’d been told were primitive and worthless, but who they knew had a modern literate society with some 20 newspapers in Jaffa, with feminist groups, with everything then thought of as modern. “Go to Gaza!” they told the people whose homes and land they were stealing and destroying. One man recalling what he did begins with an attitude almost bordering on the carefree heartlessness one sees in former killers in the Indonesian film *The Act of Killing*, but eventually he’s explaining that what he’s done has been eating away at him for decades.

In [*On the Side of the Road*](#) we meet a young Palestinian man from a permanent refugee camp who calls a place his home although he’s never been there, and who says that his children and grandchildren will do likewise. We see him obtain a 12-hour pass to visit the place his grandparents lived. He spends half the 12 hours getting through check points. The place he visits is a National Park. He sits and talks about what he wants. He wants nothing related to revenge. He wants no harm done to Jews. He wants no people evicted from anywhere. He says that, according to his grandparents, Jews and Muslims lived together amicably before 1948. That, he says, is what he wants — that and to return home.

Israelis concerned by their nation's open secret take some inspiration in the film from an art project in Berlin. There people posted signs with images on one side and words on the other. For example: a cat on one side, and this on the other: "Jews are no longer allowed to own pets." So, in Israel, they made signs of a similar nature. For example: a man with a key on one side, and on the other, *in German*: "It is forbidden to mourn on the Day of Independence." The signs are greeted by vandalism and angry, racist threats. The police accuse those who posted the signs of "disturbing law and order," and forbid them in the future.

At Tel Aviv University we see students, Palestinian and Jewish, hold an event to read out the names of villages that were destroyed. Nationalists waving flags come to try to shout them down. These properly educated Israelis describe cities as having been "liberated." They advocate expelling all Arabs. A member of the Israeli parliament tells the camera that Arabs want to exterminate Jews and rape their daughters, that the Arabs threaten a "holocaust."

The filmmaker asks an angry Israeli woman, "If you were an Arab, would you celebrate the state of Israel?" She refuses to allow the possibility of seeing things from someone else's point of view to enter her head. She replies, "I'm not an Arab, thank God!"

A Palestinian challenges a nationalist very politely and civilly, asking him to explain his views, and he swiftly walks away. I was reminded of a talk I gave last month at a university in New York at which I criticized the Israeli government, and a professor angrily walked out — a professor who'd been eager to debate other topics on which we disagreed.

A woman who participated in the Nakba says in the film, in an effort to excuse her past actions, "We didn't know it was a society." She clearly believes that killing and evicting people who seem "modern" or "civilized" is unacceptable. Then she goes on to explain that pre-1948 Palestine was just what she says mustn't be destroyed. "But you lived here," says the filmmaker. "How could you not know?" The woman replies simply, "We knew. We knew."

A man who took part in killing Palestinians in 1948 excuses himself as having been only 19. And "there will always be new 19-year-olds," he says. Of course there are also 50-year-olds who will follow evil orders. Happily, there are also 19-year-olds who will not.

Screenings

Nov 28, 2013 | Israel Premiere | [Cinematheque Tel Aviv](#)

Jan 21, 2014 | Israel | Jaffa | [Anna Lou Lou](#)

Jan 28, 2014 | Israel | Be'er Sheva | [Multaga Center](#)

Feb 08, 2014 | Georgia | EU Peace Conference

March 04, 2014 | Palestine | [Ramallah](#)

April 02, 2014 | Belgium | [Eye on Palestine Festival](#)

May 22, 2014 | Israel | [Tel Aviv University](#)

May 22, 2014 | Israel | Amnesty International (staff)

July 24, 2014 | Israel | Herzeliya (private)

Sept 28, 2014 | Canada | [One World Festival, Ottawa](#)

Oct 04, 2014 | Israel | Jaffa (private)

Oct 07, 2014 | Palestine | [Beit Sahour](#)

Oct 27, 2014 | Canada | [Victoria, BC](#)

Oct 28, 2014 | Canada | [Courtaney, BC](#)

Oct 29, 2014 | Canada | [UBC, Vancouver, BC](#)

Oct 29, 2014 | Canada | [Peretz Center,Vancouver, BC](#)
Oct 30, 2014 | USA | [Social Justice Film Fest, Seattle](#)
Oct 31, 2014 | USA | [Kitsap Country, WA](#)
Nov 1, 2014 | USA | [Portland, Oregon](#)
Nov 3, 2014 | USA | [Berkeley, California](#)
Nov 4, 2014 | USA | [Walnut Creek, California](#)
Nov 5, 2014 | USA | [Laventine Center, LA, California](#)
Nov 7, 2014 | USA | [Los Angeles, California](#)
Nov 8, 2014 | USA | [Orange County, California](#)
Nov 10, 2014 | USA | [New York, NY](#)
Nov 12, 2014 | USA | [Santa Barbara, California](#)
Nov 15, 2014 | Palestine | [East Jerusalem](#)
Nov 17, 2014 | USA | [Rochester, NY](#)
Nov 18, 2014 | USA | [Boston, MA](#)
Nov 19, 2014 | USA | [Brandeis, Boston, MA](#)
Nov 20, 2014 | USA | [New York, NY](#)
Nov 22, 2014 | USA | [New York, NY](#)
Dec 1, 2014 | USA | [Princeton, NJ](#)
Dec 3, 2014 | USA | [NYU, NY](#)
Dec 4, 2014 | USA | [Philadelphia, PA](#)
Dec 5, 2014 | USA | [Baltimore, MD](#)
Dec 7, 2014 | USA | [Baltimore, MD](#)
Dec 9, 2014 | USA | [Washington DC](#)
Dec 10, 2014 | USA | [Washington DC](#)
Dec 10, 2014 | USA | [American University](#)
Dec 13, 2014 | USA | [Washington DC](#)
Dec 15, 2014 | USA | [Washington DC](#)

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