**Thinking the Past Politically: Palestine, Power and Pedagogy**

Claire Norton and Mark Donnelly

**Abstract**

This article explores the socio-political, economic and legal implications of what counts as historical knowledge. Academic history has long been practiced *as if* its value and authority reside in its ability to produce truth, but pretending that that history occupies an epistemologically foundational position is an illusion that needs to be abandoned. History is a discourse whose sources of cultural power is ultimately social and institutional. By examining narrations of the *Nakba*, the article focuses attention back on to the political dimensions of historical practices and how hegemonic historical interpretations of Israel’s establishment in 1948 are closely intertwined with questions of identity and legitimisation. The second half of the article considers a number of reflexive, vernacular narratives on the subject of Palestinian and Israeli pasts that seek to make a direct ethical or political intervention and challenge the dominant discourse. In many ways, these works foreground how traditional academic histories tend to function as a representative of hegemonic discourses. They are more effective in making clear the issues, framing the arguments, engaging with broader, non-academic audiences and stimulating ethical discussion and political action. The focus on how broader mnemonic and cultural orientations towards ‘pastness’ have been mobilised effectively as cultural and rhetoricalresources in tactical campaigns for socio-political justice culminates with an analysis of the case of the American-Palestinian Rasmea Odeh. This example shows how historicising praxis can be used to both reinforce and challenge state power as manifested by the judiciary.

**Keywords:** history; Palestine; Israel; vernacular past-talk; politics; power; Rasmea Odeh

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‘[H]istory writing is a dialectical process fusing ideological agenda and political developments with historical evidence…’ (Pappé 2009, 6).

‘History and memory are endowed with political meaning, but they are not endowed with one, single meaning: different, viable meanings can be drawn.’ (Confino 2012, 56).

**Introduction[[1]](#footnote-1)**

In ‘The Vicissitudes of the 1948 Historiography of Israel’, Ilan Pappé discusses how ‘the writing of history absorbs and represents ideological disputes and political developments’ (Pappé 2009, 7).[[2]](#footnote-2) He argues that trends in Israeli historiography are closely linked to political events and societal currents, particularly the changing dynamics of the Israeli-Palestine peace process. Pappé contends that in the context of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in the 1980s, the first Palestinian uprising and the Oslo peace process there was a development in narratives of the 1948 war by the so-called ‘new historians’ who began to write what some have termed post-Zionist history. These accounts challenged the classical Zionist meta-narrative and, in common with Palestinian accounts, acknowledged that massacres, ethnic cleansing and war crimes were inflicted on the Palestinian population in 1948 (Pappé 2009, 7-8). This intervention in the 1948 historiographical debate was brought to an end when most of the Israeli media and academia rallied behind the Zionist consensus that emerged as a response to the second intifada in 2000 (Pappé 2009, 8). The emergence of a ‘neo-Zionist historiography’ at this time, Pappé argues, does not differ significantly ‘from a purely factual standpoint’ from the history of the earlier ‘new historians’; instead it differs in its interpretation of the ethnic cleansing, the expulsions and massacres of Palestinians. While the new historians saw this as evidence of human rights abuses or war crimes, the neo-Zionist historians interpret the same events as normal, justified, or even commendable acts that facilitated the creation of a secure, predominantly Jewish state (Pappé 2009, 9, 11-12).

Pappé’s discussion of the historiography of 1948 epitomises how questions around what gets to count as historical knowledge can matter politically. The procedural norms that have to be observed in order for particular iterations of propositions, narratives, interpretive readings, textual forms and material artefacts to be categorised as ‘historical’ are always tangled up in networks of other social practices and relations of power. And yet as Kalle Pihlainen has rightly observed, discussions of what constitutes historical knowledge are usually framed as essentially epistemological questions (Pihlainen 2011, 469, 480-1). [[3]](#footnote-3) Historians rarely acknowledge that their institutionally accredited power to regulate what counts as legitimate past-talk might have social or political consequences. They prefer to regard this function of their work as being a kind of ideologically neutral and morally-responsible knowledge audit: more like a referee overseeing agreed-upon rules among players than a coercive policing operation that favours some interests at the expense of others. Todd May saw why this was important when he pointed out that the political effects of historicising praxis can be ‘all the more telling because of the mantle of political impartiality in which it cloaks itself’ (May 1995, 92).

In this article, we examine discussions of the *Nakba* in Palestine-Israel as a way of focusing attention back onto the political dimensions of historical practices. In doing so, we recognise that what is at stake politically when it comes to historicising past events varies widely between cases. Whereas most historiographical disputes only interest relatively small communities of specialists, it is easy to see how attempts to secure and defend a hegemonic historical interpretation of Israel’s establishment in 1948 have important political implications across transnational public spheres. Nevertheless, while 1948 is a particularly useful (and radical) case study for illustrating our central arguments, we do not believe that our critical position on historical practices only holds value when it is applied to similarly politically contentious historical debates. We maintain that history as an academic discipline should always be subjected to general questions about its political responsibilities because it operates, in Martin Davies’s description, as a ‘*social practice that not only organises the world in the shape of past events, but imposes its practice as the sole, exclusive way of organising it*’ (Davies 2006, 3 emphasis in original).Academic history has long been practiced *as if* its value and authority reside in its ability to produce truth, where truth is understood as correspondence of sorts to a noumenal reality. But pretending that that history occupies an epistemologically foundational position is an illusion that needs to be abandoned. History is a discourse whose sources of cultural power are ultimately social and institutional (Davies 2006; Davies 2010; Jenkins 2009).[[4]](#footnote-4) True, in our current post-foundational intellectual culture we have learned to be sceptical about epistemological claims in all fields of knowledge. In this respect, we recognise that history is no more or less contingent, positioned and rhetorical than other discourses. But what does make it distinctive is its widespread cultural status as a special kind of discourse that purports to be able to explain features of the world as being an outcome of ‘historical processes’ or ‘developments’. This, we argue, is why historical practices need to be critiqued in terms of their ability to produce or legitimise political effects, and not simply in relation to methodological, formal and other professional criteria.

Advocating a critique of history along these consequentialist lines is another way of making the case that Hayden White has been making since the 1960s about the value of placing historical practices in the service of emancipatory or progressive political projects (White 1966; 2011; 2014).[[5]](#footnote-5) His argument that the past should be appropriated in ways that, for example, contribute to serving marginalised and oppressed groups in the present retains an inspirational force. But as White explains in his recent work, there is little reason to hope that academic historians might be capable of performing such a political role. More important, according to White, is what he calls (after Oakeshott) the construction of the ‘practical past’: the past that is constituted by practices and representational forms that lie outside the borders of academic history’s professional codes; a past that often does resonate in the social conversation and which can be used as a store of tactical resources for one’s conduct in the world (White 2014, 3-24). Therefore we also intend to explore in this article how vernacular, popular and public forms of past-talk – the broader mnemonic and cultural orientations towards ‘pastness’ that characterise most people’s sense of the historical imaginary – have been (and can continue to be) mobilised effectively as cultural and rhetoricalresources in tactical campaigns for socio-political justice.[[6]](#footnote-6) (In the context of our chosen case study, we would understand ‘justice’ to involve the necessity of guaranteeing the human rights of all involved in the conflict, adherence to UN resolutions, the end of occupation and a fair division of resources.) We then ask how academic engagement with these examples of past-talk might provide a model for a transformed, reinvented version of ‘institutional history’ that could provide it with a broader social relevance and with a more openly-acknowledged political orientation towards ‘the solution of practical problems in the present’ (White 2012, 127, quoted by Pihlainen 2015).[[7]](#footnote-7)

**The Tantura Massacre: politics and silence**

Historical accounts of the 1948 Tantura massacre, including the controversial MA dissertation written by Teddy Katz, provide an apposite example of how state apparatuses, here the educational and judicial systems, as well as the media and academic publishing practices, work via institutional coercion to silence or permit different accounts of the past.[[8]](#footnote-8) It demonstrates the inherently politicised nature of institutional histories and thus challenges the claim of history to being a truth-seeking/truth-establishing discourse. Before exploring these points in more detail it may be useful to provide a brief overview of the case. Teddy Katz submitted a MA dissertation to Haifa University that was awarded a very high mark in 1999. One of the chapters was about the ethnic cleansing of the village of Tantura in 1948. He collected oral testimony from Palestinians and members of the Alexandroni Brigade, which, together with the limited textual sources available, very strongly suggested that there had been a massacre of up to 250 Palestinians after the occupation of the village by Israeli forces. A few months later a local journalist published a story based on Katz’s thesis, after which the surviving Brigade veterans decided to sue Katz for libel. The trial, which began in late 2000, concentrated on six occasions where Katz had mis-translated or over-generously interpreted what the witnesses had said. No discrepancies were found in the other 224 references to events that transpired at Tantura. After two days of the trial, despite Katz’s defence team and supporters looking forward to the subject being discussed in an Israeli court, Katz, following pressure from friends and family, and suffering from health problems, agreed to a request by one of his legal team to sign an agreement in which he apologised for fabricating evidence. Although the following day he withdrew his apology and requested that the trial continue, the judge refused. When the case was taken to the Supreme Court, again the judge ruled against resuming the trial. Subsequently, Haifa University set up a commission of inquiry and investigated Katz’s thesis. They ostensibly found faults and recommended that his work should be disqualified. He was later permitted to submit a revised version of his thesis, which now only focused on the case of Tantura. A special panel was organized to assess it. Two members of the panel awarded it very high marks, two failed it, and one gave it an average mark – Katz was eventually awarded a non-research masters’ degree as his thesis was deemed to have failed. Lastly, a couple of years later Ilan Pappé (at that time employed by Haifa University) together with a colleague attempted to organize a conference on the historiography of 1948 at Haifa University at which Teddy Katz and Udi Adiv were due to speak. However, the university rector ordered that the conference be cancelled on the grounds that particular bureaucratic forms required for the event to take place had not been completed correctly. After re-describing the event as a departmental symposium (which invoked fewer bureaucratic controls), Pappé and other academics due to take part found that the venue they had booked was locked and security guards were waiting outside to escort them from the site. Eventually the research papers had to be presented by speakers in a very informal way in the university cafeteria (Pappé 2010, ch. 6; Pappé 2007, 133-35).

This example provides a clear illustration of how state institutions, judicial and educational, can act to silence counter-hegemonic narratives. While people may want to believe that academic history as taught in universities and as published in journal articles and monographs is neutral, non-partisan and objective, the example of Teddy Katz’s thesis shows that this is not necessarily so.[[9]](#footnote-9) The assumption that academics cannot and do not leave their political beliefs outside the university when they go to work is illustrated by Benny Morris in a 2004 article on the Tantura case. Here, in an off-hand manner, he provides background information on the various examiners involved with Katz’s second MA thesis. We presume that Morris expected his readers to interpret these personal details as evidence that explained the examiners’ political perspectives on the historic events of 1948, and also their current views on Palestine, the occupied territories, Israel and Palestinian refugees (Morris 2004).[[10]](#footnote-10) The implication is that the examiners’ political perspectives determined their evaluation of the thesis: those predisposed to overlook the expulsions and atrocities of 1948 would react negatively to Katz’s thesis, while those of Arab background or who worked on the peace process would be more sympathetic to it.

Of course, what is at stake in the Katz case is not simply a challenge to a dominant historiographical discourse; it is also a political challenge, because histories of 1948 directly relate to the legitimacy of claims to disputed land in the present. Moreover, the historiography of 1948 has, for Israeli society, the status of an Althusserian foundational myth that not only legitimises, but also maintains the existing social order. The Katz case does however clearly demonstrate how academia, media and the state’s educational and judicial institutions all provide a ‘professional and scholarly scaffold’ for hegemonic narrations of the past (Pappé 2009, 7-8). Far from achieving hegemonic status because of their purported mimetic resemblance to the past, historical accounts generate cultural authority from the political, ideological and aesthetic values that they embody. People prefer historical narratives that resonate with them ethically, politically and ideologically, and which are composed as stories that persuade them with their aesthetic qualities. Alon Confino’s recent article on Tantura exemplifies how a historical account can become part of a historiographical hegemony in this way. Confino argues that ‘[m]eanings of the past emerge when a historian commingles evidence with an opportunity of art, with a poetic act that brings human life to the course of events. It means to capture the historical sensations of a given past’ (Confino 2012, 43). He explains how in his article he tried ‘to present one such historical sensation from the war of 1948’ in both text and images (Confino 2012, 43).

Rhetorically, Confino locates the ethnic cleansing (he prefers the term forced migration) of Palestinians from the nascent Israeli state/Mandate Palestine within stories of other twentieth-century population transfers, which he argues were ultimately sanctioned by the international community as humanitarian and a means by which minority rights could be protected. He also positions it within stories of miracles that felicitously resolved seemingly intractable problems (Confino 2012, 27, 32, 37, 38-9, 40-42, 25-7).[[11]](#footnote-11) While he acknowledges in part the brutality that was involved in the forced departure of Palestinians from Tantura, he is notably reticent on the subjects of violence and killing. Although he notes that keeping quiet about actual deeds conforms to ‘a pattern of silence of the generation of 1948’, a ‘stillness’ that they display with regard to their war experiences that may just be ‘the first indicator for the historian that there is something to hide’, he employs just such silence or muted stillness to great rhetorical effect in the article (Confino 2012, 29). For example, he mentions that in court Katz retracted his claim that the Alexandroni Brigade had committed a massacre and published an apology, but does not add that Katz subsequently retracted his retraction and (unsuccessfully) asked for the court case on the libel claim to resume. He does not respond to, or discuss, claims that a massacre happened at Tantura and declines to discuss the Alexandroni Brigade’s denials of Katz’s claims.[[12]](#footnote-12) He does however claim that in the article he will concentrate on ‘those events in Tantura the soldiers did not speak openly about’, events that they kept silent about, events that generated a ‘bottled-up sense of guilt’ (Confino 2012, 30). He cites an ‘off the record’ interview by a Brigade veteran at an event commemorating the Brigade’s capture of Tantura in which the veteran states that he would never forget the crying, shouting, and lamentation when the women, children and elderly were forcibly removed from Tantura in 1948 (Confino 2012, 29-30). Confino reproduces the scrap of paper on which the veteran drew a schematic of the expulsion: a piece of paper that accidentally survived, a piece of paper that ‘the historian was not supposed to have possession of’ (Confino 2012, 30 and 46). Reflecting on this single piece of paper Confino recalls Carlo Ginzberg’s rejoinder to Hayden White that ‘the voice of a single witness is enough to reach a certain historical reality and therefore some historical truth’ (Confino 2012, 30). Confino asks: ‘what did the soldiers think they were doing […] how did it merge with their collective sense of self and of Jewish identity? What images of their personal or collective pasts did the crying of desperate refugees evoke in them’? But what he does not ask is: was there a massacre? (Confino 2012, 30).

Confino wants to move the historiography of 1948 in the direction of cultural history – he wants to explore the ‘culture, memories, feelings and sensibilities that made Jews and Arabs behave as they did’ (Confino 2012, 38). One way that he does this – one way that he presents a ‘historical sensation’ – a ‘historical sensation’ that plays with the form of academic history – is through a series of twenty-two photographs of the expulsion and repopulation of the village. The photos that Confino uses to create his ‘historical sensation’ of 1948 are fairly benign in the context of an alleged massacre. They show the separation of the women and children and their expulsion to Furaydis. They show the participation of various Red Cross and other officials in the relocation of the inhabitants, soldiers giving water to those being expelled, and then the arrival of Jewish settlers (some of whom are immigrants from Turkey) whose children play in the streets, who make the roads bloom, who work to develop a local fishing industry (Confino 2012, 44-45).

The story of the expulsion of Palestinian women and children and the occupation of Tantura by young Jewish men and women is at the heart of the article. It is used as a means of interrogating the process by which the nascent Israeli state appropriated the lands of Palestinians who fled or were forced out. Confino presents an aesthetically satisfying, superficially critical, narrative of events based on supposedly authoritative sources – photographs, and the drawing and reminiscences of a soldier who was there. He holds back from explaining and interpreting the meaning of this story, leaving it to the reader to give it meaning, to use it as a trigger for thought, to open up discussion (Confino 2012, 57). He argues that ‘Israeli Jews should acknowledge their role in the forced migration of the Arabs because […] it is part of their history […] it is inextricably linked to their own gaining of home and homeland.’ But this ‘historical sensation’ is endowed with a specific political meaning. It simulates the giving of space to the various, often contradictory, voices surrounding the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in 1948, but in reality it functions as a further means of silencing the oral testimony of the expelled Palestinian residents of Tantura. Confino claims that we don’t ‘need to hear another lesson about 1948, from this or that side’ but this is exactly what he provides. He creates a morality tale on the anguish and hope arising from early twentieth-century population transfer in times of conflict and in doing so, hopes that it is sufficient to keep the events of 1948 firmly in the past; out of reach of the politics of the present (Confino 2012, 57). His narrative demonstrates that rather than the task of history being to *teach* us how we got here, as he claims, it almost always functions as a *political justification* of a chosen explanation of how we got here (Confino 2012, 56). *Pace* Confino, past-focused narratives can be (and have been) constructed and used in such a way as to ‘redeem and justify any action’ (Confino 2012, 57).

Yossi Ben Artzi and Benny Morris similarly regard Ilan Pappé’s work on 1948 as ‘propaganda and the exposition of a personal political ideology’ (Ben-Artzi 2011, 165). One of the many issues that arise from the Katz/Tantura debate is the status of oral testimony. Yossi Ben Artzi’s review article, much of which is an *ad hominem* attack on Pappé, claims that Katz’s ‘unsubstantiated claims’ of a massacre at Tantura were based on ‘hearsay and village folklore’, that they ignored ‘demographic and historical evidence to the contrary’ and that oral testimony is ‘of questionable validity as a sole historical source’ (Ben-Artzi 2011, 166, 171). However, the debate is not really one about the legitimacy of different types of historical evidence, nor is it concerned with the few minor mis-transcriptions that Katz made. Instead it is about the political use of the past to maintain present claims and control over territory and resources. It is about what constitutes morally acceptable practices. It is about the production and authorisation of explanatory and legitimising narratives, and making sure that the ‘right’ ones are heard and the ‘wrong’ ones are silenced. The titles of the journals that have published some of the articles on this debate, to some extent, stand as a synecdoche of the political nature of historical knowledge: Pappé published in *The Journal of Palestinian Studies* while Ben-Artzi and Confino published in *Israel Studies*.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Benny Morris, in a review article on a number of Pappé’s books, concludes with an anecdote about a student who took a seminar he taught at Ludwig-Maximilian’s University in Munich. The student wrote a paper entitled ‘Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine May 1948-January 1949’ and used Pappé’s *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* among other works. She apparently argued that ethnic cleansing is inhuman and brutal and drew a number of comparisons between the Nazi expulsion and genocide of Jews in Europe and Israel’s expulsion or ethnic cleansing of Arabs. For Morris this ‘is a fine indication of the measure of Pappé’s success, of his reach in polluting Middle Eastern historiography and in poisoning the minds of those who superficially dabble in it. This is unfortunate, even tragic’ (Morris 2011).

**The cultural politics of historicisation**

At one level Morris is simply making Foucault’s point that knowledge and power are entangled and embedded in other practices (institutional, judicial, pedagogic, articulatory, and so on). And as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe explain, these are the practices that possibilise the temporary stabilisations that constitute a hegemonic fixing within a given social formation. Historical practices are not ‘unpolluted’. One of their functions is to combine with other practices to create, circulate and reproduce the ‘common sense’ that hegemonic stabilisations require. As is well understood, histories in their modern discursive form grew out of nationalist projects of self-legitimisation. Of course the discipline is now more open, pluralistic and multi-directional (and sometimes it aspires to be anti-hegemonic). But equally it remains true that history teaching in schools, and the professionalisation of history as a university discipline, continue to serve nation-state oriented agendas. Formal education is one of the primary means by which national narratives and identities are established and perpetuated (Wertsch 2002, 10, 69, 172, cited in Peled-Elhanan 2012, 2-3). Textbooks, academic writings, lessons and lectures are a powerful means by which states encourage the imagination of particular personal and national collective identities, and encourage the construction and interpretation of public memories. If this were not the case, then history curricula and the content of school history textbooks would not be the subject of political contestation across the world.[[14]](#footnote-14)

In the case of Israel, Pappé notes that in the late 1990s the topic of Palestinian expulsions in 1948 was for the first time considered for inclusion in the national curriculum, but after debate in the Knesset Education Committee it was rejected. However since 2000 the expulsion of the Palestinians has been explicitly discussed in Israeli textbooks, albeit from a Zionist perspective that contextualises it not only as a positive series of events that enabled the establishment of a secure and majority Jewish state free from a Palestinian threat, but also as ultimately the fault of the Palestinians themselves (Pappé 2009, 17-18; Peled-Elhanan 2012, 78-91). Daniel Bar-Tal in his analysis of Israeli textbooks argues that a Zionist interpretation of the conflict predominates with its concomitant negative stereotyping of the Palestinians in contrast to the portrayal of Jews as victims (Bar-Tal 2007, 443, cited in Pappé 2009, 18). Nurit Peled-Elhanan similarly illustrates how the state uses text books to create a ‘usable past’ that justifies Zionist ideology and de-legitimises Palestinian claims. In particular, she demonstrates how such textbooks intersect with, and reproduce, the hegemonic Israeli-Zionist meta-narrative that presents the Palestinians simply as a problem in the wider context of Israel’s need for land and security. As such, she explores the question of interpretive naming, foregrounds the almost exclusive representation of Palestinians in these textbooks as primitive farmers, terrorists, or poor refugees, and deconstructs the ‘toponomyc silences’ in cartographical representations of Israel where illegal settler colonies are depicted as visually the same as Israeli cities such as Tel Aviv; the occupied West Bank is presented as part of Israel, but renamed as Judea and Samaria; and Palestinian place names are erased or Hebraised (Peled-Elhanan 2012, ch.1 and 119-125).

These examples seem to confirm Davies’s argument that history is an ‘indispensible information-management technology’ whose production makes universities, as well as heritage institutions, the ideal, compliant instruments of socially dominant interests, governmental and cultural policies and neo-liberal ideology (Davies 2010, 57 and 61; Davies 2006, 133). The academic function, says Davies, sponsored as it is by the state, blocks any knowledge that ‘won’t reproduce the prevailing order’ or won’t affirm received values (Davies 2008, 464-5). In one sense this instrumental use of history is to be expected. As Keith Jenkins has argued, it would be perverse for government agencies to allocate such sizeable funds to history teaching in schools and (at least until recently in the UK) universities, and to support historical research and heritage activities, unless they believed that in doing so they were helping to reproduce forms of social cohesion and acquiescence in current political arrangements. Sande Cohen occupies a similar critical position, arguing that historians provide the data that give particular social formations present credibility (for example, by anchoring them to perceived traditions or inter-generational shared values), and that they are also able to underscore future-oriented appeals by collectives through their power to exclude contending claims to the future by designating them as (supposedly) historically invalid (Cohen 2006, 118).

Jenkins argues that causes associated with justice, emancipatory ideas and left politics have nothing to gain from academic history as it is conventionally practised (Jenkins 1999, 1-33; Jenkins 2009, 15-6, 107).[[15]](#footnote-15) According to this line of reasoning, institutional history is out-dated at best and politically compromised at worst; it is one of modernity’s failed cultural projects, incapable of adding anything specific or useful to arguments about political or ethical issues; if one wishes to counter historical claims that are experienced by a group as oppressive, he argues, one can do so using ‘ethics-talk’ or politics-talk (Jenkins 1997, 62). But of course Jenkins equally understands that history’s professional and politically-supported infrastructure is sufficiently powerful to make its survival a safe bet for many years to come (Jenkins 2009, 16).

Historians’ claims that they can apprehend the past as an already-available object of *historical* enquiry (one that precedes the effects of their discursive codings) are epistemologically flawed; moreover, few individual academic histories reach a wide audience. But these generic shortcomings do not stop historians’ social authority from running wide and deep. For a host of cultural and material reasons, societies bestow semantic and epistemological authority on certain types of (sedimented) historical practices more or less unquestioningly. This is why critiques of knowledge about the ‘historical past’ that are articulated using a different language game to history are vulnerable to being dismissed on the grounds that they are irrational, counter-factual or ‘unhistorical’ (not only by those whose interests such history serves). Defenders of academic history commonly reject critiques of their professional practices by questioning whether non-historians – people who do not produce accounts of the past based on conventional archival sources – are capable of understanding what historians really do.

This is why we believe that productive resistance to history’s hegemonic functions has to come from *within* its own institutional practices as well as from outside. This would not simply involve reviewing methodological protocols, allowing new types of source material into what is taken to constitute the historical archive, or resolving to be more adventurous in choices of representational forms (though we do, nevertheless, support each of these). It would involve historians working to challenge our own collective identity as experts who act as if we have been accorded final rights to adjudicate questions of meaning, value and truth in relation to the past. It would involve historians becoming truly self-critical, rather than critical of everything *except* the epistemological assumptions that underpin academic historical practices: using Davies’s vocabulary, it would be welcome if more historians became experts in *historics* rather than history.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Chantal Mouffe argued that because any given social configuration lacks a final ground and is ‘never the manifestation of a deeper objectivity that is exterior to the practices that brought it into being’, it is always susceptible to being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices that attempt to ‘disarticulate it in an effort to install another form of hegemony’ (Mouffe 2013, 2).In her view such counter-practices could take any form: there is nothing inherent in any articulatory practice that determines how it might be used politically. But in our opinion academic history’s potential to be used as a form for challenging dominant power appears pretty weak; as Jenkins observed, it hardly ever does so: ‘the present day is rarely *damaged* by mainstream academic historians’ (Jenkins 2009, 275 emphasis in original). This is why we believe that ‘everyday’ or ‘vernacular’ appropriations of the past are more likely to be (and have been) mobilised effectively *as* *cultural and rhetorical resources* in tactical campaigns for socio-political justice, countering oppressive claims to knowledge, expanding the scope of personal and social autonomy, and achieving individual or group dignity.

**Reflexive, political, vernacular pasts**

Recently there has been a profusion of what might be termed reflexive, political and vernacular narratives on the subject of Palestinian and Israeli pasts that seek to make a direct ethical or political intervention or contribution. These works, we argue, might be able to throw into sharper relief – and thus contribute to circumventing – the ways in which history tends to function as a representative of hegemonic discourses. In many ways, we think that these works are more effective than traditional academic histories in making clear the issues, framing the arguments, engaging with broader, non-academic audiences and stimulating ethical discussion and political action. They provide a space in which plural voices are more likely to be heard on their own terms, invoking multi-layered temporalities, and perhaps permitting a degree of dialogue that is absent from academic histories. Of course there are numerous plays, films, novels, political posters and works of art that deal with issues of socio-political injustice in Israel and the occupied territories, but in this article we focus briefly on just three examples.[[17]](#footnote-17)

*Footnotes in Gaza* by journalist and graphic artist Joe Sacco is an investigation into, and narration of, two Israeli massacres of Palestinians that occurred in Khan Younis and Rafah in 1956, during the Suez Canal Crisis (Sacco 2009).[[18]](#footnote-18) Sacco employs an unconventional historical form: the graphic novel. However, the research process, the analysis, and the interpretive processes he undertakes are in line with both journalistic and historical praxis. While he does use archival and textual sources (and extracts from these are included in an appendix), much of the research is based on an oral history approach. The format Sacco chooses to use to narrate events permits a degree of polyvocality and also makes explicit the contradictory, overlapping and contingent nature of historical knowledge. Moreover, he situates his discussion of the 1956 massacres in a present context of the essential incarceration of Gaza and its residents, punitive and discriminatory house demolition on a large scale, and the human rights abuses of Gazans. His past-focused narrative is here used to draw parallels with a present situation and to encourage ethico-political debate on a variety of issues. It also effectively gives voice to those who are rarely heard. Sacco’s work can be read as an example of engaged journalism, but equally it can be seen as an instance of a ‘democratised history’.[[19]](#footnote-19) He has been able to find a wide audience for work that discusses historic massacres, current hardships, the inhumane treatment of Palestinians in Gaza, and self-reflexive discussion about the evidential value of his sources. His work is popular, sold at reasonable prices, and available in public libraries, not locked away behind journal embargos.

The work of photographer Paul Antick is similarly reflexive and engaged with issues of current ethico-political relevance. His ‘documentary-fiction’ projects explore experiences of dark tourism and highlight issues of socio-political injustice through the device of the fictional photographer Smith and his companion, the equally fictional anthropologist Willing, whose research involves observing how Smith behaves in challenging situations and difficult environments.[[20]](#footnote-20) His recent work ‘Smith in Palestine (to be read aloud, in its entirety)’ is a screen-play interspersed with photos. It is described as ‘what remains of a film that was shot in Palestine, by Willing between 12 to 17 August 2009’ (Antick 2012, 3). Like Confino his work on Palestine is a mixture of text and photos, but there the similarity ends: Antick has constructed his narrative in an explicitly self-reflexive way that draws attention to (and problematises) questions of meaning, authorial authority, the power of the reality effect, and the ways in which we narrate and perceive on-going conflict. The author (Antick) instructs the reader to vocalise the text in its entirety, including technical instructions. In doing so our attention is drawn to the way in which the work has been put together; it foregrounds the form as a construct and as part of the means by which meaning is produced. By vocalising the technical instructions the reader’s participation in the construction of meaning is emphasised: meaning is not found, it is performed. Simultaneously, however, the authorial instruction to read the text in its entirety engenders a tension; if we obey, do we prioritise the authority of the author? Do they, should they, or can they ultimately determine how we read and respond to a text?[[21]](#footnote-21)

However, the presence of photographs frustrates a reader’s attempt to carry out the author’s instruction – how can one read aloud a photo? They cannot be translated in the same way that one translates a written word into a spoken one. They remind us that language never transparently and unproblematically conveys *the* meaning. Another effect of the photographs is to remind the reader that ‘part of the text will always apparently remain beyond them’ reminding us that meaning is never simply given and fixed forever, it is situated, contested and politicised (Antick 2012, 3). Reading aloud, the reader-as-performer ‘is corporeally propelled by the rhythms of the text.’ Perhaps, Antick suggests, we are analogously propelled through the enduring conflict in Palestine and Israel by the ‘aural, visual and narrative rhythms’ of news broadcasts, the sentiments of politicians, the sounds of war (Antick 2012, 2). Perhaps the shape that the conflict is given by news broadcasts and academic histories gives it a sense of inevitability and inures us to the many injustices – it is the ‘same old thing’ playing out endlessly as background noise.[[22]](#footnote-22) However, reading aloud the technical instructions acts as an interruption to the rhythmical speech of the characters. This dissonant irregularity interrupts and disturbs, jolting us out of a complacency that figures the conflict as inevitable and unending.

‘Smith in Palestine’ also engages obliquely with a range of ethical issues, and instances of injustice both past and present, including the massacres of refugees at Sabra and Shatila; the difficulty and brutality of daily life in the Occupied Territories; and Pappé’s argument that the 1948 *Nakba* was a deliberate policy of ethnic cleansing designed to forcibly remove Palestinians from what would become Israel, rather than an accidental consequence of war. The work also deliberately confuses and confronts our ontological notions of self and other. Discussing life in a *moshav*, Smith outlines the hierarchy of workers from the settlers at the top and Israelis working as part of their national service, to European volunteers and Palestinian workers. While one might assume that Israelis and Palestinians would imagine or construct radically different identities, in some ways the Palestinians, in comparison to the European volunteers, have more in common with the Israelis: they often speak Hebrew (as the language of power and authority in the state) and they have a very personal relationship of belonging to the land they farm.

Lastly, the unusual form (from the perspective of history writing) of Antick’s work actively engages and inspires readers. His earlier work ‘Bhopal to Bridgehampton’ motivated students at his university to dramatise and perform his work, and to send messages of support to those fighting for justice for the residents of Bhopal.[[23]](#footnote-23) Antick’s work, we argue, is an instructive example of how vernacular, non-traditional forms can be used to narrate past events in such a way that they explicitly and directly engage with current ethico-political issues and inspire reader reflection and action.

Our third example is a counterfactual history by International Relations specialist Tony Klug: *How Peace Broke out in the Middle East: a short history of the future* (Klug 2007)*.* This short hypothetical history provides a narrative of how ‘peace finally came to the Middle East’ at some future date ‘to be determined’ (Klug 2007, 3). It is a clever work that contextualises a future peace deal against a background of actual events and key players. Of interest for us here is not only the unusual form that this ‘history’ takes, but the political aspect of Klug’s work. The counterfactual peace deal functions as a means of outlining a way for the different sides in this conflict to end the bloodshed, oppression and occupation, while guaranteeing security and access to resources for all concerned as well as a fair and equitable settlement. Klug has previously made these arguments in a number of other works in an international relations context, but by presenting them as ‘already having happened’ he foregrounds the viability and possibility of the solution while not underestimating any of the problems.[[24]](#footnote-24) Furthermore, by arguing that a peace deal is not reliant on some ever-elusive ‘auspicious moment’ nor that it is a ‘mere pipe dream’ but it is ‘a matter of political will’ he implies that not making peace is equally a political decision (Klug 2007, 27).

**Political Activism, Engagement and the Case of Rasmea Odeh**

Activists, journalists, educators, aid workers, and refuseniks, – people – working in various ways to oppose the Israeli occupation, to defend the human rights of Palestinians and Israelis, and to seek a fair and just solution for both peoples, frequently use past-focused narratives of some form in their work. From the journalists writing for +972, to activists and campaigners involved with Zochrot, Palestine Solidarity Campaign, Jews for Justice for Palestinians, and the Electronic Intifada – to name but a few – appropriations of the past are used to contribute to the framing contexts of their work.[[25]](#footnote-25) The Palestine Solidarity Campaign offers factsheets on its website that explain the Nakba, Britain’s role in the establishment of the state of Israel, as well as time-lines and a series of maps illustrating the disappearance of Palestine as a geo-political entity.[[26]](#footnote-26) Jews for Justice for Palestinians and the Electronic Intifada have sections on their website that provide a context to the occupation and the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from Palestine/Israel. They also engage in debate with, and respond to, works by Israeli and other historians writing about the expulsion of Palestinians and the occupation. The NGO Zochrot as part of its goal to ‘promote Israeli Jewish society's acknowledgement of and accountability for the ongoing injustices of the Nakba’ hosts tours to the sites of destroyed Palestinian villages and localities, and employs past-focused narratives in the workshops, lectures, teacher training and the other educational courses that it provides as part of it political programme to persuade and educate.[[27]](#footnote-27) They have also designed the trilingual I-Nakba app that maps Palestinian localities that have been destroyed, ruined or depopulated since 1948.[[28]](#footnote-28) The interactive app provides information, photographs and videos and it allows users to upload their own images, share comments, follow updates and provide information on destroyed villages. I-Nakba is, just like all cartography, a political tool. It is a digital response to the material, toponomyc and cartographic erasure of Palestinian settlements. Despite the political, military and historiographical efforts to silence Palestinians it asserts an effective counter-narrative that engages and informs its users.[[29]](#footnote-29)

Contextualising how material conditions and physical forces are configured on the ground is a fundamental part of the political work of numerous activists and campaigns seeking justice and peace in Palestine/Israel. As part of this, past-focused narratives are often *chosen* by activists as favoured contextual frames within which other discourses about rights, dignity, resources and territory are then brought into play. The contextual frames within which such discourses are positioned do not so much imply that injustices in Palestine/Israel result from a logics of history. Rather they point towards the value of understanding asymmetries of power on the ground in terms of genealogical processes: the question is not so much ‘what is the truth of the matter?’ as ‘how have regimes of truth in specific conditions been used to legitimise coercive and oppressive acts?’ Bearing this in mind, we want to discuss the case of a American-Palestinian activist in Chicago, Rasmea Odeh.[[30]](#footnote-30) She is a refugee whose family was expelled from their village in 1948 and who grew up in the occupied West Bank. She is a Palestinian-American and an associate director at the Arab American Action Network, a community-based organisation that supports, through advocacy and education, the Arab-American community in Chicago. She is also a Palestinian activist. Odeh moved to the USA in 1995 and in 2004 applied to become an American citizen. However, in 1969, aged 21, she was arrested by the Israeli military in the Occupied Territories and tortured. After beatings, electric shocks and the subsequent torture of her father she was coerced into confessing to involvement in two bombings. Although she renounced her confession before an Israeli military court less than a month later, she was convicted by the court and sentenced to life in prison. She was subsequently released after ten years as part of a prisoner exchange and following her release she testified to the UN about her torture. While resident in America, she also spoke on occasion in public about her torture, her treatment in Israeli custody and her conviction. However, when she completed her application for US citizenship she was asked if she had ever been arrested or imprisoned. Not understanding that the US immigration authorities were inquiring about imprisonment in the US and overseas, Odeh failed to mention her political detention in the Occupied Territories by an Israeli military court. Odeh was arrested in 2013 and charged with ‘Unlawful Procurement of Naturalization’; in November 2014 she was convicted of immigration fraud and the following March she was sentenced to 18 months in prison and deportation. She is currently appealing her sentence.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Her lawyers and supporters are arguing that although she was found guilty of immigration fraud for failing to disclose a conviction on her naturalisation form, the conviction was handed down by an illegitimate regime that extracted a confession, and thus secured a conviction, through torture. Therefore, they argue, it does not constitute a valid conviction and as such she did not commit immigration fraud. Israel’s military court system oversees all court cases in the Occupied Territories and nearly all (99.74%) of the court cases end in conviction – most of which are based solely on signed confessions. There is also significant documentation from human rights organisations including Human Rights Watch as well as Israel’s High Court of Justice that the interrogation process that leads to these confessions includes the kind of torture that Odeh describes.[[32]](#footnote-32) Moreover, Odeh testified at her trial that had she understood that the immigration forms were inquiring about her political detention in the Occupied Territories she would have volunteered the information.[[33]](#footnote-33) Her defence had hoped to use her trial as an opportunity to scrutinise in a public forum the illegitimacy of Israel’s military legal regime in the Occupied Territories, but the judge in the case refused to allow the defence to introduce most of its evidence and kept the parameters of the case extremely narrow. Specifically, evidence about her torture was deemed inadmissible and the defence was not allowed to explain the compromised nature of the court that convicted her. In contrast, the judge did allow more than 100 official Israeli documents asserting that she confessed to, and was convicted of being involved with, two bombings. Despite the judge’s claim that the case is not ‘political’, the decision to allow evidence from an Israeli military court in occupied territory, but not evidence of their human rights abuses and regular use of torture to extract confessions, *is* political. It clearly illustrates how state institutions including the judiciary facilitate the telling of narratives about the past that affirm and uphold the interests of the state while silencing counter-hegemonic narratives. The defence team and supporters argue that this case is part of a wider political attack on the Palestinian-American community and Palestinian solidarity supporters that since 9/11 has become intertwined with the ‘war on terror’ rhetoric.[[34]](#footnote-34) Odeh’s case exemplifies Foucault’s point about the need to problematise epistemologies of all kinds – including, from our perspective, those that produce and delimit the genre that we recognise as academic history. In Foucault’s words:

There is a battle ‘for truth’, or at least ‘around truth’ – it being understood once again that by truth I mean not ‘the ensemble of truths to be discovered and accepted’ but, rather, ‘the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true’, it being understood also that it’s not a matter ‘on behalf’ of the truth but of a battle about the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays (Foucault 2002, 132).

**Final thoughts**

Academic history culture is committed to long-dominant epistemologies, methodologies and representational forms. As we have shown, these can function politically to authorise certain past-focused narratives and to find others wanting in the ‘court of history’ – and thus to exclude or silence them. We see little evidence that the political consequences of how historicising practices are mobilised and regulated are given due academic attention –based on our reading of texts such as UK history degree curricula, articulations of history departments’ aims, criteria for research ‘excellence’, and adverts for academic history jobs (Donnelly and Norton 2015). In a post-foundational (or post-1968) intellectual culture, we cannot take seriously history’s epistemic claims to being a unique authority on past-focused matters, or *the* arbitrator between competing narratives about past events. Instead the discourse of history is just another politicised contribution to conversations about how we live and what we should do. In order to stop it being used to function in oppressive ways, histories (and ‘pastifying’ practices generally) have to be more open, democratic, plural and accessible. Institutional barriers should not be used to impede forms of past-talk operating in ways similar to a ‘cinema of advocacy’ or ‘journalism of attachment’ – as a vehicle for critical voices that speak to wide audiences. History-as-discourse, we have argued here, claims for itself the right to be the benchmark against which other forms of knowledge about the past are tested; but this ‘right’ rests on fragile grounds. History is not a discursive instrument that explains ‘how the past has caused the present’, and the idea that it constitutes a collective enquiry into the actuality of what happened in the past raises significant (and now well-traversed) problems about epistemology, ontology, metaphysics, narrativity, and the status of the archive. Of course, historians invoke empirical procedures for making statements about the past that cohere with surviving traces of information, traces which the profession chooses to regard as specifically ‘historical evidence’. And we recognise that these empirical *procedures* are often vital, particularly in circumstances in which matters of human rights violations, criminal conduct, justice, restitution, and so forth are involved. But there is no reason why we should believe that (we) historians are more adept at practising these empirical procedures than, say, journalists, lawyers, screenwriters, historical novelists, social activists or academics in other disciplines. While history often succeeds in subjecting the past to its controlling disciplinary gaze, this simply confirms its elevated institutional status as a certain kind of articulatory practice. Moreover, this status means that it has the discursive power to contribute to marking out the boundaries of ‘legitimate knowledge’ that are required for temporarily fixing hegemonic social formations.

Where does this leave projects that seek to instrumentalise past-knowledge for emancipatory political objectives? Can forms of past-talk contribute to challenging those temporary fixings of the social that are experienced as unjust and oppressive? Laclau and Mouffe would suggest that they can, because they understood the social to be a contingent, open and never-to-be-completed effect of linguistic and extra-linguistic articulatory practices, marked by the infinite play of differences. As they stated: ‘The social *is* articulation insofar as society is impossible’ (Laclau and Mouffe 2014, 100 emphasis in original). Antagonism was an irreducible feature of their model of the social; as such, they argued, there will always be adversaries. In what Mouffe calls a model of ‘agonistic pluralism’, articulatory practices of varying types are understood to be part of a politics that provides a framework for managing differences between adversaries *as* adversaries, and not as enemies (accepting that there could never be a final reconciliation). Vernacular, cultural mnemonic and non-institutional forms of past-talk are better suited than academic histories to contribute to this agonistic pluralism, because the latter – while purporting to take the past conceived as a whole as its referent – works within narrowly limited methodological and evidential boundaries. This is why we believe that historians should cease subjecting all forms of past-talk to their own communally-agreed criteria for making truth claims. However, in more positive terms, perhaps Ilan Pappé’s and Jamil Hilal’s discussion of how historians can produce ‘bridging narratives’ that would help rival communities to ‘distance themselves critically from the reigning nationalist ideologies’ shows that a politically-engaged historiography can still aspire to perform a constructive discursive-political role. In *Talking to the Enemy,* they defined bridging narratives as ‘a conscious historiographical effort taken by historians in societies wrought with long internal and external conflicts, to cross over conflicting narratives and historiographies’ (Moses 2005, 329). This exemplifies the kind of constructive political function that historical practices can be used to perform.[[35]](#footnote-35) But unless historians themselves work to constitute those practices in less coercive ways, history will continue to serve the interests of state and/or dominant powers in most circumstances. Is this what we want historical learning, research and writing to do? Is this the role of an engaged historian?

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1. We would like to thank the editor of this special edition and the two reviewers for their extremely helpful comments – their suggestions have significantly improved the finished article. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Pappé explained and defended his ideas about the ideological positioning of historians’ work in a televised interview with Stephen Sackur, *HARDtalk,* BBC News channel, 30 June 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Arguing that history should be, and can be politically neutral is as disingenuous as insisting that medicine and health is not a political issue. For the debate surrounding the *Lancet*’s coverage of the 2014 Gaza conflict see <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/major-medical-journal-lancet-under-attack-for-extremist-hate-propaganda-over-its-coverage-of-the-israelipalestinian-conflict-10199892.html> [last accessed 28/04/15]. We also owe our discussion that institutionalised history is circumscribed by a commitment to truth-seeking as opposed to practical use to Pihlainen 2015. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. While Davies might argue that there is something particular about the historical perspective that engenders its socio-political appropriation by hegemonic powers, we would argue that it is perhaps the institutionalised nature of history produced within and disseminated by the educational, broadcasting and heritage organisations of the state that means it can so readily be employed by dominant interests. We also acknowledge that the state itself does not represent a singular, identifiable entity or collection of interests and that it can be more profitably seen as a site of contestation between various influential, authoritative and powerful groups. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Other historians have also argued that history as a genre of writing may have relevance today as a means of facilitating ethical debates not only on our society today but on possibly different futures: Harlan 2003; Southgate 2005; Munslow, 2010; Rigney 2007; and Pihlainen 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Here we are stretching White’s usage of the term ‘practical past’ beyond the way he discusses it in his published text. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Such a future for a reinvented form of institutionalised history would be dependent on a recognition that it does not have mimetic properties and an acknowledgement that it does not possess a unique, foundational socio-political authority as *the only* accurate or truthful guide to the past. In its engagement with other forms of past-talk it would need to actively encourage the agonistic pluralism outlined by Mouffe (2012) rather than simply evaluate or police such narratives and practices against its own communally-agreed and thus contingent genre protocols. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The case has been written about extensively by Pappé 2000-01a; Pappé 2007; Pappé 2010. Morris 2004, 21 also provides an overview of the ‘atrocities’ that happened there while doubting that events can be ‘reconstructed’ on the basis of oral testimony as a result of faulty memories and political interests. Much later, Ben-Artzi 2011 and Morris 2011 wrote hostile review articles of Pappé’s work with particular focus on the Katz/Tantura case. Accounts of the massacre at Tantura in 1948 can be found in Pappé, 2007; and Pappé 2000-01b. See also Confino 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The collusion between academia, the judiciary and politicians in silencing counter-hegemonic narratives occurs in all political systems to varying degrees as illustrated by the last minute cancellation by the University of Southampton of a conference “International Law and the State of Israel” initially approved by the University in 2014 and scheduled to be held 17-19 April 2015 at the University. It was cancelled ostensibly on health and safety grounds, but after significant political pressure from government ministers, Conservative members of parliament and pro-Israel lobby groups. The decision was upheld by the High Court in a judgement issued on 8th April 2015 refusing permission to bring a judicial review of the decision at the request of the organisers of the conference. See <http://www.southampton.ac.uk/israelpalestinelaw/index.page> <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/mar/31/southampton-university-cancels-event-questioning-israel-existence>

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/southampton-cancels-controversial-israel-conference/2019499.article>

<http://artistsforpalestine.org.uk/2015/05/10/uk-high-court-backs-shutdown-of-israel-conference/>

 <http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/133033/southampton-university-confirms-it-considering-cancelling-anti-israel-conference> (all last accessed on 24/12/15) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Morris writes ‘In September 1998 Katz’s supervisor, Firro, and two examiners – Yair Hirschfeld (who was involved in the secret Israeli-PLO talks that resulted in the 1993 Oslo agreement), and Israeli Arab historian Muhammad Yazbek – gave Katz 97 percent. […] Katz resubmitted his thesis […] in September 2002. […] The University appointed five examiners who, by a 3:2 margin, failed the thesis. [….] The other two who failed it, giving it 40 and 50, were Dr. Avraham Sela (Hebrew University) and Dr. Arnon Golan (Haifa University. Three years ago […] these two scholars authored “The Conquest of Lydda, July 1948” published by the Israel Defense Ministry Press. The slim volume, apologetic in focus and intent, argued that the Israeli Army had carried out only a “partial expulsion” of the populations of the Arab towns of Lydda and Ramish and dismissed the charge that the troops had massacred Lydda townspeople […] In fact, according to IDF records from 1948, n the IDF archive, what was ordered and carried out was a full-scale expulsion; and Yiftah Brigade troops killed some 250 townspeople.’ 2004, 20-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Confino, in this regard, follows neo-Zionists such as Golan 2004, 912 cited in Pappé 2009, 13 who argue that expulsion is just something that happens in times of war. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Indeed when he mentions the conquest of Lydda and the expulsion of the civilian population, unlike Morris 2004, 21 he does not mention the massacre of 250 Palestinians. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. It is worth noting that there is a journal entitled *Palestine-Israel: Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture* <http://www.pij.org/index.php> founded by two Palestinian and Israeli journalists in 1994. The journal is produced locally in East Jerusalem and is staffed by a joint team of Palestinians and Israelis with two chief editors and two managing editors. It aims to provide ‘background material and in-depth analysis of various aspects of the conflict from the perspective of both sides, thus helping to shed light on the complex issues dividing Israelis and Palestinians and the relationship between the two peoples.’ Its aims include the promotion of rapprochement and understanding between the two peoples by fostering active dialogue on the issues at the heart of the conflict from both perspectives in a climate of constructive criticism and respect. Past issues have focused on the environment, the media, settlements, Jerusalem, national identities, water, human rights, peace education, etc. <http://www.pij.org/about.php> The current issue is on the subject of natural resources and the Arab-Israeli conflict <http://www.pij.org/current.php> (last accessed 08/05/15) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. For a couple of recent examples in Russia and America of political interference in school history curricula see: <http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_vladimir_putin_historian_in_chief346> (last accessed 28/04/15); <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/30/high-school-history-classes-colorado-school-board> (last accessed 28/04/15). See also Loewen 2005 for America;Donnelly and Norton 2011,125-129 for examples from France, Greece and Turkey. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. This parallels recent debates among radical political theorists about the merits of ‘withdrawal’ from existing institutions [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See Davies 2006, 18 for his point that if universities really were places for critical intellectual reflection there might be here or there departments of historics rather than history. He defines historicsas an examination of what history does in an already historicised world in which history is the socially dominant idea. Historics exposes and examines the unconscious ideological effects of history including the way in which academic consensus is fabricated. See pp. 5, 7, 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. We could mention the recent wall art by Banksey in Gaza and the West Bank [http://www.theguardian.com/arts/pictures/0,,1543331,00.html](http://www.theguardian.com/arts/pictures/0%2C%2C1543331%2C00.html) [last accessed 30/04/15] as well as the art of Mohammad Saba’aneh who uses cartoons as a means of informing people about the Palestinian situation <http://mondoweiss.net/2015/04/political-cartoonist-palestine> [last accessed 30/04/15] and <http://www.cartoonmovement.com/p/148> [last accessed 30/04/15]. The exhibition by Emily Jacir, *Europa,* at the Whitechapel Gallery, <http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/exhibitions/emily-jacir-europa/> (last accessed 06/11/15). See also the Palestinian Museum <http://www.palmuseum.org/language/english> [last accessed 06/11/15]. For films about Palestine see <http://www.palestinecampaign.org/films-about-palestine/> [last accessed 06/11/15]. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Sacco has produced work about a number of conflicts that are historically contested, including the war in Bosnia, the Chechen War, and Iraq, as well as pieces about marginalized communities such as India’s ‘untouchables’ and Saharan refugees. See, for example, Sacco 2000, 2003, 2010, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. We see engaged journalism as another term for Martin Bell’s ‘journalism of attachment’, Bell 1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Like Sacco, Antick has produced work on a number of complicated, politically resonant events: the Bhopal Disaster, Palestine, former Nazi death camps, and Rio’s favelas. Antick 2012, 2013a and 2013b. He is currently working on another documentary-fiction project provisionally entitled ‘Smith at Batang Kali: a short history of little value’ that explores the 1948 British massacre of 24 unarmed civilians in Malaysia. A topic of current political relevance as relatives of the victims continued a 66-year battle for justice by taking the case to the UK Supreme Court in late April 2015, see <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/batang-kali-killings-britain-in-the-dock-over-1948-massacre-in-malaysia-10187309.html> [last accessed 30/04/15] [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. We find Wittgenstinian theories of meaning as use more persuasive and coherent than those predicated on the authority of the author. Wittgenstein 1973, 42 ‘the meaning of a word is its use in a language’. We would argue that meaning is always, and only, constructed within and by ‘interpretive communities’ we can never, therefore ascertain *the* authorial meaning, never mind prioritise it. The term is from Fish (1980, 14) – ‘[i]nterpretative communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies [… A]n interpretive community is […] a bundle of interests, of particular purposes and goals.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. The phrase ‘the same old thing’ recalls Davies’ argument that history is not simply the intellectual instrument of dominant socio-economic interests in an already historicised world, but that it also affirms and legitimises violence in general as well as specific conflicts in particular as historically normal. The *latest* human rights abuse in the Occupied Territories, the *latest* house demolition, extra-judicial murder or bombing is really just the *same old thing*. Davies 2006, 4-5 and 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. A review of the performance can be found here

<https://bhopalfacing30.wordpress.com/2014/05/05/comments-on-bhopal-to-bridgehampton-performance-by-university-of-roehampton-stp-drama-students-2-may-2014/> [last accessed 30/04/15] and the students’ message of support can be seen here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5S8UZCfMAY> [last accessed 30/04/15] [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Klug has been arguing for a two-state solution since the 1970s. Specifically, in a thoughtful Oxford Research Group policy paper (Klug 2009) he outlines three moves by which the international community, having set clear goals and with effective enforcement, could resolve the conflict. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. For +972 see <http://972mag.com/> [last accessed 30/04/15]; for Zochrot see <http://zochrot.org/> [last accessed 30/04/15]; for the Palestine Solidarity Campaign see <http://www.palestinecampaign.org/> [last accessed 30/04/15]; Jews for Justice for Palestinians <http://jfjfp.com/>[last accessed 30/04/15]; for the Electronic Intifada see <http://electronicintifada.net/> [last accessed 30/04/15]. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. <http://www.palestinecampaign.org/information/factsheets/> [last accessed 30/04/15]. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. <http://zochrot.org/en/content/17> [last accessed 30/04/15] [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. <http://zochrot.org/en/keyword/45323> [last accessed 30/04/15] [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. In the first week since its launch in May 2014 there were approximately 12,000 downloads <http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/with-inakba-palestinians-delve-into-their-history/2014/05/14/7c2a8026-db8d-11e3-a837-8835df6c12c4_story.html> [last accessed 30/04/15] [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. <https://plutopress.wordpress.com/2014/11/25/criminalizing-the-victim-the-life-story-of-rasmea-odeh/> [last accessed 06/11/15] [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. <http://www.thenation.com/article/188033/will-rasmeah-odeh-go-prison-because-confession-obtained-through-torture> [last accessed 30/04/15] <http://electronicintifada.net/blogs/ali-abunimah/judge-sentences-rasmea-odeh-insisting-case-not-political> [last accessed 30/04/15] [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. <http://www.thenation.com/article/188033/will-rasmeah-odeh-go-prison-because-confession-obtained-through-torture> [last accessed 30/04/15] [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Torture expert Dr Mary Fabri was prepared to testify that torture survivors living with post-traumatic stress disorder frequently and unintentionally narrow their focus and supress recollection. However, evidence concerning the rape and torture of Odeh was disallowed by the judge and she was not able to testify at the trial. Odeh’s legal team believe this to have been a legal error. <http://justice4rasmea.org/news/2015/10/14/defense-attorney-hits-it-out-of-the-park-in-appellate-court/> [last accessed 06/11/15] [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. For example the case of Sami Al-Arian and the Holy Land Five <http://www.thenation.com/article/188033/will-rasmeah-odeh-go-prison-because-confession-obtained-through-torture> see also <http://mondoweiss.net/2012/10/holy-land-five-appeal-could-set-precedent-on-using-secret-evidence-in-u-s-courts> [last accessed 30/04/15] [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. We are here mindful of Pihlainen’s persuasive argument that blurring the boundaries between institutionalised histories and more practical appropriations of the past may lead to history, through its preoccupation with an ultimately unobtainable search for truth, contaminating more progressive ways of thinking about our relation to the past and undermining their political and social efficacy. Pihlainen 2015. We discuss this issue in more depth in our forthcoming book, *Liberating Histories* (Routledge, forthcoming). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)