

The more Israel represses the Nakba, the stronger the memories

How nice it would be if Israel would allow its minority citizens to commune with their misfortune and at least respect their pain.

By [Gideon Levy](#) | *Haaretz*, May 14, 2015 | 2:15 AM | 4



Palestinian refugee Ali Abu Jabal, 73, in Jenin, West Bank in front of a mural of the holy land. He was 7 years old when he and his parents left their home in Haifa during the 'Nakba.' Photo by AP

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The State of Israel should be bowing its head tomorrow. It should be bowing its head out of solidarity and empathy for the pain of a fifth of its citizens and to take responsibility for their tragedy; to bow its head in apology for what happened.

Tomorrow, May 15 – the date of the declaration of the State of Israel – is Nakba Day, the anniversary of the Palestinian people's catastrophe; a day to commemorate its fallen, its lost villages and land. One needn't be a Palestinian to identify with their pain; you can be an Israeli Jew, or even a Zionist, and respect those for whom your Independence Day marks their tragedy. Nor is there any need to accept the Palestinian historical narrative in order to recognize that the native people suffered a terrible calamity.

One can respect the other's pain, about which there is no historical doubt, and, if we want to be honest and brave, one can also ask if the State of Israel has ever atoned for what it did, whether deliberately or accidentally, with forethought or lacking choice, in 1948. Has it ever abandoned the policy that caused the Nakba? Isn't it the same policy of dispossession, occupation, oppression, destruction, and expulsion that continues to this day, 67 years after 1948, and 48 years after 1967? Nakba Day ought to be a national commemoration, even if it involves a minority, the same way Mimouna, the Saharna, and Sigd (an official holiday by law) are marked, even though they are the

traditions of minority groups. There should be sirens and memorial services in the state's Arab communities and special television broadcasts for everyone.

Of course this sounds delirious, during a tour that foreign ambassadors took of Army Radio this week, a western diplomat asked in all innocence if the popular station broadcasts Arabic music. Her hosts thought she was rather out of it. Anyone who even thinks that the State of Israel should be marking Nakba Day is also out of it; worse, he's a traitor.

But the truth is that there is no greater proof of Israel's insecurity about the justness of its cause than the battle waged to forbid marking the Nakba. A people confident in its path would respect the feelings of the minority, and not try to trample on its heritage and memories. A people that knows something terrible is burning under its feet sees every reference to what happened as an existential threat.

Israel started to battle the Nakba immediately after it occurred; it did not allow the refugees to return to their homes and lands and confiscated their abandoned property. It destroyed nearly all of their 418 villages out of foresight, covered them with trees planted by the Jewish National Fund and prevented any mention of their existence.

The primitive concept was that one could erase the memory of a people with trees and suppress its pain and consciousness with laws and force. This country of monuments forbade any monument to their tragedy. This country of commemoration days and wallowing in grief forbade them to mourn. Every Arab carrying a rusty key is considered an enemy; any sign marking a destroyed village is an abomination.

Not only is there no justice in this, there's no benefit in it, either. The more Israel tries to repress the memory, the stronger it gets. The Soviet Union tried to do this to its Jews and other minorities and failed. The third and fourth generations after the Nakba remember and are bolder than their elders. Forbidden summer camps have been held on the ruins of some of the villages; there is no great-grandchild that doesn't know where his ancestors lived. A concealed wound will never scab. How nice it would be if Israel took some token steps. How nice it would be if an Israeli Willy Brandt would get on bended knee, take responsibility and ask for forgiveness, and if the country would be covered with commemorative signs for what was and is no more. How nice it would be if Israel would allow its minority citizens to commune tomorrow with their misfortune – one of history's largest, ongoing national tragedies – and at least respect their pain.