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*Displacement in the Thought of Abdel Wahab
El-Messiri: A Critical Analytical Perspective*

*A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirement for a Master's Degree
in Literature and Civilisation*

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this extended essay entitled Displacement in the Thought of Abdel Wahab El-Messiri was written by me, Mr. Shakshak Youcef, under the supervision of Dr. Belahmar Louazani Assya.

This work is submitted to the department of English letters and language in partial fulfillment of the requirement for a Master's degree in British Literature and Civilization. This research is the result of my original work, and it has been written by me entirely. Any source of information used is duly acknowledged. This work has also not been submitted for any degree in any university before this time.

SHAKSHAK YUCEF

Dedication

One will certainly need any emotional support he can have when undergoing the journey of academic research. Thereby, I dedicate my work to all those who were the remedy to my stressed heart and the calming balm to my restless mind.

My loving parents who showered me with love and care.

My caring siblings who did not miss any chance to make fun of my struggle.

My dear friends who were a therapy session free of charge as they listened to me complain.

To my role model and supervisor.

To my methodology teacher.

To all who supported me, believed in me, and wished the best for me.

Thank you all.

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Abstract

The Palestinian question has long stood at the heart of Arab, Muslim, and global concerns, gaining renewed urgency in the wake of the events of October 7, 2023. Rooted in conflicting historical narratives, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to revolve around competing claims to truth and legitimacy. This study explores the concept of *displacement* as a central theme within this conflict, particularly in light of the ongoing Gaza crisis. The recent developments challenge Israel's assertions that no policy of forced displacement exists and that Palestinian migration is voluntary. Despite recognition by the United Nations of Palestinians as the indigenous population of the land, their continuous displacement remains inadequately documented and insufficiently addressed at both international and political levels.

Dr. Abdel Wahab El-Messiri, a prominent Arab intellectual and scholar, devoted much of his academic and intellectual efforts to analyzing the Palestinian issue within a broader global framework of displacement and colonialism. By analysing his writings, lectures, and media engagements, we will highlight how El-Messiri systematically deconstructed Zionist narratives, exposing historical distortions and foregrounding the lived experiences of Palestinians since the 1948 *Nakba*. His writings will show that Palestinian displacement is endured despite successive peace initiatives and international mediation efforts, attributing this persistence to Israel's disregard for political resolutions and international law. To conclude this, we discuss his later works, where he proposes pragmatic approaches for addressing the conflict, by emphasizing its structural and ideological roots.

Keywords: Palestinian displacement; Israeli-Palestinian conflict; Abdel Wahab El-Messiri; Gaza crisis; occupation

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|------------|
| <i>Declaration</i> | <i>I</i> |
| <i>Dedication</i> | <i>II</i> |
| <i>Acknowledgement</i> | <i>III</i> |
| <i>Abstract</i> | <i>IV</i> |
| <i>Abstract</i> | <i>V</i> |
| <i>Table of Contents</i> | <i>VI</i> |
| | |
| <i>General Introduction</i> | <i>7</i> |
| <i>Chapter One:</i> | <i>6</i> |
| 1.1 Palestine of Antiquity | 7 |
| 1.2 The Herzl Conference of 1897 | 8 |
| 1.3 The Sykes-Picot Treaty:..... | 8 |
| 1.4 The Great Arab Revolt | 9 |
| 1.5 Palestine in the Nakba of 1948 | 9 |
| 1.6 Palestine in 1967:..... | 10 |
| 1.7 Palestine from 1973 to 2023:..... | 11 |
| 1.8 Displacement and Its Definition: | 12 |
| <i>Chapter Two:</i> | <i>17</i> |
| 2.1 About the author Abdel wahab El-Messiri: | 18 |
| 2.2 Who are the Jews? | 20 |
| 2.3 The beginning of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict:..... | 21 |
| 2.4 The end of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is the end of the State of Israel | 24 |
| 2.5 The writer's philosophy in analyzing the Palestinian-Israeli conflict:..... | 26 |
| <i>Chapter Three:</i> | <i>27</i> |
| 3.1 Encyclopedia of Jews, Judaism and Zionism: | 28 |
| 3.1.1 The Dalit plan and its relation to displacement: | 28 |
| 3.1.2 The Displacement of Palestinians as part of the Zionist Strategy: | 30 |
| 3.2 The book of Introduction to the study of the Arab-Israeli conflict 1991: | 31 |
| 3.3 The book of partial secularism and comprehensive secularism 2002 | 32 |
| 3.4 The book <i>My Intellectual Journey</i> (autobiography 2005) | 33 |
| 3.5 The right of return between history and Law | 35 |
| <i>General Conclusion</i> | <i>37</i> |
| <i>Works Cited</i> | <i>41</i> |

General Introduction

General Introduction

Throughout history, no major empire has sought global dominance without attempting to control Palestine and the broader Middle East. This region occupies an exceptional place in human civilization, not only for its religious and historical significance but also for its strategic geopolitical position. It is the birthplace of Prophet Isa (Jesus), the setting for key events in the Abrahamic traditions such as the forty-year wandering of the Israelites, the migration of Abraham to Egypt, and the liberation of Jerusalem by Salah al-Din during the Crusades. Moreover, the miraculous events of *Isra'* and *Mi'raj* further attest to its centrality in Islamic spirituality. This overview highlights the profound spiritual and symbolic importance of Palestine. However, beyond its sacred status, the region's strategic geographical location enhances its global significance. Functioning as a bridge between Asia and Africa and a vital link between Europe and East Asia, it has long been a crossroads of trade and power. Historically, control over Egypt and Palestine enabled Britain, among other empires, to consolidate its position as a global imperial power.

Consequently, the region has been subjected to a continuous cycle of occupation and colonization, from the Hyksos in antiquity to the Zionist occupation in the twentieth century. As methods of domination evolved, so too did the mechanisms of control. In the modern era, colonialism introduced a new term—displacement—as an instrument of subjugation. Colonial powers have historically employed displacement as a political and military strategy to uproot indigenous populations, disrupt their cultural continuity, and enable settler domination. As Hala Anderson observes in *From Harlem to Hebron, Palestine: Displacement as the Way of Colonization*, displacement functions as an essential mechanism within colonial systems of governance (Anderson).

The Palestinian Nakba of 1948 epitomizes this phenomenon, when over 700,000 Palestinians were forcibly expelled from their homes and hundreds of villages were destroyed

General Introduction

to facilitate Zionist settlement. Similar patterns of displacement occurred elsewhere, such as in apartheid-era South Africa, where populations were forcibly relocated to “Bantustans” to consolidate settler control over land and resources.

- **Purpose and Scope of the Study**

This research paper aims to examine the concept of Palestinian displacement through the lens of Arab intellectual thought, with a particular focus on Dr. Abdel Wahab El-Messiri. Historically, displacement has evolved from a mere descriptive term to a strategic colonial instrument used to advance expansionist ambitions and exercise political, cultural, and spatial domination. In the Palestinian case, it represents not only physical expulsion but also systematic deprivation of identity, rights, and belonging, resulting in exile and fragmentation.

The study will engage critically with El-Messiri’s key works, including his monumental *Encyclopedia of Jews, Judaism, and Zionism*, an eight-volume reference that deconstructs the cultural, religious, and political foundations of Zionism. The analysis will also consider *Protocols, Judaism, and Zionism* and *Zionism, Nazism, and the End of History*, which explore the intersection of Zionism and European colonial ideologies, emphasizing displacement as a core component of both.

Methodologically, this paper adopts a descriptive and analytical approach, tracing the phenomenon of displacement from 1948 to the present day. It will assess its consequences for Palestinians, evaluate its implications for future statehood, and interpret El-Messiri’s theoretical and practical contributions through his writings, lectures, and media engagements.

- **Comparative Theoretical Context**

Numerous scholars converge with El-Messiri’s interpretation of displacement. Edward Said, in *The Question of Palestine*, identifies displacement as a systematic and deliberate process that targets every aspect of Palestinian life—people, land, and memory alike. He further

General Introduction

characterizes Israel as a Western colonial instrument designed to serve imperial interests in the Arab world (Said 56). Despite differences in their frameworks, both Said and El-Messiri agree that Israel is a Western-centric project, albeit with nuanced emphases. While Said sees it as a colonial outpost, El-Messiri regards it as a functional extension of Western civilization, structured to maintain Western hegemony in the region.

Both thinkers ultimately converge on the view that Israel's establishment was predicated on a settler-colonial paradigm, constructed upon an already inhabited Arab land. This theoretical framework exposes the falsity of the long-propagated slogan "a land without a people for a people without a land." As Said notes, Western Orientalist narratives effectively erased Palestinian presence by projecting a mythic emptiness onto the land:

"What Lamartine does is to cancel and transcend an actual reality—a group of resident Arabs—by means of a future wish—that the land be empty for development by a more deserving power" (Said 29–30).

This myth has persisted, reinforced by claims that Palestinians willingly sold their land—transforming them rhetorically from *a people of the land* to *a people without land*. This dissertation seeks to critically dismantle such claims by situating them within the historical, ideological, and psychological frameworks of colonial displacement.

- **Conceptual and Literary Dimensions of Displacement**

Displacement, as defined by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), refers to the forcible transfer of individuals from their habitual residences due to circumstances beyond their control—primarily wars or disasters. In Palestinian literature, however, displacement transcends its physical meaning, symbolizing identity loss, alienation, and resistance.

Writers such as Ghassan Kanafani, in *Return to Haifa*, articulate the pain of exile and the

General Introduction

yearning for return, while Mahmoud Darwish, in works like *I Long for My Mother's Bread* and *Children of Stones*, transforms displacement into a metaphor of resilience and revolution (Darwish 1993).

Although some critics have contested El-Messiri's self-identification as an "Islamic writer," scholars such as Mohammed El-Hamy argue that his writings—though rooted in modern intellectual frameworks—are deeply influenced by Qur'anic paradigms and Islamic epistemology. In his commentary on *Mudhakkarat Abdelwahab El-Messiri* (YouTube, 26 March 2024), El-Hamy highlights that El-Messiri's critiques of Zionism derive from both Islamic moral reasoning and historical scholarship.

Leftist intellectuals like Elias Khoury, on the other hand, view the Nakba as the collapse of language and ideology, whereas El-Messiri interprets Zionism as a Western functional project designed to perpetuate colonial domination. For El-Messiri, Zionism is not merely a Jewish nationalist movement but an instrument of Western modernity, engineered to secure imperial interests (Khoury 112).

Western scholars such as Norman Finkelstein and Ilan Pappé, though critical of Israel, often marginalize displacement as a peripheral issue. El-Messiri, however, situates displacement at the core of the Zionist enterprise, arguing that it was neither accidental nor reactive, but a calculated and gradual strategy implemented to Judaize Palestine and erase Palestinian presence (Finkelstein, *The Making of the Holocaust*).

- **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

This dissertation aims to address the following central questions:

1. How does Abdel Wahab El-Messiri conceptualize displacement within the broader context of Palestinian history, identity, and colonialism?

General Introduction

2. In what ways does El-Messiri link the psychological impacts of displacement to its political and territorial dimensions?
3. What role does displacement play within El-Messiri's interpretation of Zionist ideology and state formation?

The study hypothesizes that El-Messiri perceives displacement as a strategic and deliberate colonial mechanism aimed at erasing Palestinian identity and severing their bond with the land. He posits that psychological displacement precedes physical displacement, functioning both as a method of domination and a source of resistance. In his analysis, trauma becomes a site of cultural persistence and an impetus for the collective dream of return.

- **Significance and Methodology**

By contextualizing El-Messiri's thought alongside Arab and Western intellectual traditions, this research contributes to the broader discourse on colonialism, identity, and resistance. The study employs a descriptive-analytical method within the MLA 8 citation framework, ensuring systematic documentation of both primary and secondary sources. Ultimately, this research seeks to illuminate how displacement, in El-Messiri's thought, represents not merely a humanitarian crisis but a civilizational confrontation—a struggle over meaning, memory, and moral.

C *hapter One:*

*An Introduction to Palestine, historical background related to the
term displacement*

CHAPTER ONE

Historians and intellectuals have disagreed on who the original inhabitants of Palestine were. Some argue that they were the Jebusites, while others claim they were the Canaanites. However, all agree that they were not Jews. In another official source, Ahmed Dawood also confirms: “Archaeological finds in the area of Old Jerusalem, especially in the area of the Hezekiah tunnel and the eastern city wall, indicate that the lower archaeological layers date back to the Jebusite-Canaanite period (III millennium BC),” (Dawood 72). Indeed, Palestine was—and still is—Arab, with its first inhabitants being Arabs descending from the Canaanites, when the land was known as Ancient Canaan (Sweidan 45)

1.1 Palestine of Antiquity:

In ancient times, Palestine was called the land of Canaan after the Canaanites, the first inhabitants of Palestine, which are Arab tribes that migrated from the Arabian Peninsula to the Levant and settled there. Among the most important Canaanite cities that were in Palestine are Jericho and Jerusalem. Our knowledge of this information has increased thanks to recent discoveries and clarified many mysterious historical discoveries and events (Al-Salibi 28). Ancient Egyptian texts too, confirm that Palestine was known as the land of Canaan helland to the Canaanites who are Arab immigrant tribes that settled the coastal area in Palestine, inhabited it and settled in it. The name of Canaan was later replaced by the name Phoenicia -which extended to parts of what is now known as Lebanon and Syria- after the Roman Empire took control of the Levant and Dalek before the Year 3000 BC.M (El-Messiri 40).

Since the conquest of the Levant and its incorporation into the Islamic state, the Crusaders have throughout history coveted Palestine and the Holy Land. It fell under Crusader occupation several times, and Muslims regained it after each occupation (Maalouf 73). The land settled under Ottoman rule for several centuries from 1517 to 1917, where it was known as Palestine and was directly subordinate to the Ottoman governor (Krämer 21).

CHAPTER ONE

The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed several important and very dangerous events that affected the future of Palestine and helped mainly in the fall of Palestine by the British occupation first, all in preparation for its handover to the Zionist occupation. After this key event, several important events that shaped the history of modern Palestine followed, many of which we will list now.

1.2 The Herzl Conference of 1897:

The Jews held the first conference of Zionism in 1897 in Basel, Switzerland, which was organized by Theodor Herzl. One of the most important reasons for holding the conference was the establishment of a national homeland for Jews. Later on, several countries proposed to establish an alternative national homeland for Jews, for example, Uganda and Argentina, however, the outcome of this historical conference was the establishment of the official Zionist Organization and the declaration of the establishment of a national homeland for Jews in Palestine, with the fervent support of the Western countries: "In Basel I founded the Jewish State, if I said this out loud today, I would be met with universal laughter, perhaps in five years, certainly in fifty, everyone will see it" (Herzl 68)

1.3 The Sykes-Picot Treaty:

This treaty is an agreement between France and the British Kingdom signed in 1916 in complete secrecy, going public only a year later in 1917. Its most important goal was the division of the lands of the Ottoman caliphate in the event of losing the First World War, and one of its key plans was the division of the Middle East region: France is to take over Syria and Lebanon, while Britain got Palestine, the Gulf and Iraq. Palestine was placed under British Mandate and international protection, all while the British Empire prepared for the gradual dissolution of the Islamic rule, this is how the first preparatory step was taken to create an entity that is an outsider to the region (Antonius 248).

CHAPTER ONE

1.4 The Great Arab Revolt:

The Great Arab revolution took place between 1916 and 1918, led by the Hashemites, headed by Sharif Hussein, against the Ottoman rule and with the help of British military, including their financial and media support. Many believe that the Great Arab revolution was the biggest deception that the Arabs were subjected to. It was clear that it was only a way for the British to infiltrate the area under the guise of lifting injustice from it, the region was divided under small states (Antonius 268).

The goal of the revolution was clear: Overthrow the Ottoman rule. Britain promised Sharif Hussein to rule the Hejaz and to give him a state to rule, and this was not achieved until a state was created for him, known as Jordan, while his brother was given a kingdom in Iraq. This transaction was in exchange of helping to overthrow Ottoman reign (Brown 178-180). Through this unethical deal, and through the careful analysis of the Great Arab revolution, we can see that the reasoning behind the revolution was nothing but a deception to the Arabs and the result of the ambitions of some people. Indeed, Sharif Hussein was now equipped with governance of a newly-founded state, money, and power, this in turn helped in accelerating the Ottoman's fall due to the helping hand of corrupt Arab leaders. As a direct consequence to the corruption and greed of the Western world in coming together with Arab leaders, Palestine too, became an easy prey for the British Mandate, which consequently helped accelerate the Zionist project which was cemented at the Herzl conference, mentioned earlier (Rogan 188-191).

1.5 Palestine in the Nakba of 1948:

Before 1948, Jews and Palestinians lived peacefully in Palestine under Ottoman rule, although there were some attempts to migrate Jews to Palestine and buy land from their owners. During that time, there were no land borders separating Palestine from Syria and Lebanon. However, Syrian and Lebanese owners started selling parts of their land to Jewish people

CHAPTER ONE

seeking to settle there, and unbeknownst to the original owners, were funded by powerful Zionist men (Khalidi 102–101).

After the fall of Ottoman rule and Palestine became under British rule and protection, the proportion of the Jewish population in Palestine increased until it reached its highest percentage in 1947, and separate complexes such as cities were built to contain them and armed militias were formed to protect them, known as the Haganah gangs (The Middle East Journal 65).

The year 1948 was branded the year of the Nakba for the Palestinians and the year of independence for the Israelis, where the Zionist militias fought a violent war against the Palestinian. As a result, Palestinians endured forced displacement, from their land to the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt. Israel, thus, took control of 70 percent of Palestinian territories and officially declared the state of Israel - a new stage in the history of Palestine and its division began. (Arendt 77).

In the following sections, we analyze some of the events debated here, and the impact of these different historical happenings in the history of Palestine:

- First, the easy control over the territory of Palestine was guaranteed based on the events that took place during the Great Arab Revolution; it was not a war in the sense of the word, but it was ethnic cleansing taking place in every Palestinian city, through violent intimidations, terror, assassinations, and displacement.
- Secondly, the Arab armies were under British control, especially the Jordanian and Egyptian armies, where they withdrew under British order, while only the revolutionary Palestinian groups and the Muslim Brotherhood fought alone.

1.6 Palestine in 1967:

CHAPTER ONE

In 1967, the Israeli forces launched a brutal war, called the Six-Day War, in which they occupied the entire Gaza Strip, the West Bank, the Syrian Golan, the entire Sinai desert, and all the way to the Suez Canal. During that time, all the Palestinian territories fell under Israeli occupation, where before that, Egyptian rule managed, financially and administratively, the West Bank as well as the Gaza Strip. Because of that war, the Palestinian exodus to neighboring countries increased and the number of Palestinian refugees increased alarmingly. (Khalidi 250–55).

1.7 Palestine from 1973 to 2023:

The period between 1973 and 2023 witnessed key stages in the history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and important dangerous developments unfolded. The Egyptian and Syrian forces launched a ground and air war on the morning of July 6, 1973 in an attempt to liberate all the occupied territories. However, that war eventually resulted in the liberation of the Sinai desert only, as the Syrian forces failed to liberate the Golan, while the West Bank and the Gaza Strip remained under Israeli occupation. (Khalidi 320–322).

After the war, the offensive and revolutionary operations of the armed Palestinian organizations led by the Fatah Movement, and under the banner of the Palestine Liberation Organization, intensified and escalated markedly. Israel had countless human casualties and lost many economic investments, as military operations have become a source of concern, fear, and danger to the future of the Israeli state. With the beginning of 1987, the Palestinian Intifada, broke out in Gaza and the West Bank and increased the enemy's losses and fatigue, forcing the Israeli government to seek partial solutions to ensure its survival and help it pass its colonial project through displacement (Khalidi 460).

Later in, in 1993, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and the Israeli government signed the Oslo Accords, which guaranteed the return of Palestinians to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The accords would warranty this return under certain very narrow conditions that

CHAPTER ONE

guarantee the autonomy of the Palestinians with a very limited horizon, defeated and without any sovereignty on the land. Effectively, Palestinian territories were divided into zones A, zones B, and zones C, respectively. These zones were areas of full Palestinian autonomy, areas under the security and control of the Israelis, and the last being a purely Israeli area. Israel, thus, guaranteed full control over the land and people and also guaranteed the continuation of its colonial and displacement approach to the Palestinians (Khalidi 500–504).

Aiding only as a service to the Israeli project, Israel wanted to end the intifada and military operations with minimal losses and remove legal responsibility for the problem of displacement, refugees and occupation, and therefore resorted to the Oslo agreement, which was a hope for the Palestinians and a relief for the Israelis from several regional, legal, and international problems.

At the beginning of 2000, the second Palestinian intifada ignited, which was undoubtedly a reaction of the Palestinians to the disappointment of 10 years of negotiations that did not give the Palestinians a final solution, nor any frameworks or a nucleus for the promised Palestinian state. The second Intifada gradually developed from stone to weapon to rocket, and several years later the liberation movement reached the rule of the Gaza Strip, negotiating peace and total or partial freedom, without success. Subsequently, the events of October 7th 2023 took place. This first mini-war unfolded within the borders and many Israeli soldiers were captured. As a result, the Israeli government launched a new war in which it decided to completely displace the Gaza Strip and destroy it, as it has been and still is witnessed today by millions of people around the world. Effectively, we notice here the predisposed continuation of the series of displacement taking place to this day, as this dissertation is being written (Said 300–303).

1.8 Displacement and Its Definition:

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for refugees (UNHCR, 2006): Displacement is officially defined as the transfer of individuals or groups from their original

CHAPTER ONE

place of residence to other places, whether inside or outside the country, whether permanently or temporarily, in a non-peaceful, or forced manner. Displacement results from political disputes such as wars and political conflicts. Displacement entails several methods to reach, whether by murder, starvation or political persecution, all of which are considered war crimes punishable by international law. After ignoring international law and worldwide reprimands, Israeli leaders have officially been issued arrest warrants as they continue their tyranny in Gaza, and the West Bank (International Criminal Court, para. 1 UN News para. 2).

The term displacement has been associated with Palestine and the Palestinian cause since the establishment of the occupation state, where the Zionist criminal parties carried out several systematic displacement campaigns. The most important one was in 1948, where they waged a grinding war and opened a safe corridor to make the Palestinian people leave their country and migrate to neighboring countries. Since then, the term displacement has become popular in the Arab region, and the topic of displacement has become a rich material for Arab and eastern writers and thinkers. The writer Abdel Wahab Al-Messiri authored many philosophical and political works which discusses the Palestinian issue from the approach of colonialism to Western modernity and from Nazism to Zionism , and, of course, passing through the topic of displacement.

We will now deal with the term displacement from the point of view of other thinkers, such as the Arab writer Edward Said when he hinted that displacement is a constant suffering over the years in his book *The Question Of Palestine*: "The dispossession of the Palestinian people is not a fact accomplished in the past, it is an ongoing process ... Palestinians live the experience of displacement and denial continuously" (129). Similarly, writer Walid Khalidi also emphasizes the same idea that displacement and suffering continue (Khalidi, *All That Remains* 19). In the same context, Abdullah Al-Nafisi, who has written extensively on the

CHAPTER ONE

Palestinian-Israeli conflict, asserts that Israel has repeatedly attempted to displace Palestinians to the Arab Gulf region under the pretext that it is a depopulated area (Al-Nafisi).

The Israeli occupation has also enacted several laws that hinder the Palestinians' ownership of houses and land, as well as the prevention of construction and reconstruction, as is currently happening in the West Bank. The occupation also implemented the cruel policy of blockade, preventing any life-saving resources to be let in, as is the case with the entire Gaza Strip today (Al-Nafisi *The Zionist Entity and the Arab Nation* 112).

In the same framework, the Palestinian writer and historian Walid Khalidi stressed that the displacement was deliberate and systematic, evidenced by documents from the 'Dalat' plan, a military plan developed by the Haganah gangs to implement the Nakba and forced displacement at that time (Khalidi 4). These figures indicate the scale of the catastrophe that befell the Palestinian rural population within the borders established by Israel in 1948. What is probably uniquely distinctive of the Palestinian fate is that they were dispossessed of their country as a people, and to this day they continue to be maligned for having suffered such dispossession (Khalidi, *All That Remains* 35). In the opposite context, the writer Finkelstein believes that the Jews used the idea of the Holocaust as a justification. The policy of displacement practiced by Jews against Palestinians in their land is a form of Western support for Israel is to remind the West of what it did to the Jews. As immoral a justification, Zionist propaganda considers it a divine plan to carry out mass slaughters and deportations, mirror to the horrors endured during the Holocaust in Europe (30).

The term displacement appeared in Palestinian art and literature in various forms, including poetry, stories, novels, and television works, perhaps the most famous of these works was and still is the novel *Men In the Sun* by the Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani in 1963. The novel shows the suffering of Palestinians during the displacement journey. In poetry, "Returning to Haifa" by the poet Ghassan Kanafani in 1969 is a poem that shows the suffering

CHAPTER ONE

of a Palestinian family who was forcibly displaced by force of arms from their city of Haifa and how they spent their years in exile longing for their small city of Haifa. Additionally, a popular Syrian television series entitled "Palestinian alienation" was produced in 2004, which included Palestinian, Syrian, and Jordanian actors. The series monitored the suffering of Palestinian families in the diaspora, how they became refugees, and only possessing an insurance card that barely secured their daily sustenance.

Some studies such as “The Study of Forced Displacement of the Population: the Palestinian Situation” written by Manar Makhoul, Thaeer Hastings, and Simon Reynolds in 2015, focuses on the impact of the systematic practices of Israeli policies on Palestinian communities in the occupied territories. This study denounces how the Israeli government mainly aims to change the demographic, and demographic composition, of the population in Palestine, along with the Palestinian geography. The study also highlighted the policy of settlement construction, the policy of violence against Palestinians and the policy of laws aimed at splitting the Palestinian people and preventing construction for Palestinians, or their ownership of land. The colonizer’s policies are a way to ensure erasure of Palestinian autonomy in the short term, and erasure of Palestinian geography, identity, and nationalism in the long term (Makhoul, Hastings, and Reynolds 33–37).

Through the analytical and descriptive approach we used here, we see that the occupation followed the policy of displacement as a thoughtful and effective approach that runs out step by step. Although thinkers differed in many ideas and expressions to describe it, all agree that the displacement is a planned, systematic, and deliberate policy the occupation has developed. Displacement was exerted in many ways, as discussed earlier, but also through intimidation of Palestinian activists: such as the demolition of houses under the pretext of not having a license or demolishing the homes of martyrs as a punishment for the family of a martyr or a Palestinian militant. The Israeli occupation also prevented activists and their families from traveling and

CHAPTER ONE

working and even punished the families with imprisonment at some stages. The short-term goal is punishment and displacement, and the long-term goal is to wipe out Palestinian will, freedom, and subsequently, entire existence.

The Israeli occupation systematically seeks to reshape the physical and cultural landscape of Palestine by erasing all manifestations of Palestinian identity. This process entails the denial and destruction of Palestinian land, religious sites—including mosques and churches—residential spaces, and even the olive tree, a profound symbol of Palestinian rootedness and continuity. Such acts exemplify a broader ideological project grounded in the negation of the “Other”—the Palestinian—through exclusion, displacement, and physical elimination. This project has unfolded over several decades and, regrettably, continues to persist in the present day.

C *hapter Two:*

The conflict from the point of view of the writer Abdelwahab El-Messiri

CHAPTER TWO

Abdelwahab El-Messiri is one of the most famous Arab writers and historians who is best known for his writings on the Palestinian issue and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In fact, the Palestinian issue marks a part of his copious writings, Abdel wahab El-messiri was not only a researcher on Jewish affairs but also a critic of modern Western civilization, where he focuses on how capitalist secularism views man from an Islamic perspective and how this subject reflects on the issue of Palestine and other colonial questions.

This chapter focuses on the author and his most intricate writings on the Palestinian issue in regards to our central theme, displacement.

2.1 About the author Abdel wahab El-Messiri:

Born in Egypt in 1938, Abdel wahab El-Messiri studied English literature at various universities and earned his Ph.D. in 1963 from Columbia University in the United States. His academic journey initially aligned with Western modernity, capitalism, and communism—approaching these ideas with curiosity and openness. However, his experiences in the United States, both academically and personally, soon revealed several contradictions and challenges.

El-Messiri became increasingly aware of the stark discrepancies between Western modernity and the values it claimed to uphold—such as democracy—versus troubling realities like racism, anti-Semitism, colonialism, and exploitation. These contradictions sparked deep doubts within him about the Western model of progress. Motivated by these reflections, he embarked on a profound journey of research and analysis. He immersed himself in a wealth of intellectual works, meticulously exploring topics like democracy, globalization, colonialism, Zionism, and the search for an alternative homeland. Through this journey, he sought to understand the complexities and contradictions of Western modernity and to shed light on alternative paths forward.

CHAPTER TWO

In an interview with Al Jazeera on the "*Witness to the Era*" series, Abdel wahab El-Messiri recalled a vivid moment that sparked a deep psychological conflict within him. He described walking through the alleys of New York at night when he encountered a beautiful young woman. She knew his name and his country, but when he asked her about herself—her name and her religion—she only talked about her religion. Confused, he then clarified, saying, "I'm asking about your country, not your religion," but she gave the same answer again. This moment left him shocked and profoundly unsettled. It marked the beginning of a journey of intense exploration into some of the most critical topics that shaped his ideas and intellectual pursuits—particularly the concepts of Judaism and Zionism. This encounter became a catalyst for his deeper investigation into these complex issues, which would play a central role in his work and thinking ("A Dialogue with Abdel wahab Al-Messiri" 2).

Abdel wahab El-Messiri authored a series of bold and innovative intellectual works, offering new perspectives on the Arab world, his research delved deeply into the topics of Zionism, the concept of an alternative homeland, and the deliberate displacement of Palestinians. Among his most significant achievements is *The Encyclopedia of Jews, Judaism, and Zionism* (published in 1997), an eight-volume work in which he critically analyzes the Zionist phenomenon through a sophisticated civilizational critique—completely different from the narratives often propagated by the West regarding Jews in general.

Other notable works include by the author are: *My Intellectual Journey* (published in 2000), which traces his transformation from Marxism to an Islamic intellectual perspective. *Zionist Thought* (published in 2002), in which he examines the critical stance of Zionism towards Arabs and Muslims; and *Zionism, Nazism, and The End of History* (published in 2004), where he compares the Nazi-fascist model with the Zionist model and discusses their eventual trajectories. These works stand out as some of the most important contributions of Abdelwahab El-Messiri. His scholarly achievements earned him several awards, most notably the title of

CHAPTER TWO

Best Arab Writer in 1999 for his encyclopedia. He was also honored by Cairo University as the most prominent Arab thinker of that time(*Palestine Forum* 2020).

Before engaging deeply with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, El-Messiri conducted extensive research into the origins of the Jewish people worldwide, uncovering several key pieces of information that would later inform his critical perspectives.

2.2 Who are the Jews?

At the beginning of his intellectual journey, the thinker and writer Abdel Wahab El-Messiri began exploring the history of the Jews and their identity. According to El-Messiri in *An Introduction to the Study of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (2002), many Jewish scholars perceive Jews as a single bloc, a unified people of one blood, emphasizing cohesion while downplaying differences and distinctions. The term “Jewry” was often used to express this idea of a cohesive entity, free of internal contradictions. Similarly, Jews have been described as the “Jewish nation” or the “Jewish people.” However, El-Messiri asserts that Jews are, in fact, diverse groups with different origins, characters, and cultural behaviors. Each group follows distinct customs, traditions, and even religious practices. Some of the notable Jewish groups differing in race, culture, and heritage include the Ashkenazi, Orthodox, Haredim, and Falasha.

Differences are evident in language, as some groups do not speak Hebrew, and there are significant variations in religious customs and interpretations according to each group’s beliefs, but one idea remains identical among them, and that is the idea of Zionism (El-Messiri 45).

In his book *The Encyclopedia of Jews, Judaism, and Zionism* (1997), the late Egyptian thinker Abdel Wahab El-Messiri emphasizes that members of Jewish groups have never constituted a single people with a “universal Jewish unity” or a unified identity. He notes that issues related to Jewish identity remain unresolved. For example, the Law of Return, issued after the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948, grants every Jew the right to immigrate to Israel. However, the law does not specify which Jews are eligible, nor does it clarify which

CHAPTER TWO

interpretation of Judaism a person follows, given the multiple religious and ethnic traditions among Jewish groups whose identities derive not from a “universal Jewish identity” but from the societies in which they live (El-Messiri 38–39).

El-Messiri notes in his book *Who Are the Jews? And What Is Judaism?* (2004) that defining the Jew is not merely a religious or political matter but a “fateful” issue connected to one’s self-perception and worldview, and also a source of legitimacy for the Hebrew state itself. He states that the ruling Zionist establishment lacks a minimum level of consensus on this question, which has led them to ignore it or postpone consideration, relying on “temporary fabricated solutions.” He asks, “Is it possible to establish a Jewish state without defining Jewish identity and without arriving at a definition of who one is?” El-Messiri also criticizes the Arab media for not giving this problem the attention it deserves (El-Messiri 40–41). He adds that the “magic Darwinian solution” at the beginning of the twentieth century was to “export the (Jewish) problem to the East by convincing the Jewish surplus of humanity that displacing it to Palestine is not an attempt to get rid of it, but rather a return to the Promised Land” (El Messiri 41-42). This move was intended “to absorb this surplus and to be a forward fortress that defends the interests of the Western world in the Arab region” (Introduction to the Study of the Arab-Zionist Conflict 41-42). Here the author answers an important question, which is why the West created Israel in that region, He explains that Israel is the West's colonial tool in the Arab region.

2.3 The beginning of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict:

In his book *Introduction to the Study of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (2002), he provides a comprehensive vision of the roots of the Arab-Israeli conflict and how the Western colonial world contributed to creating the crisis that led to the “Palestinian issue” in the late nineteenth century by examining imperialist policies and ideas. This includes particularly those of Theodore Herzl, the founder of the Zionist movement, who called for settler colonialism (El-Messiri 126).

CHAPTER TWO

He notes that “one of the most important features of the Zionist settler occupation is that it is the occupation of an agent affiliated with Western colonialism, and knowing that fact is the distinguishing characteristic of all schools of Zionism” (El-Messiri 126). Additionally, he states that “Herzl developed the elusive Zionist discourse that opened all the closed doors to all the contradictory Zionist stories” (El-Messiri 131). El-Messiri reviews the history of Jewish groups and the early Zionist movements, tracing their development, and then discusses Herzl’s proposal to establish a national homeland for the Jews in Palestine. He also addresses an important question: how Zionism transformed from a mere idea into a replacement colonial project under the banner of “European imperialism” (El Messiri 38-40).

Western media talks about the cycle of violence, and we talk about the cycle of resistance and oppression. There is no way out of this circle within the Zionist framework, as no peace can be expected within the structure of oppression, injustice, and aggression—that is, within the framework of Zionism. While we can move towards a reasonable amount of peace by removing the Zionist settler-colonial nature, the crisis of Zionism cannot be solved except by getting rid of Zionism itself, as its colonial structure—a replacement settler entity planted in the middle of the Arab region—is the cause of its crisis.

In his article, “The New Middle East in the American-Zionist Perception,” published in 2004, El-Messiri says: ‘It can be said with much reassurance that the Western strategy toward the Islamic world since the middle of the 19th century stems from the belief in the necessity of dividing the Arab and Islamic world into different ethnic and religious groups so that it is easier to control.’ (El-Messiri 15). Western interests, he argues, have driven this strategy since colonial times, notably intensifying after the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1920 and the subsequent establishment of British and French mandates in the Middle East (1920–1946). The creation of Israel in 1948 further exemplified this divide-and-conquer approach, which has continued to influence regional dynamics into the 21st century. He says that: “Within the

CHAPTER TWO

framework of partition, the Zionist settler state, which is firmly planted in the Arab body, becomes a natural and even a leading state. Partition is, in fact, a process of normalization of the Zionist state, which suffers from its structural anomaly, as it is a foreign body implanted in the Arab region" (El-Messiri 45). El-Messiri considers that this view underlies a perception that regards the Arab East merely as a space or region without a significant history or shared heritage—inhabited by unrelated religious and ethnic groups and devoid of historical memory or a sense of dignity. According to this perspective, the Arab is seen as a materialistic, economic creature driven solely by economic motives, reflecting a reductionist view that diminishes the complex cultural and historical identity of the Arab peoples.

Accordingly, the mass migration of Jews began in the late nineteenth century and doubled at the beginning of the twentieth century, with the support of Great Britain, which was the primary ally at that time. The region was already suffering from French and British settlement efforts, and the dismemberment of the Arab lands was aimed at reducing resistance to the establishment of the usurping entity in Palestine. This plan, of course, was to be realized gradually, with the eventual elimination of the Islamic Ottoman state and the division of the entire Arab region into small, manageable states that would be easier to control politically, economically, and scientifically. This process was carried out under a misleading guise called the "Great Arab Revolt" (1916–1918), which was falsely portrayed as a popular Arab uprising against Ottoman rule.(El Messiri 45-46)

Here, we observe that El-Messiri explained the origins of the Palestinian conflict began in a transparent manner. He argued that the establishment of a functional state was an urgent necessity for both the West and the Jews to create a national homeland. Consequently, organized emigration to Palestine began under the pretext of escaping the Holocaust and rescuing Jews from the Nazi pogroms and systematic killings they faced in Europe. As El-Messiri notes, "The fact that Israel is an expansionist entity in its essence makes it not lacking

CHAPTER TWO

in various pretexts and justifications for expansion. Rather, these pretexts become a necessity for its survival and expansion"(El Messiri 163). The writer believes that Israel is a colonial state whose fundamental principle is continuous expansion and colonization. It is the only state that still lacks officially recognized borders documented by the United Nations. The Zionist approach is rooted in colonialism and driven by a religious doctrine, whose vision is of a Zionist state extending from the Nile River to the Euphrates. This is a persistent goal that Israel continually strives to realize.

2.4 The end of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is the end of the State of Israel

Egyptian writer Abdel Wahab El-Messiri predicted a “near end” for Israel, perhaps within fifty years. The author of the encyclopedia titled *Jews, Judaism and Zionism* emphasized that this expectation was not rooted in pessimism or optimism but was based on an objective reading of data and facts, from which he draws his conclusions.

El-Messiri noted that even Israeli researchers do not deny this fear; in fact, the amount of literature within Israel discussing the potential end of their state has become “boring.” He added that this concern haunted the founders of Israel, including David Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister, who in 1938 delivered a speech stating that Jewish groups in Palestine did not face “terrorism.” Ben-Gurion defined terrorism in that speech as “a group of gangs funded from abroad,” emphasizing that what they faced was not terrorism but a “war,” a national conflict declared by the Arabs against what they considered to be a ‘usurpation of their homeland’ by the Jews. He asserted that the Palestinians’ resistance was a legitimate response to this perceived occupation, and that they would ‘not tire easily in their struggle.’ (El-Messiri 152). Here El-Messiri means and refers to the book of the Israeli historian Simha Flapan *Zionism and the Palestinians* (English edition) published in 1979, in which Flapan reviews many speeches of Israeli leaders in his book.

CHAPTER TWO

After nearly a quarter of a century of preparing his encyclopedia *The Jews, Judaism, and Zionism*, El-Messiri was currently working on a new encyclopedia titled *Zionism and Israel*.

This new work aims to examine Israel from within - as a society and through its institutions- with the goal of deepening understanding of “this settler entity so that our efficiency in confronting it as a functional state will improve” (El-Messiri 255). The Egyptian writer noted that although Israel resembles the Mamluk state in some ways, it does not mean it will last 267 years, as the historical cycles are now much faster. He added that “the enemy is now in a state of retreat after suffering successive military defeats” from the 1960s until the summer 2006 war with Hezbollah, which demonstrated that Israel can be “defeated” (El-Messiri 310-315).

El-Messiri explained that the functional nature of Israel means that “the colonial powers created it and created it to carry out functions and tasks that they cannot carry out directly. It is a colonial project that has nothing to do with Judaism” (El-Messiri 307). He further stated “Israel’s defeat in the war with Hezbollah was contributed by the Palestinian resistance, which exhausted Israel with means that, despite their primitiveness, Israel has no means of repelling” (El-Messiri 421). He clarified that “in liberation wars, the enemy cannot be defeated, but rather exhausted until he accepts the status quo” (*Al Jazeera Net*).

The writer believes that Israel functions as a cheap colonial machine for the West, noting that Western support for it amounted to only a few billion dollars, whereas if the United States preferred to occupy the region directly, the cost would reach hundreds of billions annually (El-Messiri 310–311) .

In an interview with journalist Ahmed Mansour, El-Messiri stated that the downfall of the State of Israel depends on two main factors: first, the unlimited support from America and the West; second, the silence of Arab countries. He argued that the collapse of either of these factors would lead to the immediate fall of Israel (“Interview with El-Messiri”) .

CHAPTER TWO

2.5 The writer's philosophy in analyzing the Palestinian-Israeli conflict:

El Messiry famously said: “God is the fundamental foundation of everything, the fundamental foundation of communication between people, to ensure that truth is truth. If God is forgotten, then the entire foundation of the universe will end.” (*Judaism, Zionism and Israel* 45). Here, El-Messiri sought to control the terminological dictionary used and to emphasize, in more than one context, that terms do not exist in a vacuum but rather within cognitive frameworks that embody cognitive models. The conflict with the Zionist entity, in one of its forms and representations, is a struggle to name things and describe phenomena in a way that reflects their nature and reveals their reality, which confirms the necessity of paying attention to our spoken discourse and circulating narrative.

The Zionist system repeatedly seeks to renew its discourse and means of persuasion in an attempt to legitimize every displacement process it carries out, and this problem and attempt to legitimize represent one side of the Israeli coin, as El-Messiri points out. It clearly shows the persistent attempts to expel the people of Gaza from their land with iron and fire, and the excuse of fighting the Hamas political movement and other justifications is considered realistic only by the logic of the Western system. This leads us to emphasize that every act of resistance is confronted by the entity; it directly contributes to undermining the legitimacy of the Zionist presence. The Al-Aqsa Flood operation exposed all the masks in the world, both civilized and ‘uncivilized’; It showed how the Western system is desperate to defend those who belong to it and are consistent with it at the same time (El-Messiri 45–50).

C *hapter* **T** *hree:*

Displacement in the works of Abdel Wahab El-Messiri

CHAPTER THREE

El-Messiri elaborated in his writings on the intended displacement of the Palestinian people and repeatedly proved that displacement was a means and a precise colonial approach targeting the Palestinian demography, where the displacement project began and reached its peak in 1948 and the Nakba war, as the Arabs call it. El-Messiri has discussed the displacement project in several publications and we will begin to analyze and explain some of them in the following sections.

3.1 Encyclopedia of Jews, Judaism and Zionism:

It is the largest intellectual work that Abdul wahab El-Messiri worked on and it took him about a quarter of a century to write it. This collection has been published by Dar Al Sharq in Cairo since the nineties of the last century, the writer not only provides information about Zionism and Jews. In it, the writer produces what he calls “The Zionist model”, where the writer puts the Zionist model in an intellectual, historical and psychological framework to study this phenomenon in the best way to understand, criticize and study it.

The Encyclopedia included several basic concepts that the writer clarified, including “Semitism”, “God's Chosen People”, “historical truth” and what matters to us here, he explained the essence of the Zionist project towards Arabs and Muslims in displacement and highlighted its image and purpose. (Al-Arian Abdullah 73-88)

3.1.1 The Dalit plan and its relation to displacement:

The goal of the plan: to forcibly displace the indigenous population, which means using murder, intimidation and massacres to forcibly force the population to be displaced, as Al-Messiri says in his famous encyclopedia "The Dalit plan was not just a military plan, but a model framework for the realization of the Zionist project: the evacuation of the land from its original inhabitants to achieve the Zionist majority" (203). El-Messiri demonstrates here that the plan was rooted within the intellectual and strategic framework of Zionist thought. He argues that displacement

CHAPTER THREE

was not merely an accidental consequence of the war but was the primary goal of the plan, with the war serving as a means to achieve displacement. He is surprised by this ideology, as it contrasts with the common understanding that displacement typically occurs accidentally during conflicts, when residents flee dangerous areas temporarily to safer locations. He states, "The plan explicitly stipulated the destruction or occupation of Palestinian villages and forcing their inhabitants to flee through displacement or massacres" (El-Messiri 205).

It is common knowledge now that the scale of the massacres and their atrocity were peaking during the plan of forced displacement of Palestinians. The most prominent of those massacres are Deir Yassin, in which more than 250 Palestinians were killed, the massacre of Tantora, which killed more than 200 martyrs, including the massacres of Lod, Ramla, sa'sa (Salman Abu Sitta 56-58, Walid Khalidi 152-158). El-Messiri explains that the plan was implemented in July 1948, and 531 Palestinian villages and cities were completely destroyed where the gangs used brutal and barbaric methods to implement the plan. (215-220). A direct result of the plan was that 84 percent of the indigenous population was displaced from their cities. (220-240)

El-Messiri further explains how the plan turned from an accidental event into a major one and the most famous ethnic cleansing operation of this era was carried out amid the permanent Arab and international silence. He says, "The dalit plan did not end in 1948, but continued through laws such as absentee property, land confiscations and the systematic demolition of houses, which confirms that displacement is a permanent policy and not a transient historical event" (El-Messiri 250) Through our analysis of this military plan, we see how the El-Messiri proved through numbers and events that a major and important event cannot be fleeting or happen without prior planning. Instead, it is a systematic policy adopted by the occupation to implement its colonial aims. El-Messiri recounts that the "cleansing of the land" is explicitly mentioned in the archives and documents of Israeli leaders since 1937 (El-Messiri 247).

CHAPTER THREE

In conclusion, El-Messiri encapsulates his analysis of the Zionist project by emphasizing the enduring legacy of Plan Dalet. He contends that the plan was not merely a historical episode but rather the foundational framework upon which subsequent Israeli policies were constructed. As he states, "The Dalet Plan was not just a piece of history, but the infrastructure of all subsequent Israeli policies. We still see its applications today in the changing map of Palestine, where populations, names, and memory are replaced" (El-Messiri 247).

This observation underscores El-Messiri's conviction that the mechanisms of displacement and erasure initiated in 1948 remain operative, albeit in evolving and adaptive forms, within contemporary Israeli strategies toward Palestinian land and identity.

3.1.2 The Displacement of Palestinians as part of the Zionist Strategy:

El-Messiri explains in the sixth volume of *The Encyclopedia* that the Jews have never had a homeland throughout history. This problem has become an eternal knot for the Jews. How can a people like the Jews, who have no attributed homeland remedy it? El-Messiri believes that these issues have become a key motivation for searching for a homeland that would unite all Jews worldwide. This search turned into their right, and the expulsion of Palestinians became a justification for that right, denying Palestinian existence psychologically, demographically, and historically.

He explains: "The goal of the Zionist operation was not just to settle, but to create a new reality that excludes the indigenous physically and symbolically, and blurs their existence and memory by all means" (El-Messiri 215). Propaganda has been spread to justify Israel's developing leadership of the land instead of Palestinians. One of the most famous phrases throughout history is "a land without a people, for a people without a land." The Jews repeatedly used religion to justify this, claiming that Palestine is the Promised Land of God for the Jews, "a birth right" for them. Leaders of the Zionist movement discussed and justified these

CHAPTER THREE

prerogatives, viewing displacement as an important and necessary step to establish a Jewish homeland and a pure Jewish state. They adopted military solutions, carried out massacres, spread rumours, and used psychological warfare to intimidate citizens. Laws were enacted to confiscate Palestinian land and homes left behind by those fleeing war and violence.

On the other hand, Israel practiced political and religious repression, as it began to publish its version of its truth in Palestine and that God promised them this land. They began to portray to the world that the Palestinian is the terrorist and historical invader of the land and the Israelis have the right to defend themselves against the Palestinians. As witnessed today, all this was delivered to the world with clear and unlimited Western and American support at the political and military level (El-Messiri).

El-Messiri explains how displacement is continuous and ever-renewing, and it shows no signs of ending. The settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have been used to cut off the geographical connection of the Palestinians, serving as both a physical and psychological barrier. He states: "Settlements are the new modern face of displacement, as they are used to cut off demographic and geographical communication between Palestinian communities." (180) This situation makes Palestinian life difficult, monotonous, and stressful, which in turn pushes some Palestinians to seek better opportunities elsewhere—voluntary migration—though they often move in the same direction as the colonizer's goal: displacement and land expropriation. Meanwhile, forced displacement and seizure of Palestinian lands continue, as seen in 1967 when 300,000 Palestinians were displaced.

3.2 The book of Introduction to the study of the Arab-Israeli conflict 1991:

This book aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the history of the Arab-Zionist conflict from a historical perspective and touches on the issue of displacement in a historical and legal sense, where the laws that made displacement legal and systematic were established: "Israel has turned forced asylum into a legal system, and every Palestinian is considered an

CHAPTER THREE

absentee, even if he is at the feet of its soldiers" (El-Messiri 84). The author explains how laws were used to achieve this through the enactment of discriminatory legislation, such as the Absentee Property Law of 1950, which was employed to seize the homes, lands, and properties of displaced Palestinians. Israel considered any Palestinian who was displaced or absent—whether they emigrated or moved to neighboring Palestinian cities—as non-existent, thereby controlling, even legally and legitimately, Palestinian property (El-Messiri 84). Consequently, Israel confiscated approximately 17 million dunams, which is equivalent to 85% of the land of historical Palestine. At the time, the Israeli government forbade the sale or transfer of these lands to non-Jews (El-Messiri 84). El-Messiri emphasizes that "Israel rejects the right of return because it exposes the falsity of its democratic claim" (130). Israel rejects the right of return because the concept of the absentee will not truly remain absent, and because the confiscated land could eventually be returned to its original owners. This rejection exposes and undermines the legal framework through which most Palestinian land was confiscated. Furthermore, it aims to dismantle the displacement project itself, which in turn threatens and ultimately destroys the entire colonial enterprise.

3.3 The book of partial secularism and comprehensive secularism 2002

The author explains how secularism has been utilized to serve and justify the displacement project. According to this perspective, some Jews believe that there is no intrinsic value to Palestinian existence, viewing it merely as an obstacle to progress and modernity. This reflects a form of anti-Palestinian sentiment that can be seen as an expression of the highest facets of antisemitism. The author draws parallels between these approaches and how the United States historically treated Native Americans, as well as how Europe dealt with African populations during colonization. These historical examples illustrate how displacement and settlement were deemed urgent necessities for the advancement of modernity and progress (El-Messiri 135). El-Messiri criticizes this logic, rejecting the notion that displacement and land control are justified

CHAPTER THREE

under the guise of secularization. He argues that such claims lack moral, innate, logical, and even legal validity, emphasizing that these justifications are fundamentally flawed and illegitimate.

3.4 The book *My Intellectual Journey* (autobiography 2005)

The writer recounts how he first received and learned about the displacement project during his childhood, and how the shock of learning about the Nakba impacted him deeply. His experience resembles a personal testimony to the era and the international crimes committed, as his young mind absorbed these realities early on. He describes how his small town in Egypt welcomed Palestinian families who escaped massacres, murder, and displacement, and how he listened to their stories and suffering. These narratives contributed to igniting in him urgent, simple, and innate questions about justice and the larger history behind these events: Where is justice? And what is the history of all this?

He recalls hearing from a Palestinian woman how soldiers shot her husband in front of her eyes in Lod. He states, "The first words I knew about Zionism were murder and deportation" (El-Messiri 252). The writer reflects on what he and others of his generation were hearing about the suffering of Palestinians at that time. He criticizes the Arab silence and its complicity, questioning why these massacres were not openly acknowledged or condemned. He criticizes the Arab world for failing to provide an honest account of what happened and what continues to happen in Palestine. Furthermore, he mentions reading an Israeli report boasting that the Absentee Property Law had confiscated 17 million dunams. It was at that moment that he realized that the Nakba was a premeditated and systematic crime (El-Messiri 258).

The writer traces his intellectual transformation from initially supporting capitalism through a leftist perspective to embracing an Islamic monotheistic worldview. He believed that Zionism was an extension of capitalist ideology; however, during his studies in the United

CHAPTER THREE

States, he was surprised and openly disapproved upon discovering evidence of a planned displacement. He was shocked to find plans for forced removal, contrary to rumors or notions that the displacement was voluntary (El-Messiri 265). He also praises scholars such as Benny Morris and Ilan Pappé for revealing and challenging the falsified narratives of Zionist history and displacement. Nonetheless, he criticizes some thinkers' justifications of Zionism and displacement, which he sees as morally and historically flawed. This realization led him to compile the Encyclopedia of Jews and Judaism as a means to counteract the distortion of facts and reality propagated by Western scholars (El-Messiri 265-268). He states, "When I discovered that the Israeli archives themselves record a pre-planned displacement of Palestinians, and that the Zionist narrative is based on a systematic falsification of history, I felt that it was my duty as a researcher to confront this moral drift with facts. The encyclopedia was an attempt to recover the stolen land... Even in words" (El-Messiri, *My Intellectual Journey* 265).

Finally, in this book, El-Messiri attempts to connect how the Palestinian was reduced to an absentee—a mere number in the records of refugees documented by the United Nations—with the triumph of the financial capital model embodied by colonialism and the Israeli occupation. El-Messiri states, "Zionism has turned the Palestinian into an 'absentee' in the law, just as the capitalist has turned the worker into a 'labor force'... Both belong to a materialistic worldview" (El-Messiri 269). He argues here that the colonizer seized control of the land, initiated development projects, and fulfilled the divine promise to the Jews to dominate Palestine.

In another interesting context, El-Messiri showed the double standards of the West politically and scientifically. He exposes the Western universities in their falsifying history and promoting the Zionist narrative at the expense of reality and truth, thus, marginalizing the Palestinian narrative of history, displacement and occupation, He also singled out Harvard

CHAPTER THREE

University and Columbia University, who give priority to Jewish teachers to tell the story of the Zionist government (El-Messiri 300-305). They advocate Zionism as a "militant liberation movement" as opposed to Palestinians being referred to as terrorists (El-Messiri 303).

El-Messiri also touches upon the attempt to smear the writer Edward Said when he criticized Zionism as a Colonial wave: "Even the word Nakba does not appear in most Western academic books... It is referred to as the 'Israeli war of independence'" (310). The writer sees the Great Western bias even in the Western curricula, where important terms such as Nakba and displacement were ignored, and he also noted a severe disregard for the massacres that took place during that war and a complete blackout on the Dalt plan. According to the author's experience and his readings, only five percent of the books on the Middle East published in America mention the Palestinian novel. Here the writer sees that the West is an original partner in displacement and a cover for the occupation for its crimes in Palestine (El-Messiri 310).

3.5 The right of return between history and Law:

This seminar addressed the legal and political mechanisms that systematically obstruct the Right of Return for Palestinian refugees. In his intervention, El-Messiri identified several structural measures that contribute to the denial of this fundamental right. First, he highlighted the discriminatory citizenship policies within Israel, whereby Arab residents, even when granted formal citizenship, are relegated to second- or third-class status, effectively excluding them from full civic participation. Second, he referred to the Absentee Property Law, which authorizes the transfer of ownership of any property deemed to lack a present owner directly to the Israeli state—thus institutionalizing dispossession. Third, El-Messiri discussed the militarization of geography, wherein displaced Palestinians are barred from returning to their homes under the pretext that these areas constitute "closed military zones" or "combat zones," thereby rendering return legally and physically impossible. Finally, he examined Israel's manipulation of international law, noting how the *Right of Return*,

CHAPTER THREE

as recognized by the United Nations, was reframed as a negotiable issue rather than a binding right. Within the framework of peace negotiations, the question of return was deliberately postponed to the final stages of dialogue—where it was ultimately frozen and left unresolved (El-Messiri *Report of the Institute for Palestine Studies* 2003).

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

In reflecting on the Nakba, El-Messiri offers a profound and morally charged interpretation, stating: “The Nakba was not just the displacement of a people; it was the announcement of a new world that sanctifies power and kills conscience... I came late to Palestine, but I came early to its reality” (*My Intellectual Journey* 270). This statement encapsulates his conviction that the Palestinian tragedy was not a singular historical event, but rather the manifestation of a broader civilizational crisis—one that privileges domination over justice and moral awareness.

Throughout his intellectual career, Abdel Wahab El-Messiri devoted his scholarship to examining the Palestinian question as a microcosm of the enduring conflict between Arabs and Jews, and more broadly, between the Islamic world and the West. While acknowledging that this struggle possesses deep religious dimensions rooted in the Qur’an and the Prophetic tradition, El-Messiri ultimately identified himself as an Arab-Islamic intellectual. This self-definition reflects his belief in both the centrality of the Palestinian cause and the inevitability of the ideological and epistemological confrontation between Western modernity and Islamic civilization, as well as between colonial structures and Arab nationalism.

El-Messiri’s writings consistently exposed the colonial ambitions of the Israeli occupation and the falsified narratives it constructed to legitimize its wars and massacres against Palestinians and Arabs more broadly. He meticulously analyzed the architecture of the displacement project, its ideological underpinnings, and the deliberate use of violence, terror, and forced migration as instruments to achieve political and demographic transformation. In doing so, El-Messiri uncovered the intellectual, psychological, and military dimensions of the Zionist enterprise, revealing how these mechanisms were enabled and perpetuated through Western complicity and international silence.

General Conclusion

In his Introduction to the Study of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, El-Messiri asserts that the displacement project is an ongoing historical process, not a concluded episode: “The displacement project is not over yet. It began in 1948 and was planned long before that—during the Herzl Conference and the Sykes-Picot Treaty. Displacement continues against the Palestinian people to this day, albeit through different methods and strategies. These converge in what is now recognized internationally as ethnic cleansing, all serving one goal: to empty Palestine of its people and its original identity” (El-Messiri *Introduction to the Study of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* 153).

This analysis underscores El-Messiri’s conviction that displacement functions as the core of the Zionist project, operating through adaptable strategies that extend from the political to the cultural and psychological realms. His insight prefigures contemporary realities in Gaza and the West Bank, where systematic destruction of homes, infrastructure, and social life echoes the earlier phases of the Nakba. The ongoing war in Gaza since October 7th, 2023, serves as a tragic validation of El-Messiri’s warning that displacement has neither ceased nor diminished; rather, it has evolved into new forms of military occupation and demographic engineering.

The current devastation of cities, the uprooting of families, and the erasure of historical memory all point to the continuity of a carefully orchestrated strategy aimed at depopulating and de-Palestinizing the land. The sustained campaign of violence against both human and ecological life—against “stone, tree, and city alike”—demonstrates the enduring relevance of El-Messiri’s framework for understanding displacement as a systemic and structural phenomenon, not merely a humanitarian crisis.

In conclusion, El-Messiri’s intellectual legacy is best summarized by his profound statement during an interview on Al Jazeera: “Ultimately, understanding the complexities of displacement and colonization requires empathy and a willingness to confront uncomfortable

General Conclusion

truths. Recognizing the human cost, both past and present, is crucial for fostering a more just and equitable future.” This reflection encapsulates the ethical foundation of El-Messiri’s thought—a call for moral consciousness in the face of power, and an insistence that any genuine understanding of Palestine must begin with empathy, justice, and historical truth.

W orks C ited

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