

*Making Israel*

# MAKING ISRAEL

*Edited by Benny Morris*

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## Abbreviations

ACFR	Arab Center for Future Research
CSZ	Center for the Study of Zionism, the Yishuv, and the History of the State of Israel
CZA	Central Zionist Archives
DBGA	David Ben-Gurion Archive
DP	displaced person
HQ	headquarters
HU	Hebrew University of Jerusalem
IBA	Israel Broadcasting Authority
IbTY	<i>Iyunim BiTkumat Yisrael</i> [Studies in the Establishment of Israel]
IDF	Israel Defense Forces
IDFA	Israel Defense Forces Archive
ISA	Israel State Archives
IST	Israel State Television
IZL	Irgun Zvai Leumi
JIH	<i>Journal of Israeli History: Politics, Society, Culture</i>
JNF	Jewish National Fund
JPS	<i>Journal of Palestine Studies</i>
JSP	Jewish Settlement Police
KMA	Kibbutz Me'uhad Archives
MK	Member of the Knesset
MoD	Ministry of Defense
NA	National Archives (Washington, DC)
NPA	National Police Headquarters Archive
NRP	National Religious Party
OBG	<i>Ofakim BaGeographya</i> [Horizons in Geography]
PCIR	Palestinian Center for Israeli Research
PIAT	Projector Infantry, Anti-Tank
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization

POW	prisoner of war
PRO	Public Record Office (London)
TAU	Tel Aviv University
TuV	<i>Teoriya U'Vikoret</i> [Theory and Criticism]
UN	United Nations
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
YM	<i>Yalkut Moreshet</i> [Heritage Papers]
YvS	<i>Yad VaShem</i> (Jerusalem)
YZ	<i>Yahadut Zmaneinu</i> [Contemporary Jewry]
ZOA	Zionist Organization of America
ZSC	Zalman Shazar Center (Jerusalem)

## Hebrew Journal Titles Translated

*Alpayim* [2000]  
*Ashmoret* [Watch]  
*BaSha'ar* [In the Gateway]  
*BeEretz Yisrael* [In the Land of Israel]  
*BeTerem* [Before]  
*Bikoret VeUtopia* [Criticism and Utopia]  
*Bitzaron* [Citadel]  
*Cathedra* [Chair]  
*Dapim LeHeker HaShoah VeHaMered* [Dapim: Studies on the Holocaust and the Revolt]  
*Davar* [Thing]  
*Dorot* [Generations]  
*Gesher* [Bridge]  
*HaAretz* [The Country]  
*Hagar* [Hagar]  
*HaTzofeh* [The Observer]  
*Ha'Umma* [Nation]  
*Hazut* [Aspect]  
*HaMizrah HeHdash* [The New East, i.e., Journal of the Israel Oriental Society]  
*Jama'a* [Group]  
*La-Merhav* [To the Area]  
*Ma'ariv* [Evening]  
*Mahberot LeMehkar U'LeVikoret* [Notebooks for Research and Criticism]  
*Medina, Mimshal, VeYahasim Bein-Le'umiim* [State, Government, and International Relations]  
*Megamot* [Currents]  
*Mehkarim Be-Geographya Historit-Yishuvit shel Eretz Yisrael* [Historical Geography Studies in the Settlement of Eretz-Israel]



*Meḥkarim BaGeographya shel Eretz Yisrael* [Studies in the Geography of  
 Israel]  
*Merhavim* [Spaces]  
*MiBifnim* [From Inside]  
*MiKedem U'MiYam* [From East and West]  
*Molad* [Birth]  
*Moznayim* [Scales]  
*Ner* [Candle]  
*Orlogin* [Timepiece]  
*Panim* [Face]  
*Pe'amim* [Pulse]  
*Proza* [Prose]  
*Riv'on LeKalkala* [Economic Quarterly]  
*Riv'on LeMeḥkar Ḥevrati* [Social Studies Quarterly]  
*Shdemot* [Fields]  
*Shivat Tziyon* [Return to Zion]  
*Shorashim BaMizrah* [Roots in the East]  
*Siman Kriah* [Exclamation Mark]  
*Sulam* [Ladder]  
*Tikkun* [Correction]  
*Tkhelet* [Azure]  
*Tziyonut* [Zionism]  
*Yalkut Moreshet* [Heritage Kit]  
*Yediot Aḥaronot* [Latest News]  
*Zmanim* [Times]

*Benny Morris*

## **Introduction**

During the past two decades Israel has been undergoing a historiographic revolution. Scholars in their hundreds have assailed the archives, and a torrent of books, articles, and MA and PhD theses has poured forth. Inevitably, a substantial part of this revolution has focused on the history of Zionism and Israel, and particularly on the main foundational crises—the first Arab-Israeli War of 1948, the Holocaust that preceded it, and the traumatic waves of immigration that followed Israel's establishment.

One may link the historiographic revolution to Israel's growth. Back in the early 1950s, there were about 1 million Israelis and a state budget of 250 to 300 million dollars; today there are 6.5 million Israelis, and a state budget of 30 to 40 billion dollars. Back then, there was one university; today there are six with an additional two dozen or more undergraduate colleges. The growth in spending on education and research has been commensurate.

But the revolution also testifies to a radical intellectual change. In the course of the 1970s and 1980s—as a result of natural processes of social and political maturation and a series of major political-military upheavals, including the 1973 October War, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, and the first Palestinian Intifada of 1987–91—hearts and minds grew more amenable to exploring in depth the history of the Zionist enterprise and its conflict with the surrounding Arab world.

The revolution was no doubt spurred by the opening of archives and the declassification of masses of documents in the West (in, among others, Britain's Public Record Office (PRO), the U.S. National Archives (NA), and the United Nations Archives) relating to the Middle East and Palestine/the Land of Israel in the 1940s and 1950s. But the key, of course, has been the opening of Israeli archives, including the Israel State Archives (ISA), the repository of the various ministries' papers; the Central Zionist Archives (CZA), which houses the Zionist movement's and institutions' papers; the Haganah and Israel Defense Forces (IDF) archives; and a host

of smaller political party and local archives. Israel enjoys a liberal Archives Law (1955), by comparison with other Western democracies, and during the 1980s and 1990s it was applied liberally (some might say with abandon) in line with the more open, liberal ethos of Israeli society itself. Reams of documents, including many on sensitive subjects, were opened to public scrutiny (although historians like me might legitimately bemoan the continued classification of certain documents or segments of documents).

The revisionist or “New Historiography,” which sought to reexamine the Zionist enterprise, including its conflict with the Arab world and its relationship with the Holocaust, with a new, critical eye, was based on the coupling of this newfound intellectual openness and the newly opened archives. The result was a historiographic earthquake. The work of the New Historians, who began publishing in the mid-1980s, tended to undermine the research, and some of the basic political-ideological assumptions, of the previous generation of historians, today commonly called the “Old Historians,” whose work, produced in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, tended to transfigure Zionism and Israel and sweep under the carpet anything that might tarnish their image. (And, let it be noted, these Old Historians have spawned a generation of younger historians, fine-tuned in their image, who I would call “New Old Historians.” Entrenched in the country’s universities, they continue to purvey a propagandistic view of Israel’s past.)

From the start, with the publication of their first essays and books in the 1980s, the New Historians significantly affected the whole domain of Israeli historiography, including those who opposed and dismissed them as anti-Zionist and pro-PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) and those who took a more neutral stance.

Let me give an illustration of that almost instantaneous (in historiographic terms) impact. In 1994 the Israel Defense Ministry Press published *In the Path of the Desert and Fire: The History of the Ninth Armored Battalion, 1948–1984*, by Col. (Res.) Moshe Giv’ati. The research and writing were facilitated, and, I believe, financed, by the IDF History Department. Alongside straightforward sketches of battles, the book describes the massacre of civilians in the conquered Arab village of Breir in May and the murder of Egyptian prisoners of war in October 1948 by Ninth Battalion troops. Such accounts would never have been included in a book spawned by the History Department and published by the Defense Ministry Press a decade before; for decades the two were redoubts of Israel’s Old Historiography. The appearance of the New

Historiography, replete with descriptions of savagery by Jewish troops and Zionist political skullduggery, without doubt facilitated this new-found openness in the heart of the Israeli defense establishment. The new wave thus contributed to the significant expansion of the realm of the permissible in Israeli historiographic discourse, while at the same time, through its headline-grabbing contentiousness, it increased interest in Zionism's and Israel's history in the Israeli public and the Jewish diaspora.

It is possible that over time the new wave will lead to basic changes in the nation's collective memory. Perhaps it has already done so. About five years ago, Israel's then education minister, Limor Livnat, spoke blandly on Israel State Television (IST) about "the expulsion of the Arabs" (*geirush ha'aravim*) in 1948. (I would use a softer more nuanced term to describe what happened, as alongside those who were expelled many more simply fled.) This is something no Israeli official would have said, let alone publicly broadcast, only a few years before.

The school—as it came to be seen—of New Historians, unusually, did not spring from within the Israeli university establishment. Indeed, the school's most prominent critics were pillars of that establishment—historians such as professors Itamar Rabinovich, the president of Tel Aviv University (TAU); and Anita Shapira, its former dean of humanities. The early New Historians were essentially outsiders in terms of Israeli academia: Tom Segev (author of *1949: The First Israelis*; *The Seventh Million*; and *One Palestine, Complete*) is a columnist for *HaAretz*, Israel's leading daily newspaper, with a PhD from an American university, and Avi Shlaim (*Collusion across the Jordan*; and *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*) is a professor of international relations at Oxford University, who obtained his BA and PhD in England. I (*The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949*; *Israel's Border Wars, 1949–1956*; and *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881–1999*) was a journalist with the *Jerusalem Post* until 1991, with a PhD in modern European history from Cambridge University. (I have held a university post in Israel, at Ben-Gurion University, only since 1997.) In other words, none of us was trained as a researcher in an Israeli university, none had held a position in one, and none had read Middle Eastern, Israeli, or Jewish history. (Cultural sociologists may one day investigate why it was that Israel's universities, during the first three or four decades of the state's existence, were bastions of conservatism, not to say whitewashing, in all that concerned the history of Zionism and Israel, and why it was that the New Historiography emerged among a set of journalists and non-Israeli academics.)

The first essay in this collection, my “The New Historiography: Israel Confronts Its Past,” was originally published at the end of 1988 in the American Jewish magazine *Tikkun*. Even though it has been republished a number of times since, it is fitting that it open this collection as it both announced the emergence of the New Historiography and defined the main terms of the debate that followed between this historiography and its critics.

Various historians have pointed to this essay as the source of the terms *New* and *Old Historiography* and *New* and *Old Historians*; in it, as it were, they were coined. But perhaps this is as good a place as any to clarify that this is not completely accurate. On 28 July 1988 the cultural critic Richard Bernstein published an article in the *New York Times* entitled “Birth of the Land of Israel: A History Is Revisited,” hailing the publication of three revisionist studies of the first Arab-Israeli War of 1947–49: Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities* (1987); Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949* (1988); and Avi Shlaim, *Collusion across the Jordan* (1988). Bernstein spoke of “the new scholarship” and said that it was “more self-critical” than previous Israeli (and Arab) works. My *Tikkun* essay, introducing the new terminology, followed four months later.

The revisionist wave that is passing over Israeli historiography has some exceptional features. The historiography of Western democracies has been characterized by a fixed pattern: a traditional or official narrative is followed by a revisionist wave, which, in turn, generates a round of counterrevisionism, harking back to and reinforcing at least some of the tenets of the official narrative. This is followed by a counter-counterrevisionist wave, upholding the essence of the original revisionism, and so on. Each wave co-opts and synthesizes some of the findings of the previous wave, the upshot usually being a continuous refinement and amplification of the data and their interpretations. Such, for example, has been the course of the historians’ debate about the Cold War.

Usually, relating to revolutions or wars, revisionism takes place decades after the apogee or end of a critical event or process, when passions have cooled and possible political repercussions have diminished. In Israel’s case, the revisionism, or New Historiography, occurred (and is still occurring) while the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is still with us and is, indeed, in an upsurge.

Second, as some critics have pointed out, Israel’s Old Historiography was in a sense merely a “prehistory,” not academic historiography at all. Much of it, indeed, was written by politicians, such as Ben-Gurion,

who were players in the events described and was not based on repositories of contemporary documentation (as all good history must be). In this view, then, Israel's current New Historiography is not really revisionist or is revisionist only vis-à-vis the collective memory shaped by the Zionist establishment; indeed, in this reading, the New Historiography is really the *first* wave of serious, academic historiography, and it has yet to be confronted and assailed by a revisionist nemesis.

A question arises about where Israeli historiography is heading. Prediction is always hazardous. But some tentative lines appear to be emerging. Clearly, a relatively large number of MA and PhD students and young lecturers in history and adjacent fields have embarked on highly detailed local, social, and economic histories. What exactly happened in Haifa, Rehovot, and the Jezreel Valley in the course of 1948? How did the Yishuv's economy function under conditions of mass mobilization, siege, and war? What happened to Tel Aviv's nightlife during the war? How was depopulated Arab Jaffa reconstructed by young Israel's town planners and architects? How did women fare in the first years of Israeli statehood? Why did Arab farmers sell land to the Zionist settlement bodies? These are the types of questions being answered by young Israeli academics in articles and books recently published or currently being researched, and one can expect such local, socioeconomic, and gender research to expand in the coming years. One can expect this questioning to be open and forthright in part—I believe—because of the initial spadework done by the New Historians. The upshot will be a further deconstruction of the traditional narrative or narratives—but also interesting reconstructions. How all this will affect Israel's education system and society in general is unclear. (One is forced to recall Chou En Lai's response when asked about the long-term consequences of the French Revolution: "I'm afraid it is too early to say.")

During the summer of 1988, probably prompted by Bernstein's article, the editor of *Tikkun*, Michael Lerner, organized a dialogue between a group of Israeli historians representing the Old and New trends. I recall the presence of the late Netanel Lorch, the author of the Old classic history of the 1948 war, *The Edge of the Sword* (1961, originally published, in Hebrew, in 1958), and Ilan Pappé, a young Haifa University historian, the author of the hesitantly New history, *Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948–1951* (1988). Lerner had hoped to publish the dialogue as is but found it lacked focus and force, and so he asked me to write an article describing the dialogue, and the hastily written "The New Historiography: Israel Confronts Its Past" emerged.

During the dialogue itself, or while writing the article, it occurred to me that Israeli historiography had apparently reached a watershed or turned a corner and a New Historiography had been born. The article announced the birth.

The article—along with the new books—came in for vociferous criticism from enraged Old Historians and their champions. The Old Historians by and large shared the common experience and memory of 1948, viewing it as the golden moment of their lives and the pivotal event in their maturation. The New Historiography sullied both their youth and their professional reputations.

The new wave's critics, including the Israeli novelist Aharon Megged and Anita Shapira, have argued that the New Historians constructed, and are spreading, a false, or partially false, picture of Zionist and Israeli history, a picture that aids Israel's enemies in the ongoing propaganda battle that is a component of the state's larger struggle for survival in a very hostile and vicious neighborhood.

More specifically, some have charged that the New Historiography has helped persuade Israel's leaders to be more—or too—conciliatory toward the Palestinians, contributing to the “weakening of Israel.” And there is probably a small measure of truth in this. To be sure, the New Historiography has affected the Israeli leadership's and public's political perceptions and positions.

But I would say that the effect has been far smaller than has been suggested. The gradual change in Israeli attitudes and policies in the late 1980s and early 1990s toward the Palestinians—which led to the recognition by the government, under Yitzhak Rabin, of the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and the start of peace negotiations that were designed to lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel—was the product mainly of the maturation and liberalization of Israeli society and of the Palestinian Intifada (or revolt) during 1987–91 against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The bulk of Israeli society came to understand that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) could not indefinitely rule millions of resisting Palestinians and that the Palestinians, too, would need to have a state of their own. In other words, long-term historical processes and a traumatic historical reality were infinitely more important to generating the Oslo peace process than the scribblings of a handful of historians.

What we have here is a case of coincidence rather than causality. The emergence of the New Historiography was not so much a trigger as an expression, one expression, of that wider liberalization of Israeli so-

ciety and values that eventually led to the new political openness toward the Palestinians. They “happened” at the same time. Nevertheless, undeniably the New Historiography in some ways dovetailed with the evolving mind-set of the educated, Ashkenazi-dominated elite that ran Israel during the Rabin years.

And perhaps in one or two individual cases the New Historiography affected, or at least buttressed, political opinions and positions. One of the architects of the Oslo peace process, which began with secret Israeli-Palestinian talks in Scandinavia in late 1992 and early 1993, once told me that he kept a well-annotated copy of *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* by his bedside and instructed his subordinates, who were attempting to negotiate a solution to the refugee problem with the PLO, to read the book.

The New Historians responded energetically to the Old Historians’ criticisms. But, reflecting on the matter over the years, I can now see that some of their criticisms, and those of others, were to the point. I would now add some of my own. The 1988 article had too narrow a focus—the portrayal of the 1948 war—and failed to note that other fields of study (the Sephardi question, the Yishuv and the Holocaust, etc.) were also being revamped by a handful of Israeli sociologists and historians and that the new thinking about 1948 was merely a part—albeit a major part—of a broader historical wave. And the article failed, even within the context of studying the Arab-Israeli conflict, to give any or at least sufficient credit to a number of scholars who had published on the subject before 1987–88. More tellingly, the article painted a picture in strokes that were too rough and broad (and merciless), lacking in nuance and bereft of compassion for several Old Historians who had labored under difficult censorial constraints and, despite their failings, had significantly contributed to historical understanding and, yes, had occasionally even strayed from the consensual narrative.

Nonetheless, the article was immediately perceived by historians in the field as a benchmark and a manifesto, as it were, of the New Historiography that defined the contours of an emergent controversy—the first major controversy in Israeli historiography. This is why it has been included and can be construed as constituting a sort of introduction for the collection that follows.

While most of the books by the New Historians and some by the Old Historians and their successors have appeared in English, much of the historiographical polemic has appeared only in Hebrew publications in Israel. This volume intends to provide the English-speaking reader



with in-depth coverage of the controversy. Side by side with essays by New and Old Historians, the volume includes articles by “neutrals,” who throw an external, if not necessarily objective, light on the issues. The essays touch on, directly or obliquely, the full panoply of subjects tackled during the past two decades, including the historiography of the Zionist-Arab conflict and the relationship between the Yishuv/Israel and the Holocaust. A number of essays deal with the evolution of personal and collective memories and how these have interfaced with historiography. Sociologists, “Old” and “Critical,” analyze the contradictory descriptions of the development of Israeli society, and a historian examines the historiographic treatment of the Sephardi (or Eastern Jewish) immigration to Israel.

The volume can be roughly divided into two parts: essays that relate to the historiography of the relations between the Yishuv/Israel and the Arab world and essays that relate to the historiography of internal Israeli/Jewish problems.

Following my piece, the volume kicks off with an essay by Mordechai Bar-On—a veteran IDF officer who later became a prominent peace activist and a left-wing Knesset member before turning to historiography—on the relationship between personal memory, collective memory, and historiography concerning the 1948 war (in which he participated as a soldier and about which he has written as a historian). Yoav Gelber, a leading political and military historian of Israel, gives us a comprehensive survey of the march of Israeli historiography from its prestate beginnings up to the current Old-New controversy. Avi Shlaim provides us with an overview of the Old-New historiographic controversy concerning the 1948 War. His essay is preceded by Anita Shapira’s on S. Yizhar’s “The Story of Hirbet Hizah.” The story, published in 1949, fictionally depicted the Israeli conquest of an Arab village and the expulsion of its inhabitants, and it is almost unique in Israeli literature in describing part of the “dark side” of Israel’s war of establishment. Shapira, perhaps the doyen of Israeli historians of Zionism, looks at the successive controversies and reactions surrounding the story’s publication and its transposition into film and at what this tells us about Israel and, obliquely, about what happened in 1948.

Yossi Ben-Artzi, an Israeli geographer, veteran IDF officer, and erstwhile prominent Peace Now figure, reviews the evolution of the discipline of historical geography in Israeli academia. While not figuring prominently in the Old-New controversy—for decades the field was

dominated by conservative, Old academics—historical geography is of particular relevance to our subject given the fact that the colonizing Zionist influx into Palestine, and particularly the 1948 war, radically transformed the country's landscape, which once was characterized by Arab villages, Arab agriculture, and (mostly) Arab towns and almost overnight was changed into a modernized “Zionist” landscape largely denuded of these villages, peasants, and towns.

The remaining essays all look at controversies about internal Israeli subjects. Moshe Lissak and Uri Ram explain and examine the sociological controversies surrounding the development of Israeli society. We can see the two scholars speaking a different language, using different categories, and demonstrating their conflicting sociological worldviews. Yaron Tsur, a historian, traces the scholarly scrutiny of a key social issue—the immigration of Sephardi Jews—that still plagues Israeli society, though far less than in the first decades of statehood.

Yechiam Weitz, who has written about Mapai, the Yishuv's/Israel's main socialist party and Herut, the leading right-wing party, in the 1940s, reviews the Israeli historiographic treatment of the relationship between the Yishuv (and then Israel) and the Holocaust. The issue relates both to the years of World War II, when the murder of the six million was proceeding apace, and the postwar years, when the Yishuv/Israeli society confronted the problem of absorbing hundreds of thousands of Holocaust survivors, who were often physical and emotional wrecks. In addition, the Holocaust served a number of utilitarian and unifying purposes in the Israeli political and societal arenas—against, for example, the Arab enemy.

The volume concludes with an essay by Mustafa Kabha, an Israeli Arab historian, who provides a particular external perspective on the controversy, which is, in effect, an internal Jewish Israeli intellectual dispute. Kabha surveys the Palestinian Arab and outside Arab perceptions of this debate.

In all volumes of essays a question arises about what should be included and what left out. In this case, some potential contributors declined to be included, arguing technical or other reasons. Others were deliberately not approached on the grounds that—in my view—their work fails to attain a minimal level of “scientific” accomplishment or objectivity. Streets—Israeli or Palestinian—awash with blood and political commitments can drive people around the bend, and this unfortunately has happened to a number of protagonists on the Israel historiographic scene. I have preferred to leave them out of this volume.

In all, the essays in this volume should provide a general picture of what is at issue and a taste of the modes of dispute and the arguments proffered on either side of the barricade. For many, this may be sufficient; others—who knows?—may be encouraged to dig deeper and read on.

*Benny Morris*

## **The New Historiography**

### **Israel Confronts Its Past**

On 11 July 1948, the Yiftah Brigade's Third Battalion, as part of what was called Operation Dani, occupied the center of the Arab town of Lydda. There was no formal surrender, but the night passed quietly. Just before noon the following day, two or three armored cars belonging to the Arab Legion, the British-led and -trained Jordanian army, drove into town. A firefight ensued. And the scout cars withdrew. But a number of armed townspeople, perhaps believing that the shooting heralded a major Arab counterattack, began sniping from windows and rooftops at their Israeli occupiers. The Third Battalion—about four hundred nervous Israeli soldiers in the middle of an Arab town of tens of thousands—fiercely put down what various chroniclers subsequently called a “rebellion” by firing in the streets, into houses, and at a concentration of prisoners of war (POWs) in a mosque. Israeli military records refer to “about 250” Arabs killed in the town that afternoon.<sup>1</sup> By contrast, Israeli casualties in both the firefights with the scout cars and the suppression of the sniping were between 2 and 4 dead (the records vary) and 12 wounded. Israeli historians called the affair a rebellion in order to justify the subsequent slaughter; Arab chroniclers, such as Arif al-Arif, did likewise in order to highlight Palestinian resolve and resistance in face of Zionist encroachment.

Operation Dani took place roughly midway through the first Arab-Israeli War—the War of Independence in official Israeli parlance. The Arab states' invasion of the fledgling state on 15 May had been halted weeks before; the newly organized and freshly equipped Israel Defense Forces (IDF) were on the offensive on all fronts—as was to remain true for the remainder of the war.

On 12 July, before the shooting in Lydda had completely died down, Lt. Col. Yitzhak Rabin, the operation's officer of Operation Dani, issued the following order: “1. The inhabitants of Lydda must be expelled quickly without attention to age. They should be directed toward Beit

Nabala. Yiftah [Brigade headquarters (HQ)] must determine the method and inform [Operation] Dani HQ and Eighth Brigade HQ. 2. Implement immediately.”<sup>2</sup> A similar order was issued at the same time to the Kiryati Brigade concerning the inhabitants of the neighboring Arab town of Ramle.

On 12 and 13 July, the Yiftah and Kiryati brigades carried out their orders, expelling the fifty to sixty thousand inhabitants of the two towns, which lie about ten miles southeast of Tel Aviv. Throughout the war, the two towns had interdicted Jewish traffic on the main Tel Aviv–Jerusalem road, and the Yishuv’s leaders regarded Lydda and Ramle as a perpetual threat to Tel Aviv itself. About noon on 13 July, Operation Dani HQ informed IDF General Staff/Operations: “Lydda police fort has been captured. [The troops] are busy expelling the inhabitants [*oskim begeirush hatoshavim*].”<sup>3</sup> Lydda’s inhabitants were forced to walk eastward toward the Arab Legion lines, and many of Ramle’s inhabitants were ferried in trucks or buses. Clogging the roads (and the legion’s routes of advance westward), the tens of thousands of refugees marched, gradually shedding possessions along the way. Arab chroniclers, such as Sheikh Muhammad Nimr al Khatib, claimed that hundreds of children died in the march of dehydration and disease.<sup>4</sup> One Israeli witness at the time described the spoor. The refugee column “to begin with [jettisoned] utensils and furniture and, in the end, bodies of men, women and children.”<sup>5</sup> Many of the refugees came to rest near Ramallah and set up tent encampments (which later became refugee camps supported by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees [UNRWA] and hotbeds of Palestinian militancy).

Israeli historians in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s were less than honest in their treatment of the Lydda–Ramle episode. The IDF’s official *Toldot Mu’hemet Hakomemiyut* (History of the War of Independence), written by members of the General Staff/History Branch and published in 1959, stated: “The Arabs [of Lydda], who had violated the terms of the surrender and feared [Israeli] retribution, were happy at the possibility given them of evacuating the town and proceeding eastwards, to Legion territory: Lydda emptied of its Arab inhabitants.”<sup>6</sup>

Two years later, the former head of the IDF History Branch, Lt. Col. Netanel Lorch, wrote in *The Edge of the Sword*, his history of the war, that “the residents, who had violated surrender terms and feared retribution, declared they would leave, and asked for safe conduct to Arab Legion lines, which was granted.”<sup>7</sup>

A somewhat less deceitful, but also misleading, description of the

events in Lydda and Ramle is provided by Lt. Col. Elhannan Orren, another former employee of the IDF History Branch, in his *Baderekh el Ha'ir* (On the Road to the City), a highly detailed description of Operation Dani published by the IDF Press in 1976. Orren, like his predecessors, fails to state anywhere that what occurred was an expulsion and one explicitly ordered from on high (originating, according to Ben-Gurion's first major biographer, Michael Bar-Zohar, with the prime minister himself).<sup>8</sup> Orren also repeats a variant of the 'inhabitants asked, the IDF graciously complied' story.<sup>9</sup>

Yitzhak Rabin, ironically more frank than his chroniclers, inserted a passage in the manuscript of his autobiography, *Pinkas Sherut* (service notebook), that more or less admitted that what had occurred in Lydda and Ramle had been an expulsion. But the passage was excised by order of the Israeli government. (Subsequently, to everyone's embarrassment, Peretz Kidron, the English translator of *Pinkas Sherut*, sent the deleted passage to the *New York Times*, where it was published on 23 October 1979.)<sup>10</sup>

The treatment of the Lydda-Ramle affair by past Israeli historians is illustrative of what can be called, for want of a better term, the Old or official History. That history has shaped the way Israelis and diaspora Jews—or at least diaspora Zionists—have seen, and in large measure still see, Israel's past; and it has also held sway over the way gentile Europeans and Americans (and their governments) see that past. This understanding of the past, in turn, has significantly influenced the attitude of diaspora Jews, as well as European and American non-Jews, toward present-day Israel—which effects government policies concerning the Israeli-Arab conflict.

The essence of the Old History is that Zionism was a beneficent and well-meaning, progressive national movement; that Israel was born pure into an uncharitable, predatory world; that Zionist efforts to achieve compromise and conciliation were rejected by the Arabs; and that Palestine's Arabs, and in their wake the surrounding Arab states, for reasons of innate selfishness, xenophobia, and downright cussedness, refused to accede to the burgeoning Zionist presence and in 1947 launched a war to extirpate the foreign plant. The Arabs, so goes the Old History, were politically and militarily assisted in their efforts by the British, but they nonetheless lost the war. Poorly armed and outnumbered, the Jewish community in Palestine, called the Yishuv, fought valiantly, suppressed the Palestinian "gangs" (*knufiyot* in Israeli parlance), and repelled the "five" invading Arab armies. In the course of that war, says the Old History—which at this point becomes indistinguishable from Israeli propaganda—Arab states and leaders, in order to blacken Israel's image and facilitate the

invasion of Palestine, called on or ordered Palestine's Arabs to quit their homes and the "Zionist areas"—to which they were expected to return once the Arab armies had proved victorious. Thus was triggered the Palestinian Arab exodus, which led to the now forty-year-old Palestinian refugee problem.

The Old History makes the further claim that in the latter stages of the 1948 war and in the years immediately thereafter Israel desperately sought to make peace with all or any of its neighbors. But the Arabs, obdurate and ungenerous, refused all overtures, remaining hell-bent on destroying Israel.

The Old Historians offered a simplistic and consciously pro-Israeli interpretation of the past, and they deliberately avoided mentioning anything that would reflect badly on Israel. People argued that since the conflict with the Arabs was still raging, and since it was a political as well as a military struggle, it necessarily involved propaganda, the goodwill (or ill will) of governments in the West, and the hearts and minds of Christians and diaspora Jews. Blackening Israel's image, it was argued, would ultimately weaken Israel in its ongoing war for survival. In short, *raison d'état* often took precedence over telling the truth.

The past few years have witnessed the emergence of a new generation of Israeli scholars and a New History. These historians, some of them living abroad, have looked and are looking afresh at the Israeli historical experience, and their conclusions, by and large, are at odds with those of the Old Historians.

Two factors are involved in the emergence of this New History—one relating to materials, the other to personae.

Thanks to Israel's Archives Law (passed in 1955 and amended in 1964 and 1981), and particularly to its key "thirty-year rule," starting in the early 1980s a large number (hundreds of thousands, perhaps millions) of state papers were opened to researchers. Almost all the Foreign Ministry's papers from 1947 to 1956, as well as a large number of documents—correspondence, memoranda, minutes—from other ministries, including the Prime Minister's Office (though excluding the Defense Ministry and the IDF), have been released. Similarly large collections of private papers and political party papers from this period have been opened. Therefore, for the first time historians have been able to write studies of the period on the basis of a large collection of contemporary source material. (The Old History was written largely on the basis of interviews and memoirs, and at best it made use of select batches of documents, many of them censored, such as those from the IDF Archive).

The second factor is the nature of the New Historians. Most of them were born around 1948 and have matured in a more open, doubting, and self-critical Israel than the pre-Lebanon War Israel in which the Old Historians grew up. The Old Historians lived through 1948 as highly committed adult participants in the epic, glorious rebirth of the Jewish commonwealth. They were unable to separate their lives from this historical event, unable to regard impartially and objectively the facts and processes that they later wrote about. Indeed, they admit as much. The New Historians, by contrast, are able to be more impartial.

Inevitably, the New Historians focused their attention, at least initially, on 1948 both because the documents were available and because that was the central, natal, revolutionary event in Israeli history. How one perceives 1948 bears heavily on how one perceives the whole Zionist/Israeli experience. If Israel, the haven of a much-persecuted people, was born pure and innocent, then it was worthy of the grace, material assistance, and political support showered upon it by the West over the past forty years—and worthy of more of the same in the years to come. If, on the other hand, Israel was born tarnished, besmirched by original sin, then it was no more deserving of that grace and assistance than were its neighbors.

The past few months have seen the publication in the West of a handful of New Histories, including Avi Shlaim's *Collusion across the Jordan* (1988); Ilan Pappé's *Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948–1951* (1988); Simha Flapan's *The Birth of Israel* (1987); and my own *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949* (1988). Taken together, these works—along with a large number of articles that have appeared recently in academic journals such as *Studies in Zionism*, *Middle Eastern Studies*, and the *Middle East Journal*—significantly undermine, if not thoroughly demolish, a variety of assumptions that helped form the core of the Old History.

Flapan's work is the least historical of these books. Indeed, it is not, strictly speaking, a history at all but rather a polemical work written from a Marxist perspective. In his introduction, Flapan—who passed away last year and was the former director of the left-wing Mapam Party's Arab Department and editor of the monthly *New Outlook*—writes that his purpose is not to produce “a detailed historical study interesting only to historians and researchers” but rather to write “a book that will undermine the propaganda structures that have so long obstructed the growth of the peace forces in my country.”<sup>11</sup> Politics rather than historiography is the book's manifest objective.



Despite its explicitly polemical purpose, Flapan's book has the virtue of more or less accurately formulating some of the central fallacies—which he calls myths—that informed the Old History. These were (1) that the Yishuv in 1947 joyously accepted partition and the truncated Jewish state prescribed by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly and that the Palestinians and the surrounding Arab states unanimously rejected the partition and attacked the Yishuv with the aim of throwing the Jews into the sea; (2) that the war was waged between a relatively defenseless and weak (Jewish) David and a relatively strong (Arab) Goliath; (3) that the Palestinians fled their homes and villages either voluntarily or at the behest or order of Arab leaders; and (4) that at the war's end Israel was interested in making peace but the recalcitrant Arabs displayed no such interest, opting for a perpetual—if sporadic—war to the finish.

Because of poor research and analysis—including the selective and erroneous use of documents—Flapan's demolition of these myths is far from convincing. But Shlaim, in *Collusion*, tackles some of the same myths—and far more persuasively. According to Shlaim, the original Zionist goal was the establishment of a Jewish state in the whole of Palestine. The acceptance of partition in the mid-1930s, as in 1947, was tactical, not a change in the Zionist dream. Ben-Gurion, says Shlaim, considered the partition lines of “secondary importance . . . because he intended to change them in any case; they were not the end but only the beginning.”<sup>12</sup> To his son, Amos, Ben-Gurion wrote in October 1937: “My assumption is that . . . a partial Jewish state is not an end but a beginning . . . and it will serve as a powerful lever in our historical efforts to redeem the whole of the country.”<sup>13</sup> In June 1938, Ben-Gurion explained to the Jewish Agency Executive that he had agreed to the partition plan “not because I will make do with part of the country, but on the basis of the assumption that after we constitute a strong force after the establishment of the state we will annul the partition and expand through the whole Land of Israel.”<sup>14</sup>

Come November 1947, the Yishuv entered the first stage of the war with a tacit understanding with Transjordan's king, Abdullah, “a falcon trapped in a canary's cage,”<sup>15</sup> that his Arab Legion would take over the eastern part of Palestine (now called the West Bank), which had been earmarked by the UN for Palestinian statehood, and would leave the Yishuv alone to set up a Jewish state in the rest of the country. The Yishuv and the Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan, Shlaim persuasively argues, had conspired from 1946 to early 1947 to nip the (future) UN Partition Resolution in the bud and to stymie the emergence of a Palestinian Arab

state. From the start, while publicly expressing support for the partition of the land between its Jewish and Arab communities, both Ben-Gurion and Abdullah aimed to frustrate the UN resolution and share among themselves the areas earmarked for Palestinian Arab statehood. It was to be partition—but between Israel and Transjordan. This “collusion” and “unholy alliance”—in Shlaim’s loaded phrases—was sealed at a now-famous clandestine meeting between Golda Myerson (Meir) and Abdullah at Naharayim, on the Jordan River, on 17 November 1947.<sup>16</sup>

This Zionist-Hashemite nonaggression pact was sanctioned by Britain, adds Shlaim. Contrary to the old Zionist historiography—which was based largely on the (mistaken) feeling of Israel’s leaders at the time—Britain’s foreign secretary, Ernest Bevin, “by February 1948,” had clearly become “resigned to the inevitable emergence of a Jewish state” (while opposing the emergence of a Palestinian Arab state). Indeed, he warned Transjordan “to refrain from invading the areas allotted to the Jews.”<sup>17</sup>

Both Shlaim and Flapan make the point that the Palestinian Arabs, though led by Haj Amin al Husseini, the conniving, extremist, former mufti of Jerusalem, were far from unanimous in supporting the Husseini-led crusade against the Jews. Indeed, in the first months of the hostilities, according to Yishuv intelligence sources, the bulk of Palestine’s Arabs merely wanted quiet, if only out of respect for the Jews’ martial prowess. But gradually, in part due to Haganah overreactions, the conflict widened and eventually engulfed the two communities throughout the land. In April and May 1948, the Haganah gained the upper hand and the Palestinians lost the war, most of them suffering displacement.

What ensued, once Israel declared independence on 14 May 1948 and the Arab states invaded on 15 May, was “a general land grab,” with everyone—Israel, Transjordan, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt—bent on preventing the birth of a Palestinian Arab state and carving out chunks of Palestine for themselves.

Contrary to the Old History, Abdullah’s invasion of eastern Palestine was clearly designed to conquer territory for his kingdom—at the expense of the Palestinian Arabs—rather than to destroy the Jewish state. Indeed, the Arab Legion—apart from one abortive incursion around Notre Dame in Jerusalem and an assault on the Etzion Bloc (a Jewish settlement bloc inside the Arab state area south of Bethlehem)—struck meticulously, throughout the war, to its nonaggressive stance vis-à-vis the Yishuv and the Jewish state’s territory. Rather, it was the Haganah/IDF that repeatedly attacked the legion on territory earmarked for Arab sovereignty (at Latrun, Lydda, and Ramle).

Nevertheless, Shlaim, like Pappé in *Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, is never completely clear about the main purpose of Egypt, Syria, and Iraq in invading Palestine. Was their primary aim to overrun the Yishuv and destroy the Jewish state or was it merely to frustrate or curtail Abdullah's territorial ambitions and acquire some territory for themselves?

Flapan argues firmly, but without evidence, that "the invasion . . . was not aimed at destroying the Jewish state."<sup>18</sup> Shlaim and Pappé are more cautious. Shlaim writes that the Arab armies intended to bisect the Jewish state and if possible "occupy Haifa and Tel Aviv" or "crippl[e] the Jewish state."<sup>19</sup> But at the same time he argues that they were driven to invade more by a desire to stymie Abdullah than by a wish to kill the Jews, and, partly for this reason, they did not properly plan the invasion, either militarily or politically, and their leaders were generally pessimistic about its outcome. Pappé points out that Egypt initially did not seem determined to participate in the invasion and all the Arab states failed to commit the full weight of their military power to the enterprise,<sup>20</sup> which indicates, perhaps, that they took the declared aim of driving the Jews into the sea less than seriously. In any event, Transjordan frustrated the other Arabs' intentions throughout and rendered their military preparations and planning ineffective.<sup>21</sup>

One of the most tenacious myths relating to 1948 is that of "David and Goliath"—that the Arabs were overwhelmingly stronger militarily than the Yishuv. The simple truth—as conveyed by Flapan, Shlaim, Pappé, and myself—is that the stronger side won. The map showing a minuscule Israel and a giant surrounding sea of Arab states did not, and, indeed, for the time being still does not, accurately reflect the military balance of power. The pre-1948 Yishuv had organized itself for statehood and war; the Palestinian Arabs, who outnumbered the Jews two to one, had not. And in war command and control are everything, or almost everything. During the first half of the war (November 1947 to mid-May 1948), the Yishuv was better armed and had more trained manpower than did the Palestinians, whose forces were beefed up by several thousand volunteers from the surrounding Arab states. This superior organization, command, and control meant that at almost every decisive point of engagement the Haganah managed to field more and better-equipped formations than did the Palestinians. When the Yishuv put matters to the test, in the Haganah offensives of April and early May 1948, the decision was never in doubt; the Arab redoubts fell, in domino fashion, like ripe plums—the Jerusalem Corridor, Tiberias, Haifa, Eastern Galilee, Safad. When one adds to this the Yishuv's superiority in

morale and motivation—it was a bare three years after the Holocaust, and the Haganah troopers knew it was do-or-die—the Palestinians never had a chance.

The Old History is no more illuminating when it comes to the second stage of the war—the conventional battles of 15 May 1948 to January 1949. Jewish organization, command, and control remained superior to those of the uncoordinated armies of Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon, and throughout the Yishuv also had an edge in numbers. In mid-May, for example, the Haganah fielded thirty-five thousand troops while the Arab invaders fielded twenty-five to thirty thousand. By the time of Operation Dani in July, the IDF had sixty-five thousand men under arms, and by December it had eighty to ninety thousand—outnumbering its combined Arab foes at every stage of the battle. The Haganah/IDF also enjoyed the immensely important advantage, throughout the conventional war, of short lines of communication, while the Iraqis and Egyptians had to send supplies and reinforcements over hundreds of kilometers of desert before they reached the front lines.

Two caveats must be noted. First, Transjordan's Arab Legion was probably the best army in the war. But it never numbered more than nine thousand troops, and it had no tanks or aircraft. Second, in terms of equipment, during the crucial weeks between the pan-Arab invasion on 15 May and the First Truce on 11 June, the Arab armies had a major edge in weaponry over the Haganah/IDF. (The Haganah changed its name and became the IDF on 1 June 1948.) The Haganah/IDF was much weaker in terms of aircraft and had almost no artillery (only heavy mortars) and very few tanks or tracked vehicles. During those weeks, as the Haganah's officer in command of operations, Yigael Yadin, told the political leadership, the chances were about even.<sup>22</sup> But before 15 May and from the end of the First Truce onward, the Yishuv's military formations were superior both in terms of manpower and, gradually, in terms of weaponry.<sup>23</sup>

Apart from the birth of the State of Israel, the major political outcome of the 1948 war was the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem. How the problem came about has been the subject of heated controversy between Israeli and Arab propagandists for the past four decades. The controversy is as much about the nature of Zionism as it is about exactly what happened in 1948. If the Arab contention is true—that the Yishuv had always intended “transfer” and in 1948 systematically and forcibly expelled the Arab population from the areas that became the Jewish state—then Israel is a robber state that, like young Jacob, has won

the sympathy and support of its elders in the West by trickery and connivance and the Palestinians are more or less innocent victims. If, on the other hand, the Israeli propaganda line is accepted—that the Palestinians fled “voluntarily” or at the behest of their own or other Arab leaders—then Israel is free of original sin.

As I have set out in great detail in *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* the truth lies somewhere in between these two explanations. While from the mid-1930s on most of the Yishuv’s leaders, including Ben-Gurion, wanted to establish a Jewish state without an Arab minority, or with as small an Arab minority as possible, and supported a “transfer solution” to this minority problem, the Yishuv did not enter the 1948 war with a master plan for expelling the Arabs, nor did its political and military leaders ever adopt such a plan. There were Haganah/IDF expulsions of Arab communities, some of them with Haganah/IDF General Staff and/or Cabinet sanction—such as at Miska and Dumeira in April 1948; at Zarnuqa, at Qubeiba, and Huj in May; in Lydda and Ramle in July; and along the Lebanese border (in Bir‘im, Iqrit, Tarbikha, Suruh, al Mansura, and Nabi Rubin) in November. But there was no blanket or grand policy of expulsion.

On the other hand, at no point during the war did Arab leaders issue a blanket call for Palestine’s Arabs to leave their homes and villages and wander into exile. Nor was there an Arab radio or press campaign urging or ordering the Palestinians to flee. Indeed, I have found no trace of any such broadcasts—and throughout the war the Arab radio stations and press were monitored by the Israeli intelligence services and Foreign Ministry and by Western diplomatic stations and agencies (such as the BBC). No contemporary reference to or citation from such a broadcast, let alone from a series of such broadcasts, has ever surfaced.

Indeed, in early May 1948, when, according to Israeli propaganda and some of the Old Histories, such a campaign of broadcasts should have been at its height in preparation for the pan-Arab invasion, Arab radio stations and leaders (Radio Ramallah, King Abdullah, and Arab Liberation Army commander Fawzi al-Qawuqji) all issued broadcasts calling on the Palestinians to stay put and, if already in exile, to return to their homes in Palestine. References to these broadcasts exist in Haganah, Mapam, and British records.

Occasionally, local Arab commanders, leaders, and officials ordered the evacuation of women and children from war zones. Less frequently, as in Haifa on 22 April 1948, local Arab leaders advised or instructed their communities to leave rather than stay in a potential or actual war

zone or “treacherously” remain under Jewish rule. But there were no blanket Arab orders or campaigns urging people to leave.

Rather, in order to understand the exodus of the 600,000 to 760,000 Arabs from the areas that became the post-1948 Jewish state, one must look to a variety of related processes and causes. What happened in Haifa is illustrative of the complexity of the exodus (though it, too, does not convey the full complexity of what transpired in the various regions of Palestine in the course of the war).

The exodus from Haifa (which before the war had a population of about sixty-five thousand Arabs and seventy thousand Jews), as from the other main Palestinian Arab centers, Jaffa and Jerusalem, began in December 1947 with the start of hostilities between Jewish and Arab neighborhoods. The exodus gained momentum during the following months as the British Mandate administration moved toward dissolution and final withdrawal. The first to go were the rich and educated—the middle classes with second homes on the Beirut beachfront, in Nablus or Amman, or who had either relatives abroad with large homes or enough money to stay in hotels for long periods. The Palestinians’ political and economic leadership disappeared. By mid-May 1948, only one member of the Arab Higher Committee, the Palestinians’ “government,” was still in the country.

The flight of the professionals, civil servants, traders, and businessmen had a powerful impact on the Haifa Arab masses, who already were demoralized by the continual sniping and bomb attacks, the feeling that the Jews were stronger, and the sense that their own ragtag militia would fail when the test came (as indeed it did). The Arabs felt terribly isolated and insecure; the Arab half of Haifa was far from other major Arab population centers and was easily cut off by Jewish settlements along the approach roads to the city. Businesses and workshops closed, policemen shed their uniforms and left their posts, Arab workers could no longer commute to jobs in Jewish areas, and agricultural produce was interdicted in ambushes on the approach roads. Unemployment and prices soared. Thousands left.

Then came the Haganah attack of 21–22 April on the Arab districts. Several companies of Haganah Carmeli Brigade troops, under cover of constant mortar fire, drove down the Mount Carmel slope into the Arab downtown areas. Arab militia resistance collapsed in hours. Thousands of Arabs fled from outlying neighborhoods (such as Wadi Rushmiya and Halissa) into the British-controlled port area, piled into boats, and fled northward to Acre. The leaders who remained sued for a cease-fire.

Under British mediation, the Haganah agreed, offering what the British regarded as generous terms. But then, faced with Muslim pressure, the Arab leaders, most of them Christians, got cold feet; a cease-fire meant surrender and implied agreement to live under Jewish rule. They would be open to charges of collaboration and treachery. So, to the astonishment of the British officers and the Jewish military and political leaders gathered on the afternoon of 22 April at the town hall, the Arab delegates announced that their community would evacuate the city.

The Jewish mayor, Shabtai Levy, and the British commander, Maj. Gen. Hugh Stockwell, pleaded with the Arabs to reconsider. The Haganah representative at the meeting, Mordechai Makleff, declined to voice an opinion. But the Arabs were unmoved, and the mass exodus, which had begun under the impact of the Haganah ground and mortar assault, moved into top gear, with the British supplying boats and armored car escorts to the departing Arab convoys. From 22 April until 1 May, almost all the Arabs departed. The rough treatment—temporary evictions, house-to-house searches, detentions, and occasional beatings—meted out to the remaining population during those days by the Haganah and Irgun Zva'i Le'umi (IZL or Irgun) troops that occupied the downtown areas led many of the undecided to opt for evacuation as well. By early May, the city's Arab population had dwindled to three or four thousand.<sup>24</sup>

The bulk of the Palestinian refugees—some 250,000 to 300,000—went into exile during those weeks between early April and mid-June 1948, with the major precipitant being Jewish (Haganah/IZL/IDF) military attacks or the fear of such attacks. In most cases, the Jewish commanders, who wanted to occupy empty villages (occupying population villages meant leaving behind a garrison, which the units could not afford), were seldom confronted with deciding whether or not to expel an overrun community. Most villages and towns simply emptied at the first whiff of grapeshot.

In conformity with *Tochnit Dalet* (Plan D), the Haganah master plan, formulated in early March 1948, for securing the Jewish state areas in preparation for the expected declaration of statehood and the prospective Arab invasion, the Haganah cleared various areas completely of Arab villages—in the Jerusalem Corridor, around Kibbutz Mishmar Ha'emek, and along the Tel Aviv–Haifa coast road. But in most cases expulsion orders were not necessary; the inhabitants had already fled out of fear or as a result of Jewish attack. In several areas, Israeli commanders successfully used psychological warfare ploys (“Here’s some friendly ad-

vice. You'd better get out now before the Haganah troops come and rape your daughters") to obtain Arab evacuation.<sup>25</sup>

The basic structural weaknesses of prewar Palestinian society led to the dissolution of that society when the test of battle came. The lack of administrative structures, as well as weak leaders, a poor or nonexistent military organization beyond the single-village level, and faulty or nonexistent taxation mechanisms all caused the main towns to fall apart in April and May 1948. The fall of the towns and the exodus from them, in turn, brought a sense of fear and despondency to the hinterlands. Traditionally, the villages, though economically autarchic, had looked to the towns for political leadership and guidance. The exodus of the middle classes and Arab leaders, as well as the fall of the towns, provided the rural Palestinians with an example to emulate. Safad's fall and evacuation on 10–11 May, for example, triggered an immediate evacuation of the surrounding villages; so, earlier, did the fall of Haifa and the IZL assault on Jaffa (25–27 April).

Seen from the Jewish side, the spectacle of mass Arab evacuation certainly triggered appetites for more of the same. Everyone, at every level of military and political decision making, understood that a Jewish state without a large Arab minority would be stronger and more viable both militarily and politically. Therefore, the tendency of local military commanders to "nudge" Palestinians into flight increased as the war went on. Jewish atrocities—far more widespread than the Old Historians have indicated (there were massacres of Arabs at Dawayima, Eilabun, Jish, Safsaf, Hule, Saliha, and Sasa besides Deir Yassin and Lydda)—and the drive to avenge past Arab misdeeds also contributed significantly to the exodus.

The last major fallacy tackled incidentally or directly by the New Historians concerns an Israel that in 1948–49 was bent on making peace with its neighbors and an Arab world that monolithically rejected all peace overtures. The evidence that Israel's leader were not desperate to make peace and were unwilling to make the major concessions necessary to give peace a chance is overwhelming. In Tel Aviv, there was a sense of triumph and drunkenness that accompanied victory—a feeling that the Arabs would soon or eventually sue for peace, that there was no need to rush things or make concessions, that ultimately military victory and dominance would translate into diplomatic-political success.

As Ben-Gurion told an American journalist in mid-July 1949: "I am prepared to get up in the middle of the night in order to sign a peace agreement—but I am not in a hurry and I can wait ten years. We are



under no pressure whatsoever.”<sup>26</sup> Or, as Ben-Gurion records Abba Eban telling him: “[Eban] sees no need to run after peace. The armistice is sufficient for us; if we run after peace, the Arabs will demand a price of us—borders [i.e., in terms of territory] or refugees [i.e., repatriation] or both. Let us wait a few years.”<sup>27</sup>

As Pappé put it: “Abdullah’s eagerness [to make peace] was not reciprocated by the Israelis. The priorities of the state of Israel had changed during 1949. The armistice agreements brought relative calm to the borders, and peace was no longer the first priority. The government was preoccupied with absorbing new immigrants and overcoming economic difficulties.”<sup>28</sup>

Israel’s lack of emphasis on achieving peace was manifested most clearly in its protracted (1949–51) secret negotiations with Abdullah. Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett described his meeting with Jordan’s king at the palace in Shuneh on 5 May 1949 in the following way: “Transjordan said—we are ready for peace immediately. We said—certainly, we too want peace but one shouldn’t rush, one should walk.”<sup>29</sup> Israel and Jordan had just signed an armistice agreement, after much arm-twisting by Israel, which British and American diplomats compared to Hitler’s treatment of the Czechs in 1938–39. (As Abdullah put it, quoting an old Turkish saying: “If you meet a bear when crossing a rotten bridge, call her ‘dear auntie.’”) But the two sides never signed a peace treaty or a nonbelligerence agreement, something that was proposed at one point by Abdullah.

Shlaim, who in *Collusion* expands the description of the secret Israeli-Jordanian negotiations first provided in Dan Schueftan’s *Optziya Yardenit* (Jordanian Option), published in Israel in 1986, more or less lays the blame for the failed negotiations on Israeli shoulders. A more generous, less anti-Israeli interpretation of the evidence would blame the Israelis and the Jordanians equally.

Israel refused to offer major concessions in terms of refugee repatriation or territory (Abdullah was particularly keen on getting back Lydda and Ramle) and was too long unwilling to offer Jordan a sovereign corridor through its territory to the sea at Gaza. Throughout, Israel was prodded if not guided by the “blatant expansionism” of some of Ben-Gurion’s aides, including Moshe Dayan. As Yehoshafat Harkabi, one of Dayan’s military colleagues, put it (according to Shlaim): “The existential mission of the State of Israel led us to be demanding and acquisitive, and mindful of the value of every square metre of land.”<sup>30</sup> In any case, Ben-Gurion refused to meet Abdullah, and the Israeli leaders spoke of Abdullah with undeserved contempt.

At one point, Shlaim writes that “two principal factors were responsible for the failure of the post-war negotiations: Israel’s strength and Abdullah’s weakness.”<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, Shlaim seems to attribute too much weight to the first and too little to the second. He does not sufficiently acknowledge the importance of the “Palestinization” of Jordan following the Hashemite annexation of the West Bank, which quickly resulted in the curtailment of Abdullah’s autonomy and freedom of political movement both within Jordan and in the Arab world in general. The twin pressures exercised by the Arab world outside and his successive cabinets inside the kingdom successfully impeded Abdullah’s ability to make a separate peace with Israel. He almost did so a number of times, but he always held back at the last moment and refused to take the plunge. It is possible, Shlaim argues, that more generous concession by Tel Aviv at certain critical points in the negotiations would have given Abdullah greater motivation to pursue peace as well as the ammunition he needed to silence his antipeace critics, but the truth of such a claim is uncertain. What is clear is that Abdullah, though showing remarkable courage throughout, simply felt unable in those years to go against the unanimous or near-unanimous wishes of his ministers and against the unanimous antipeace stand of the surrounding Arab world.

What happened with Abdullah occurred in miniature and more briefly with Egypt and Syria. In September and October of 1948, Egypt’s King Farouk, knowing that the war was lost, secretly sent a senior court official to Paris to sound out Israel on the possibility of a peace based on Israeli cession of parts of the Negev and the Gaza Strip to Egypt. Sharett and the senior staff at the Foreign Ministry favored continued negotiations, but Ben-Gurion—bent on a further round of hostilities to drive the Egyptian army out of the Negev—flatly rejected the overture. According to Shlaim, Ben-Gurion “may have been right in thinking that nothing of substance would come out of these talks. But he surely owed his cabinet colleagues at least a report on what had taken place so that they could review their decision to go [again] to war against Egypt on the basis of all the relevant information.”<sup>32</sup> New Egyptian peace overtures in November, after Israel’s Operation Yoav, again came to naught.

As for Syria, in May 1949 its new ruler, Col. Husni Za’im, made major peace proposals, which included recognition of Israel as well as Syrian readiness to absorb hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees. Za’im wanted Israel to concede a sliver of territory along the Jordan River and the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee and to share the waters of the Jordan and the Sea of Galilee. He asked to meet with Ben-Gurion.

Again Ben-Gurion rejected the proposal, writing on 12 May: "I am quite prepared to meet Col. Za'im in order to promote peace. . . . But I see no purpose in any such meeting as long as the representatives of Syria in the armistice negotiations do not declare in an unequivocal manner that their forces are prepared to withdraw to their pre-war territory [i.e., withdraw from the small Syrian-occupied Mishmar HaYarden salient, west of the Jordan]." <sup>33</sup>

Continued feelers by Za'im resulted in another Israeli refusal. As Sharett put it on 23 May: "It is clear that we . . . won't agree that any bit of the Land of Israel be transferred to Syria, because this is a question of control over the water sources." <sup>34</sup> Shabtai Rosenne, the legal adviser at the Foreign Ministry, put it simply: "I feel that the need for an agreement between Israel and Syria pressed more heavily on the Syrians." <sup>35</sup> Therefore, why rush toward peace? A few weeks later, Za'im was overthrown and executed. The Syrian peace initiative died with him. Whether the overture was serious or merely tactical—to obtain Western sympathy and funds, for example—is unclear. What is certain is that Israel failed to pursue it.

What was true of Israel's one-on-one contacts with each of the Arab states was true also of its negotiations with the Arabs under UN auspices at Lausanne in the spring and summer of 1949. There, too, Israel was ungenerous (though, needless to say, the Arabs were equally unyielding). For months, UN officials and the United States pressed Israel to make what they felt might be the redemptive gesture: to proclaim its willingness to take back several hundred thousand refugees. As the months dragged on and Israel remained inflexible, the Arabs became just as obstinate. When at last Israel offered to take back "one hundred thousand," which, in reality, as Sharett explained to his colleagues, was only sixty-five thousand (Sharett told Mapai leaders that some thirty-five thousand refugees had already returned to Israel illegally or were about to return as part of the family reunification scheme and that these refugees would be deducted from the total), <sup>36</sup> it was a case of too little too late. And Israel's more realistic offer—to take the Gaza Strip with its resident and refugee populations—was never seriously entertained by Egypt. Lausanne was probably the last chance for a comprehensive Israeli-Arab peace.

In *Pirkei Avot*, it is written: "Rabbi Shimon ben Gamliel was wont to say: "On three things the world rests: on justice, on truth and on peace"" (1:18). And he would quote the prophet Zechariah: "[E]xecute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates" (8:16). Telling the truth

thus seems to be an injunction anchored in Jewish tradition, and the scriptures apparently link truth to peace in some indeterminate manner.

The New History is one of the signs of a maturing Israel (though, no doubt, there are those who say it is a symptom of decay and degeneration). What is now being written about Israel's past seems to offer us a more balanced and truthful view of the country's history than what has been offered hitherto. It may also in some obscure way serve the purposes of peace and reconciliation between the warring tribes of that land.

## NOTES

This essay was originally published in *Tikkun* (Nov.–Dec. 1988): 19–23, 99–102.

1. Zerubavel Gil'ad, ed., *Sefer Hapalmah* (Tel Aviv, 1956), (Heb.) 2:565; Third Battalion/Intelligence, "Comprehensive Report on the Third Battalion's Actions from Friday 9.7 until Sunday 18.7," 19 July 1948, IDFA 922\75\1237.

2. Dani HQ to Yiftah and 8th Brigades, 12 July 1948, IDFA 922\75\1234. The cable, in coded form, is also reproduced in IDFA 922\75\1237, issued at 13:30 hours, 12 July 1948.

3. Dani HQ to General Staff/Operations, 11:35 hours, 13 July 1948, IDFA 922\75\1235.

4. Segev (Sabagh) Shmuel, ed., *Be'einei Oyev* [In Enemy Eyes] (Heb.) (Tel Aviv, 1954), 36.

5. Gil'ad, *Sefer Hapalmah*, 2:718.

6. Israel Defense Forces, *Toldot Milhemet Hakomemiyet* [History of the War of Independence], (Tel Aviv, 1959), (Heb.) 259.

7. Nethanel Lorch, *The Edge of the Sword: Israel's War of Independence, 1947–1949* (New York, 1961), 286. Interestingly, the selfsame sentence also appears in the third, revised version of the book, published in 1989. There Lorch added (p. 424) that in light of the great suffering of the Lydda evictees, the Yiftah Brigade mobilized fifty buses to ferry them to the legion lines. This is incorrect. The Lydda refugees walked. But the Ramle evictees (whom Lorch does not mention) were supplied with buses by the Kiryati Brigade.

8. Michael Bar-Zohar, *Ben-Gurion* (Heb.) (Tel Aviv, 1977), 2:775.

9. Elhannan Orren, *Baderekh el Ha'ir* [On the Road to the City] (Heb.) (Israel, 1976), 123–27.

10. Peretz Kidron, "Truths Whereby Nations Live," in *Blaming the Victims*, ed. Edward Said and Christopher Hitchens (London, 1988), 85–96.

11. Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities* (London and New York, 1987), 4.

12. Avi Shlaim, *Collusion across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement, and the Partition of Palestine* (Oxford, 1988), 16.

13. D. Ben-Gurion to A. Ben-Gurion, 5 October 1937, Ben-Gurion Correspondence, IDFA. This quotation and the next one did not appear in the original *Tikkun* article, which included quotations to the same effect but not as powerful.

14. Protocol of meeting of Jewish Agency Executive, 7 June 1938, CZA S100/28.
15. Shlaim, *Collusion*, 33.
16. *Ibid.*, 116–20; Pappé, *Britain*, 10.
17. Shlaim, *Collusion*, 139; Pappé, *Britain*, 16–18.
18. Flapan, *Birth*, 9, 186.
19. Shlaim, *Collusion*, 201, 203.
20. Pappé, *Britain*, 23–25.
21. Shlaim, *Collusion*, 196–205.
22. Israel State Archives, “The People’s Administration, Protocols 18 April–13 May 1948.” 67, protocol of meeting held on 12 May 1948. Today I would describe the shifting balance of forces between the Yishuv and the Palestinians and the Arab states in more nuanced terms (see Morris, “The Complexity of Assessing the Balance of Forces between Israel and the Arabs in the 1948 War,” in *The Few against the Many?* ed. A. Kadish and B. Z. Kedar (Jerusalem, 2006), 41–48.
23. See A. Kadish and B. Z. Kedar, eds., *The Few against the Many?* particularly the essays by Amitzur Ilan, Yosef Heller, Benny Morris, Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, Eyal Naveh, Mordechai Bar-On, and Zaki Shalom; Amitzur Ilan, *The Origin of the Arab-Israeli Arms Race: Arms, Embargo, Military Power, and Decision in the 1948 Palestine War* (1996). Haim Levenberg, *The Military Preparations of the Arab Community in Palestine, 1945–1948* (London, 1993), is illuminating about the Arab side.
24. See Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949* (Cambridge, 1987).
25. Such ploys were used, for example, in the Galilee Panhandle in May 1948 (see *ibid.*, 122).
26. Shlaim, *Collusion*, 465.
27. David Ben-Gurion, *Yoman HaMilhama* [War Diary], (Tel Aviv, 1982), 3:993, entry for 14 July 1949.
28. Pappé, *Britain*, 188.
29. Israel State Archives, ed. Yamima Rosenthal, *Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel, May–December 1949* (Jerusalem, 1986), 4:68.
30. Shlaim, *Collusion*, 444–45.
31. *Ibid.*, 621.
32. *Ibid.*, 320.
33. Israel State Archives, *Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel, Armistice Negotiations with the Arab States, December 1948–July 1949* (Jerusalem, 1983), 3:563.
34. *Ibid.*, 4:69.
35. *Ibid.*, 3:582.
36. Morris, *Birth*, 278–83.

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## **Remembering 1948**

Personal Recollections, Collective  
Memory, and the Search for  
“What Really Happened”

### **Collective Memory and the New History**

Israelis have been revisiting the events of the 1948 war for the past fifty years, not only because they were branded with the personal memories of the generation that lived through them, nor simply because they were crucial to the Jewish state's political and social makeup, but primarily because they still occupy a major segment of the collective memory that constitutes Israel's mental space and identity.

Israel's landscape is saturated with sites that carry the memories of that war. Children's textbooks are laden with stories and poems that pay tribute to it; our calendar contains numerous dates that reconnect us to it. Travelers from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem may well ask at the start of the journey, near the community of Mishmar HaShiv'a, which straddles the road, who the “seven” are that are memorialized by its name. As they reach the foothills, they may observe the large fortress of Latrun, which was recently made into the main commemoration site of Israel's Armored Corps. As the winding road starts to climb, they may wonder about the ruined armored vehicles lining it, which are draped in the national flag on Independence Day. They may also notice the strange chrome monument in the shape of a giant broom erected in memory of the troops that broke through the siege of Jerusalem (*Andartat Ha-Portzim*). Next the road runs through the Castel passage, abutted by concrete walls emblazoned with the name of the Harel Brigade.

The construction of these memories, and the interpretation of the events they come to remind us of, have been the subject of animated dissent since 1948. The wide divergence between the different accounts is well known to scholars who have researched specific battles and tried to grasp “what really happened” by recording personal testimonies. Most of the testimonies of “participants,” moreover, are mere hearsay since each individual has firsthand experience only of a very narrow portion of the

events; yet she or he tells us a complete story, based on details heard after the event from other actors in the drama. As these stories are told and retold, especially when carried forward by nonparticipants, they innocently or intentionally become distorted by prejudice, loyalties, presumptions, and even political interests. The field of memory is thus wide open for an ongoing battle over national narratives.

Collective memory should properly be called dominant memory, that is, memory shared by the majority of the public at a given time. There are, however, always other memories carried, for one reason or another, by part or parts of the population and diverging from the dominant one. Thus, for example, the Arabs of Nazareth who survived the war, or their descendants, may remember the events of Operation Dekel, in which the town was occupied by the Jews in July 1948, differently from the veterans of the Seventh Brigade or their descendants.

This diversity is endemic to all collective memories; one version or another becomes prevalent, leaving the rest embedded in fewer carriers. Ruling elites obviously play a major role in shaping collective memory since they control most of the agencies of state commemoration, command more influence in the networks of education, and enjoy more access to the media.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, dominant memory does not always ensue from vested interested or manipulation. Often, it evolves spontaneously on the basis of accumulated "firsthand testimonies." This is not to say that it is more authentic or more accurate. It only means that it is not fabricated, as some postmodern sociologists would have us believe, but may rely on a specific kind of knowledge of real events and facts.

Furthermore, even if ruling elites do consciously manipulate public memory, this is seldom based on falsification, at least in democratic societies. They can hardly tout notions totally detached from reality for there will always be qualified people to rebut them and put forth their own narratives to set the record straight and uncover the truth.

Over the past few years, we have seen a concerted attack on the dominant Israeli narrative of the 1948 war. New Historians and critical sociologists, dissatisfied with the educational impact and political implications of the traditional story, have begun to weave an alternative account.

One of the arguments used by the New Historians to delegitimize older historiographies is that earlier writers, who in many cases were also participants in the events they describe, were motivated by apologetic tendencies, burdened by excessive pride or guilt, and therefore impelled

to justify the policies and actions of their generation. The Old Historians counter these allegations by claiming that the younger generation of scholars suffers from alienation and therefore does not have the necessary empathy and imagination to reconstruct history. Archival documents may only corroborate what these writers knew or thought they knew. But contemporary knowledge may also be wrong and is always partial since even those who were there never had access to the full, complex picture of events. Historiography that lacks acquaintance with the complete context and zeitgeist, that lacks a thorough understanding of the circumstances in which the story unfolded—so goes the counterargument—remains barren and deficient and fails to reconstruct the events “as they really were.”

There is a measure of justice in both positions. Those who helped shape history must always bear in mind that the parts they had to play in order to realize their aspirations cannot but affect their perceptions of both past realities and their own roles in them. The historian wishing to relate events in which he participated and hoping to achieve a minimal standard of objectivity, must never stop searching himself and his motives; he must cross-examine his assumptions and constantly strive to overcome his preconceptions, putting them to the test again and again. The young historian, on the other hand, must make every effort to piece together the mood of the time in question and grasp the dynamic, evolving context of the past events he is analyzing.

As regards the 1948 war, I had the opportunity to play a multiple role. In the war itself, I served as a company commander in the battles against the Egyptians on the southern front and later against the Iraqis on the central front. In the 1950s, I served as chief of the IDF's History Branch, the main assignment being to research and record the history of Israel's War of Independence. In the 1960s, as the army's chief education officer, I initiated and supervised the transmission to all ranks of what we call battle legacies, which amounted to nothing less than inculcating the dominant memory and “correct” understanding of the events. Since the end of the 1970s, I have been engaged in academic research on Israel's political and military history in its first two decades, including the 1948 war. In this capacity, I have had the opportunity to comb through different archives in Israel and abroad, record oral histories, and come face-to-face with the narratives and explanations of other historians.

In the following pages, I shall reconsider the 1948 war and deal with four issues that have been raised by some New Historians as a counter-narrative to the established story.



Who started the war and could it have been avoided?

Were the Jews the David who defeated Goliath?

Who was responsible for the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem?

Why did efforts to transform the armistice agreements into final-status peace treaties fail?

I shall try to treat these issues on three levels: my personal recollections, the dominant Israeli collective memory, and an academic historian's view.

### **The Initiation of the 1948 War**

Traditional Zionist historiography tends to date the start of the 1948 war with the attack on a Jewish bus near Lydda Airport on the morning of November 30, 1947, just a few hours after the UN General Assembly adopted the resolution to partition Palestine into two states, Jewish and Arab. This cutoff point places the blame on the Arabs for perpetrating violence and making the war inevitable. Some New Historians, on the other hand, see the war as a watershed after which the violent Jewish-Arab conflict became intractable, and they do not blame the Jews any less. Some argue that the war could have been avoided had the Zionists not escalated the violence by overreacting and insisting on declaring an exclusively Jewish state.<sup>2</sup>

At this point, I should disclose my own basic convictions as to the grounds for the Arab-Israeli conflict in general. The century-old conflict between the Zionist movement and the Arab national movement is neither the result of an error committed by either side nor the result of a misunderstanding by either side of the true motivations of the other. The bitter confrontation was unavoidable from the moment that Jews decided, at the end of the nineteenth century, to regain their national sovereignty in Palestine, a piece of territory they have always referred to as the Land of Israel (*Eretz-Israel*) but which was occupied by another people. The root of the conflict lies in a tragic clash between two sets of motivations and processes, which, to begin with, were essentially independent of one another but in time became inextricably entangled and collided head-on. It was a clash of deep-set aspirations and motivations,

each born under totally different circumstances at a different place and time, that eventually drew both protagonists into continuous violent hostilities.

The first generations of Zionists innocently believed in the justice of their ideas, which were forged in Europe well before the American president Woodrow Wilson proclaimed the universal right to self-determination. Zionism, in many ways, was a unique colonial phenomenon, a child of its time, and was seen by Europeans as the moral vindication of injustices done to Jews for generations. Obviously, the Arabs could not understand why they had to pay the price for these injustices. By 1948, however, there was already an entire generation of young Jews, born or at least reared in Palestine, who had no other place in the world they could call home, and they fought for survival and independence with their backs to the wall.

Across the firing line, the Palestinians understandably and vehemently confronted the uninvited Jewish intrusion, which threatened to strip them of their lands and their own right to national existence and independence. Obviously, they could not accept without a struggle the logic and justifications of Zionism, which derived from circumstances to which they had not been a party and for which they were not responsible. For them, too, this was a struggle for survival.

To hold on to their sense of innocence, many early Zionists desperately sought to believe that eventually the Arabs would realize that Zionism did not intend to displace them but rather to build an entity of its own alongside them. This proved to be impossible. For most inhabitants of Palestine, the 1948 war only highlighted the well-known fact that the basic aspirations of Jews and Arabs in the land were irreconcilable and the conflict had become a zero-sum game.

Be that as it may, the nineteen-year-old native Palestinian Jew I was at the time could not do much about all these complex arguments. Regardless of whether or not my father and mother had been right to leave Germany and come to Palestine in 1924, I, in 1948, could see no alternative but to fight for my life and our national aspirations. When the war broke out, I performed my "national service" as a station commander with the Jewish Settlement Police (JSP) in my hometown of Rishon LeZion. Formally, the JSP was supervised by the British; actually, however, it came under the auspices of the Jewish paramilitary, underground organization, the Haganah. Like all Jews in Palestine, I too, burst onto the streets as soon as the UN General Assembly voted in favor of the establishment of a Jewish state, and I, too, danced the night away drunk with joy. Early the next

morning, my rifle and I escorted a bus en route to Tel Aviv. When we passed through the Arab village of Yazur, perched astride the road, we came under fire and the bus driver was wounded in the arm. This was the first act of violence I encountered, and it was clearly initiated by Arabs. A few weeks later, Elik Shamir, who commanded the station on the other side of the line, and six members of his squad were ambushed at the same spot and killed to a man. Had it been my turn to check the road, I would not now be writing these lines. Thus, from the perspective of my personal memory, the war, unequivocally, was the result of aggression on the part of Palestinian Arabs, who turned a short, peaceful drive from my home to Tel Aviv into a highly dangerous adventure.<sup>3</sup>

It may be assumed that many young Jews of my generation in Palestine had similar experiences. In their minds, these memories firmly implanted the perception as to how the war came about: as a result of Arab refusal to accept the UN verdict and of Arab aggression, which endangered our lives in very real terms.

This has remained the way that Israel's collective memory—transmitted to following generations by popular historiography and other means of commemoration—sees the story. These perceptions were not invented; they stemmed from the recurrent, very real experiences shared by so many members of this generation. Despite its clear bias, the Israeli narrative, which makes the Arabs the culprit in the violence, was not the result of manipulation but reflected the actual experience of numerous contemporary Israelis.

Nevertheless, the self-righteous, moral significance inherent in the common Zionist narrative evades deeper questions. What is aggression? Is the aggressor always the one who fires the first shot in defense of his endangered, vital interests? Perhaps this sort of violence should be seen as a desperate attempt by Palestinian Arabs to defend rights that may well be considered legitimate. Is it absurd to claim that the UN partition plan was an act of aggression against their legitimate rights? Was their refusal to accept the UN verdict as illogical and immoral as the common Zionist narrative would have it? In this respect, the war did not start on November 30, 1947, at Yazur. Rather, Yazur, by then, was only a new phase in a fifty-year-old conflict.

On the other hand, what choice did my friends and I have but to fight back? I was born in this country. Like other people, I wanted to live under my own national rule, just as the Arabs who shot at me that sad morning wanted to live under Arab rule. I feel truly sorry for what happened, but I cannot feel any remorse, and if I had to do it all over again

I would act exactly as I did then in order to realize my right to self-determination and independence. This moral stance, however, obliges me to attribute the same values and rights to the Palestinians. Moreover, since the existence of my state is assured, I should be able to understand that the 1948 war, and the Arab-Israeli conflict in general, is not simply a tale of good guys versus bad but the tragic story of an unavoidable clash between two opposing sets of interests, legacies, and perceptions emanating from the existential conditions under which both involved parties lived.

### **Retaliation and Escalation**

Another question raised by some historical revisionists is whether the war, once begun, could not have been stopped.<sup>4</sup> During the first months of the war, so goes the argument, only a handful of Palestinians took part in anti-Jewish violence. According to this version, by December 1947 and January 1948 a significant portion of the Palestinian elite and wide segments of the Palestinian lower classes (workers and farmers) were keenly interested in halting the violence and avoiding escalation into a general war. This was due to the heavy blows sustained by the followers of the mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al Husseini, in the 1936–39 revolt, the sharp controversies permeating Palestinian society, the growing, self-serving interference of the surrounding Arab states in Palestinian affairs, the obvious lack of military and civic preparedness among the Arab population for the ongoing conflict, and some serious economic interests (such as bringing in the orange crop). This description of Arab Palestinian society at the outbreak of violence is often based on the well-known protocol of a meeting held by David Ben-Gurion at the beginning of January 1948 with the chiefs of the intelligence services, a number of experts on Arab affairs, and political advisers.<sup>5</sup> Many of the participants recommended deescalation and restrained Israeli reaction.

The “revisionists” argue that the Haganah’s policy of limited reprisals as Arab violence spread throughout the country, and especially the unbridled raids undertaken by the dissident Irgun and Stern Gang soon after the outbreak of hostilities, contributed significantly to the unnecessary and avoidable escalation of warfare; Jewish retaliation rallied many Arabs to the ranks of the mufti and weakened the hand of his opponents and thus turned the initial low-intensity struggle into an uncompromising, full-scale civil war. Indeed, there were some local agreements not to

interfere with the citrus exports, and these were maintained de facto in most of the areas concerned. On January 8, Ben-Gurion reported to his Mapai Party Central Committee that “a secret agreement had been reached to quietly see through the citrus season,” and he called for moderation to counter the mufti’s attempt to draw uninvolved farmers into the fray.<sup>6</sup> But these were local, temporary arrangements, soon disrupted.

The revisionist assumption that the spread of warfare was avoidable is, in my opinion, tainted by a fair measure of paternalism and lack of respect for Palestinian Arabs. Every national struggle begins with a small, active minority that undertakes to lead the fight. Often, this minority remains in splendid isolation for a long time, encountering a good deal of internal opposition since its activities frequently endanger the interests of broad groups among its conationals and make everyday life very difficult. Gradually, however, the activists win over the silent majority by means of ideological propaganda, as well as intimidation, provocation, and even direct, physical pressure. Yet no such measures can succeed if no real national grievances and energies underlie the situation in the first place. Opposition to the Zionist venture, and later to the UN partition resolution, was quite widespread among a vast majority of the Palestinian people, who emotionally supported the mufti’s call for resistance. Arab opposition to the Jews was popular and real and could not be dispelled in the long run by economic interests.

Not all the reprisals initiated by the Haganah in the early months of intercommunal warfare were justified or well considered. Unintentional loss was often inflicted on innocent people who were not actively involved in the strife. As a squad leader, I took part in one of those early raids. In retaliation for the murder on the Jerusalem road in late December of Yehoshua Globerman, a senior Haganah commander, it was decided to raid a large building in the village of Qazaza, where some Palestinian guerrillas were allegedly based. I can testify to the genuine intention to strike at the culprits, but as it happened the night assault was carried out on the wrong building and caused the deaths of women and children. I was obliged to open fire on a cluster of tents near the main target from which fire was being directed at my small group. There is no way I will ever know whether or not I killed innocent civilians. It was too dark to see, and we had to retreat as soon as the “large” house was demolished.<sup>7</sup>

One can imagine the anger and desire for revenge our attack aroused among the inhabitants of that village, but there is no way of knowing whether the attacks on Jewish traffic to and from Jerusalem in

this area would have stopped had we not retaliated for Globberman's murder. It seems safer to assume that the Palestinian leadership would have continued its attempt to cut the communication lines between Jewish Jerusalem and its bases on the coast. The events of 1948 were not an "exhibition game" or a symposium on wartime morality. Both sides soon played it as a zero-sum game.

### **David against Goliath**

Ben-Gurion often described the 1948 war as the victory of a few against many or, metaphorically, as the battle between David and Goliath. Even as the fighting proceeded, he referred to it as "campaign between unequal forces, a war on one against forty."<sup>8</sup> In one of his early summaries of the war, he wrote: "World history does not record many cases of a war of so many against so few, as young Israel has experienced."<sup>9</sup> In religious circles, people referred to the Jewish victory as a divine miracle. This image was deeply internalized in Israel's collective memory and is very much alive even today, three generations after the events. All attempts by historians to dispel it and prove that the balance of power between the contending forces during much of the war inclined in favor of the Jews are in vain. I personally have met with anger from Israeli audiences when spelling out the exact figures of this balance. The false image stems from three sources.

1. At the time, the Jewish public in Palestine had no knowledge of the exact size of the contending armed forces at different phases of the war or any inkling of the arsenal that the Haganah had procured and secretly stored around the world in anticipation of Britain quitting the arena. The starting point for the man on the street was the well-known fact that the population of the Arab states, even counting only those directly bordering Palestine, was ten times greater than the Jewish population. In addition, the average Jew also knew that the Arab states had maintained regular armies for years and had obtained types of armaments that the Haganah could not yet dream of. Even allowing for the Jewish advantage in technology and organization, it was hard to imagine that the Arabs would not enter the field with forces far superior to those the Jews could muster.

2. Twice during the war the Arabs managed to gain temporary superiority on the battlefield, raising great doubt, at least in the minds of many Jews, about the eventual outcome of the war. By the end of March

1948, the Haganah had endured three painful defeats in the battle to keep its lines of communication open. Three large Jewish convoys, at Hulda, at Nabi Daniel, and on the road to Yehi'am had been attacked and suffered heavy casualties.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, for a brief period the road to Jerusalem seemed to be cut off, and its Jewish community appeared to be on the verge of starvation amid a dearth of arms and ammunition. On April 6, Ben Gurion reported to the Zionist Action Committee: "Hebrew Jerusalem is partially cut off all the time. For the past 10 days, it has been completely isolated and faces a serious danger of starvation. Almost all other roads are in disarray, Jews cannot set out without risking their lives."<sup>11</sup>

As we now know, the entire Palestinian force, including many of the volunteer forces that the Arab League had sent to Palestine during the winter of 1948, was routed by the Haganah in its first major offensive in April and May. We also know that this was not a miracle since the Jews managed during the first half of 1948 to mobilize a force significantly superior to the forces the Arabs put into the field before May 15. Nevertheless, the painful memories of the defeats at the end of March, as well as other setbacks sustained by the Jews elsewhere in the early phases of the war, starkly etched the memory of those who lived through the events and imprinted on their collective memory a sense of weakness and vulnerability that subsequent victories could not eradicate. The fall of "The Thirty-Five" on the way to Gush Etzion, in a battle against hundreds of Arab combatants, and, for me personally, the fall of eleven of my friends from the Haganah unit of my native town when large numbers of Arab irregulars attacked them in the citrus orchards of Gan Yavne—bodies I was called on to inspect and help identify—left us all with a vivid image of the few against the many.

Before those painful impressions could be offset by the victories of April and May, the invasion of the regular armies of five Arab states on May 15 helped the "enemy" achieve real superiority, if not in the total number of troops then at least in the quality of its armaments. For four weeks the Israel Defense Forces had to wage battle against an enemy employing weapons to which it had no effective response.

Moreover, in many sections of the fighting lines, the Arabs, taking the initiative at that stage, managed to muster forces greatly superior to the defending Jewish troops, while Israel had to deploy meager forces along strung-out lines vulnerable to Arab onslaught. Indeed, the worst defeats the Israelis suffered during the war took place during these weeks (at Gush Etzion, Latrun, Yad Mordechai, Nitzanim, Jenin, Hill 69, and

other places). The sense of weakness, vulnerability, and imminent danger of defeat was not imaginary at this point in time; it was real. When, a few days before the invasion, General Yadin, the chief of operations, was asked by members of the provisional government about the chances of standing up to the expected Arab attack, he replied: "Fifty, fifty." This was a sober assessment based on accurate calculations.<sup>12</sup>

3. Even in those sections where Jewish settlements and IDF units managed to repel Arab assaults (at Negba, Nirim, Degania, Gesher, etc.), it was rough going. In most of these places, the defenders had only light weapons, no defense against tanks apart from a few antiquated Projector Infantry Anti-Tanks (PIATs) and Molotov cocktails, and no artillery or air support against the armor and canons, which exacted a heavy toll of casualties. The urge to tell a heroic tale and immortalize fallen comrades, understandably, meant highlighting the images of weakness and vulnerability that could be overcome only by exceptional bravery and dedication. But this narrative was not invented. Rather it reflected honest memories of the way things looked to participants at the time.

On May 28, 1948, when the Egyptian advance guard reached the Palestinian village of Isdud on the coastal road, less than thirty miles south of Tel Aviv, I was ordered to deploy my platoon across that road a few miles to the north of the Egyptian encampment. In preparation, I went on a reconnaissance tour, getting as close as I could to the Egyptian forward column. I clearly remember the sight through my binoculars or rather what I thought I saw: a heavy concentration of Egyptian tanks, armored cars, and heavy guns. At the time, I assumed that this column intended to proceed toward Tel Aviv and I was supposed to stop them with my thirty ill-trained, ill-equipped men. We had in our possession only a few World War II rifles, a few Sten submachine guns, two light machine guns, some antitank mines, one PIAT, and a dozen Molotov cocktails. My mission seemed suicidal.

At nightfall, after having stationed and briefed my men, I found a small irrigation ditch beneath some citrus trees and tried to take a short nap. In my mind's eye, I could clearly see my entire platoon being trampled to death the next morning by the Egyptian column galloping its way to Tel Aviv. I did not know then that the Egyptians would decide not to continue their advance to the north. Seven years later, as the head of the IDF History Department, I researched some of these events and discovered that the overall balance of forces in the south between the invading Egyptians and the Israelis had not been to our disadvantage at all. Nevertheless, these late insights could not wrest from my mind the



memory of the staggering fear and alarm I felt that day at the sight of the Egyptian encampment near Isdud.

Many Israeli combatants and civilians who lived and fought on and around the front lines shared this experience of fear and vulnerability, stories about the experience were told and retold. It was thus stored in the collective memory of this generation and transmitted to later generations as a fundamental belief in the great superiority of the invading Arab forces in May of 1948. The end of the story is well known. Israel managed to use the truce imposed by the UN Security Council to its benefit. It succeeded in producing and procuring some heavier equipment, including tanks and airplanes. It managed to recruit a new cohort, including many Holocaust survivors straight from the displaced persons camps in Europe, thereby replenishing its depleted ranks and building several additional formations, including an armored brigade and quite a few artillery battalions. Toward the end of the war, Israel achieved distinct superiority in terms of both men and weapons. Despite their initial vulnerability, the Israelis, through efficient organization and improvisation, managed to fully utilize their resources and end the war victoriously.

When the Palmah fighters defeated the Arab forces of Safad in May and conquered the town, a local rabbi told them that their feat had been the result of a lucky combination of action and miracle: the action was the prayers of his devout community; the miracle was the timely arrival of the Palmah. There is much truth in this anecdote since divine miracles are always performed through the agency of people. The “miracle” that helped the 650,000 Jews of Palestine defeat 1.3 million Palestinians and the Arab armies of neighboring states was effected through the Jewish ability to mobilize a superior force and defy the initial demographic imbalance. It was a miracle, indeed, but someone had to perform it.

A few days before the Arab invasion of Palestine, George Marshall, the celebrated American general who served as secretary of state at the time, warned the Jews against establishing a state of their own then since it could end in disaster and total annihilation. This assessment was not unfounded. The factors responsible for the eventual balance of power can never be fully ascertained in advance of the ordeal. Enemy mistakes, disparate motivations and stamina, and the ability of soldiers to stand firm under conditions of local inferiority are all factors that cannot be evaluated beforehand. When fear of the unknown turns into the joy of victory, it is natural to experience an unexpected sense of redemption, much as the defeated side feels betrayed and frustrated.

If I may be permitted a slight digression, it is perhaps not unreason-

able to generalize that, more often than not, soldiers at war feel outnumbered, especially when on the defensive. The rank and file never see the entire picture. They see only the forces concentrated by the enemy at the very spot where they happen to be fighting. On January 3, 1949, just before the last battle in the Negev ended the war, I was involved in a local, small-scale battle with Iraqi forces deployed in the Samarian foothills on the central front. The previous night, I and some two dozen of my men had taken a small hill held by local Palestinian irregulars, who kept harassing Jewish settlers and sniping at a neighboring kibbutz. Early the next morning we came under heavy artillery and mortar fire from Iraqi batteries stationed a couple of miles down the hill. Soon an Iraqi infantry company tried to storm our position. Albeit no more than a local skirmish, it turned out to be a battle in which I was wounded and lost seven of my men. Understandably, I retain a sharp memory of the day's events. I clearly remember that at the peak of the Iraqi assault we were shelled by a squadron of four armored cars mounted with six-pounder guns, which completely outranged every weapon in our possession and was able to blast us with impunity. At least sixty to eighty infantrymen, who at one point came as close as one hundred yards from our positions, were repelled by our hand grenades. We were clearly outnumbered at this spot although by then I knew that the overall picture was quite different. For those of my men who survived the ordeal, this was clearly the fight of a few against great odds.

Israel's collective memory, which remembers the 1948 war as the victory of the few against the many, is not mistaken, although it was not the hand of God that intervened but human energy and resourcefulness. That's what changed the odds. For the same reason, it is doubtful that the detailed researches of the New Historians will manage to change the popular perception. Collective memory, in general, has a high resistance to innovations based on research, especially when that memory feeds on national pride and a sense of moral superiority.

### **Flight, Expulsion, or Both? The Palestinian Refugees**

The creation of the Palestinian refugee problem received excellent historiographic treatment by Benny Morris. His narrative is complex, variegated, and on the whole balanced. With the help of ample documentation, Morris analyzes step by step the flight of the Palestinian elite at

the beginning of the intercommunal war and the mass exodus from the rural areas in April and May resulting from the terror created by the Deir Yassin massacre. He also analyzes the eventual initiatives taken by local IDF commanders, with the tacit approval of the higher echelons, to expel Palestinians from occupied regions in such places as Lydda, Ramle, and many villages in most fighting zones, but also the refusal of others to uproot civilians, as happened in Nazareth in July and in many villages in the Galilee in October.

The official Israeli narrative, which attempts to exonerate the IDF of all blame for the expulsion and refuses to admit any responsibility for the creation of the problem, is still widely prevalent in Israel's canonical memory. This version, more so than the issues we have dealt with till now, was the result of conscious manipulation by Israeli propaganda, aimed at fending off the insistent, international pressure put on Israel to grant Palestinian refugees a choice between return and compensation. Nevertheless, in this case, too, the common stereotype was based on the genuine experience of many Israeli soldiers, who in numerous places witnessed the flight of Palestinian inhabitants without waiting for a Jewish initiative to expel them or even encourage their flight.

As mentioned earlier, during the war I served first as a platoon commander and later as a company commander in the Giv'ati Brigade, participating in attacks on, and the conquest of, more than a dozen Arab villages in the southern coastal plain. I can testify that all these villages were practically empty when we arrived. By dawn, we could often see the felahin with their women and children in the distance, making their way toward the Arab lines. I knew that in other villages some of the inhabitants who had not left were ordered to do so. Yet I am sure that thousands of Israeli soldiers carry with them the memory of flight rather than expulsion. Ezra Danin, a senior member of Israel's intelligence service, did not lie when he stated in his memoirs: "The Arab exodus was a surprise to us all. . . . In April, we witnessed a mass Arab flight, despite promises made to the inhabitants of the villages in the Sharon and the Shfela [the coastal plain between Haifa and Gaza] that no harm would be done them. . . . Once the great exodus started, it spread like brushfire, like a plague."<sup>13</sup>

Still, there is no small measure of self-righteousness and evasiveness in the official Israeli waiver of all responsibility for the creation of the tragic consequences. Beyond the details on the manner in which Palestinians had to leave this or that village, one must simply acknowledge that the tragedy would not have occurred had the Zionists never arrived in Palestine. If the

Jews at the end of the nineteenth century had not embarked on a project of reassembling the Jewish people in their “promised land,” all the refugees languishing in the camps would still be living in the villages from which they fled or were expelled. Second, one must realize that when people flee out of fear and terror their flight is hardly voluntary. The massacre of Deir Yassin and a number of other atrocities provided ample cause for fright and flight, even if, with hindsight, we know these events to have been the exception rather than the rule.

Third, whatever the balance between flight and expulsion, one must admit that once the exodus got started—especially after the Arab invasion in May, when the Israelis had little to lose and it had become a zero-sum game—the Israelis did not shed too many tears and were glad to find, at the end of the war, that much of the land they had conquered was empty of its indigenous population, waiting for the hundreds of thousands of Jewish immigrants who began flocking into the country. And, indeed, Israel never allowed any significant number of refugees to return to their villages.

On this matter I have two personal memories. During Operation Yoav in October, when the Egyptian army withdrew from parts of the coastal plain, the Palestinian villagers joined it and fled toward the Gaza Strip. My company, sent to pursue the retreating forces, took control of half a dozen of these empty villages. As I came within range of a slightly hilly elevation some ten miles north of Gaza, I saw, far in the distance, several thousand of these wretched refugees trudging across the sand dunes. The departing Arabs nearest to me were more than three miles away, totally out of range of the weapons in my possession. Nevertheless, I positioned a machine gun on one of the hills and emptied a whole belt of bullets in their direction. Nobody could have been hurt, nor did I intend to hurt anyone. It was a symbolic act, a message to the Palestinians: now that you have left, there is no way back, you will have to stay away.

I also remember that somewhat later, when my company was still deployed near the Gaza Strip, I received information from my superiors that Palestinian refugees were perched on one of those sand dunes, intending to cross the lines and march back into the areas held by the Israeli army. I was ordered to stop them, even with fire if need be. I clearly remember being fully aware of the cruelty involved, but I would not have hesitated to open fire since by then I already understood that the struggle was not only for the establishment of our political sovereignty but also for the land. I also knew all too well that for the Arabs who had gambled on destroying our new state there could be no way back. It was

one thing to include in the Jewish state a large minority of Palestinians who peacefully accepted the UN resolution; it was quite another to bring back large numbers of Arabs who had declared all-out war on that same resolution and done their best to destroy us. This is why Israelis were, and still are, quite united around the conviction that under the new circumstances created by the war the return of large numbers of Palestinian refugees would destroy our ability to build the Jewish state to which we all aspired.

It can hardly be doubted that the Arab defeat in 1948 sharpened their rage against Zionism, but that rage was not created by the war. The revolutions that brought to power in the 1950s a young generation of leaders in most Arab states enabled them to blame the defeat on the corruption of the old regimes and their collusion with colonial powers. But such rationalization also blurred their vision, preventing them from accepting what had happened in 1948. Most of the new Arab rulers continued to dream of a “second round” in which they would have another chance to destroy Israel. This was not entirely irrational. The tremendous disparity in size between the sides and the new horizons opened by the pan-Arab movement, which for a while scored some impressive achievements, reinvigorated their hope to win the struggle against the Zionists. These factors, as well as the anger and insult that most Arabs felt after the 1948 defeat, fed their total resistance to accepting the verdict of history.

Under the leadership of David Ben-Gurion, most Israelis in the 1950s and early 1960s were ready to accept the territorial outcome of the 1948 war.<sup>14</sup> This meant giving up on parts of the Holy Land, including the Old City of Jerusalem and its holy sites. But they remained adamant about continuing the march of Zionism, that is, “ingathering the exiles” and settling them on the emptied lands. And this entailed a point-blank refusal to allow a significant number of Palestinian refugees to return. Refusal versus refusal spelt a deadlock that only force could settle. It spelt a deadlock that resulted in the continuation of bitter national strife for years to come.

To believe that the deadlock can be resolved by the clever diplomatic maneuvers of one side or the other is to underestimate the depth of the animosity. To assume that opportunities to make peace were missed because this side or the other did not come forward to meet an opportunity is to imply that history is no more than a chance of disconnected, arbitrary, and accidental events rather than a complex, often tragic web of profound human motivation, perception, and devotion. The desire of the New Historians to enlist historiography in the cause

of peace is morally praiseworthy, but it does not provide us with better historiography.<sup>15</sup>

My personal experiences, related in these pages, may have distorted my historic understanding. That remains for the reader to judge. I do hope, however, that my stories have also shown that Israel's collective memory is not as arbitrary as some historians and sociologists would have us think.

## NOTES

This article is an edited and somewhat expanded version of the Hebrew original, published under the title "Zikhronot Tashah" [Memories of 1948] in the festschrift *Dvarim le-Yizhar* [For S. Yizhar], ed. Nitza Ben-Ari (Tel Aviv, 1996). For a fuller treatment of collective memory, see M. Bar-On, "Lizkor u-le-hazkir" [Remembering and Reminding], in M. Bar-On, *Gvulot 'Asheinin* [Smoking Borders] (Jerusalem, 2001).

1. For a good survey of these dynamics, see M. Azaryahu, *Pulhanei Medina, Hagigot ha-'Atzma'ut, ve-Hantzahat ha-Noflim* Be-Yisrael, 1948–56 [State Rituals, Independence Celebrations, and Commemorating the Fallen in Israel, 1948–56] (Sede Boker, 1995). See also I. Shamir, "Andartot La-Noflim Be-Ma'arkhot Yisrael: Hantzaha ve-Zikaron" [Monuments to the Fallen in Israel's Wars: Commemoration and Memory], PhD diss., Tel Aviv University, 1994.

2. For one such protagonist, see S. Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities* (London and New York, 1987). A similar approach may be found also in Noam Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle: The U.S., Israel, and the Palestinians* (Boston, 1983), 94–99.

3. Elik was the younger brother of renowned novelist, Moshe Shamir, who ten years later wrote a book in his memory: *Pirkei Elik* [On Elik] (Merhavia, 1958).

4. See, for example, Y. Nimrod, *Breirat ha-Shalom ve-Derekh ha-Milhama: Hit'havut Defusim shel Yahasei Yisrael- 'Arav, 1947–50* [The Alternative of Peace and the Road of War: Emerging Patterns in Israel-Arab Relations, 1947–50] (Givat Haviva, 2000), 63–77.

5. Some of the details of this meeting were recorded in David Ben-Gurion, *Yoman ha-Milhama* [War Diary], ed. Gershon Rivlin and Elhanan Orren (Tel Aviv, 1982), 1:97–103.

6. David Ben-Gurion, *Be-Hilahem Am* [Nation at War] (Tel Aviv, 1950), 28–29.

7. Yaacov Nahmias and Efi Meltzer, eds., *Gdud Hamishim ve-Shnayim shel Hativat Giv'ati be-Milhemet ha-'Atzma'ut Tashah, 1948* [The Fifty-second Battalion of the Giv'ati Brigade in the 1948 War of Independence] (Tel Aviv, 2001), 67–71; Uri Milstein, *Toldot Milhemet ha-'Atzma'ut* [History of Israel's War of Independence], vol. 2.: *Ha-Hodesh ha-Rishon* [The First Month], 106–25.

8. David Ben-Gurion, *Yihud ve-Yi'ud* [Uniqueness and Destiny] (Tel Aviv, 1971), 29.

9. David Ben-Gurion, foreword to Yosef Ulitzki, *Mi-Meora'ot le-Milhama: Prakim be-Toldot ha-Haganah* [From Riots to War: Selected Episodes in the History of the Haganah] (Tel Aviv, 1950), 351.

10. On the late March crisis, see Milstein, *History*, vol. 4: *Mi-Mashber le-Hakhra 'a* [Out of Crisis Came Decision] (Tel Aviv, 1991), 49–140.
11. David Ben-Gurion, *Ba-Ma 'arkha* [In Battle] (Tel Aviv, 1949), vol. 4, p. 2, 288.
12. Quoted in Z. Sherf, *Shlosha Yamim* [Three Days] (Tel Aviv, 1959), 60.
13. Ezra Danin, *Tziyoni be-khol Tnai* [A Zionist without Conditions] (Jerusalem, 1987), 217.
14. On Ben-Gurion's policies in the 1950s, see M. Bar-On, "Status quo lifnei o aharei: Ikarei medinyut ha-bitahon shel Yisrael, 1949–1957" [Status Quo Before or After: Israel's Security Policy, 1949–1957], in Bar-On, *Smoking Borders*.
15. Some revisionist historians claim that Israel missed such opportunities during the 1950s and 1960s, but the issue is beyond the scope of this essay. See, for example, Flapan, *Birth*, 201–32. For a more critical treatment of this issue, see I. Rabinovich, *The Road Not Taken: Early Arab-Israeli Negotiations* (Oxford University Press, 1991).

Yoav Gelber

## The History of Zionist Historiography From Apologetics to Denial

### The First Generation of Zionist Historians

The writing of history cannot be separated from the era in which it is written. Changing perspectives define scope, fields and focal points, attitudes toward the objects of study, and even methodological developments. This essay attempts to trace the growth of Zionist historiography, that is, the writing of the history of Zionism (The Zionist movement and ideology, the prestate Jewish community in the Land of Israel, and the State of Israel), as well as the writing of Jewish history by Zionist historians. Within the context of its time frame, Zionist historiography itself becomes part and parcel of the history of Zionism.

Early historians of Zionism were, on the whole, amateurs—Zionist activists who under certain circumstances became historians. Thus, Nahum Sokolow, Adolf Böhm, and Yizhak Gruenbaum all wrote in the 1920s comprehensive histories of Zionism, followed by Richard Lichtheim, a prominent Zionist diplomat who became the first historian of German Zionism. A few professional historians with a Zionist background and education, such as N. M. Gelber, also chose to study the history of the movement, although their research did not enjoy academic recognition at the time.

The writing of Zionism's history ensued from the movement's political success in obtaining the 1917 Balfour Declaration and was clearly affected by it. The declaration, and subsequent achievements of the Zionist delegation at the Peace Conference in Versailles, put Zionism on the international map and attested to its historical vitality. For the English-reading public interested in the new phenomenon, Nahum Sokolow wrote his two-volume *History of Zionism*. Its preface was written by Lord Balfour, who reiterated the Zionist arguments against the movement's Jewish opponents: the assimilationists, the territorialists, and the advocates of emigration to places other than Palestine (such as the



United States, South Africa, Australia, and Latin America). Balfour maintained that Jews needed a national home and that this home could be established only in Palestine.<sup>1</sup>

According to Sokolow, the history of Zionism began with the return of the Jews to England in the mid-seventeenth century and the man who promoted it, Rabbi Menashe Ben Israel. Sokolow's account ends in 1918. Faithful to the spirit of the age and to the new British-Jewish alliance embodied in the Balfour Declaration, he contended that the roots of Zionism were primarily English, deriving from a profound affinity for the Bible and its language as evinced in English literature from Shakespeare through Milton, Byron, Shelley, and Browning to George Eliot.

Sokolow devoted most of his voluminous work to the long-standing British interest in the Holy Land and the various revelations in the Anglo-Saxon world relating to the restoration of the Jews to their homeland. This ancient, vague idea, he told his readers, later spread from Britain to France. In the mid-nineteenth century, it took the form of a small-scale, philanthropic, colonizing endeavour linked to such figures as Sir Moses Montefiore and Adolphe Cremieux. Given the plight of the Jews in the Russian Pale of Settlement after the 1881 pogroms and the obstacles to mass emigration, the idea of Jewish restoration to their ancient land became an immigration and colonization enterprise centered on a national goal. It attracted Jewish millionaires, such as Baron Edmond Rothschild and Baron Maurice de Hirsch, and marked an interim phase between philanthropy and nationalism.

Sokolow regarded Herzl's Zionism as "New Zionism," devoting to him less than 10 percent of his first volume. That space dealt also with the general historical background of Herzl's diplomatic efforts—the decay of the Ottoman Empire and British policy in the Near East. The second volume described mainly the lobbying and diplomatic activity that led to the Balfour Declaration, with the underlying message conveying the legitimacy of the Zionist idea and its political expression. At the same time, it stressed that Zionism supplemented, but did not supplant, emancipation.

A few months after Sokolow's book appeared in London in 1919, the first volume of Adolf Böhm's *Die Zionistische Bewegung* came out in Berlin, describing the history of the Zionist movement up to Herzl's death. The second volume, published in 1921, reviewed the decade from Herzl's death to the outbreak of World War I. An epilogue dealt with the war years and the Peace Conference.<sup>2</sup>

Böhm's approach to the history of Zionism was radically different from Sokolow's. He ignored the biblical, millenarian, and messianic roots that were central to Sokolow's search for legitimacy and, apart from quoting Balfour's famous letter ("Declaration") to Lord Rothschild, did not mention the Zionist-British bond, suggesting, evidently, that this connection at that juncture would not have enhanced Zionism's popularity among the German-reading public. Moreover, it would have situated the Zionist movement in the camp of Germany's defeaters.

Böhm took as his point of departure the realities of Jewish life in the nineteenth century: emancipation and its consequences, cultural assimilation, demographic growth, the transformation of economic and social conditions in the wake of modernization, and the subsequent disparity between the Jewish communities in Western and Eastern Europe. According to his emphasis, Zionism was essentially an internal Jewish development, and his narrative focused on the growth of the movement: its organizational consolidation in institutions and parties, Zionist ideologies and intellectual trends, the emergence of Hebrew culture, domestic controversies, and the tension between concern for the Jewish public in the diaspora and the onset of the settlement enterprise in Palestine. Zionist diplomacy, by contrast, received marginal treatment.

For Sokolow, the Zionist leader and statesman who later chaired the Zionist organization (1931–35), the Zionist idea stood at the heart of its history. For Böhm, the core of Zionist history was the movement, its institutions and actions. Common to both men was the search for legitimacy. Sokolow directed this search at the outside world, Böhm at the Jewish people.

Both works were pioneering attempts to write a comprehensive history of the Zionist movement. Another attempt (albeit of a different nature) was made by Yizhak Gruenbaum in the mid-1920s. Under the title *The Development of the Zionist Movement*, Gruenbaum published a series of lectures that he had delivered at a seminar of HeHalutz (Zionist pioneering youth) counselors in Warsaw. Neither a study nor a compilation, this didactic textbook was a first effort to teach early Zionist history to the new generation of Zionist youth. Gruenbaum's innovation was the organic link he forged between Zionism and the historical Jewish messianic movements and his definition of Zionism as "secular messianism."<sup>3</sup>

Besides defending Zionism against its opponents and critics, Zionist historiography throughout the 1920s and 1930s aspired to gain both domestic (Jewish) and international legitimacy and recognition. Whereas Sokolow had identified the roots of Zionism in seventeenth-century

England, N. M. Gelber discovered that the idea of Jewish restoration had emerged also in Germany, France, and Denmark. He linked the growth of the idea to the nineteenth-century European debates on the Jewish Question and Palestine, from the Vienna Congress in 1815 to the Berlin Congress in 1878.<sup>4</sup>

Covert apologetics continued throughout the next decade. In 1934, Sokolow published *Hibbat Zion*, in which he reviewed the metamorphoses of the pre-Zionist idea of “love of Zion” from George Eliot and Benjamin Disraeli to Moses Hess, Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer, Leo Pinsker, Ahad HaAm, Baron Rothschild, and Rabbi Samuel Mohilewer.<sup>5</sup>

A second *Hibbat Zion* appeared almost at the same time. Written by Benzion Dinaburg (later Dinur), it described the development of the Hovevei Zion [Lovers of Zion] movement in the Russian Pale after the pogroms of 1881. Dinur drew on the three volumes of original documents that had been collected and published by Abraham Droyanov on the Jewish press in Russia, as well as on private diaries and letters gathered by the Jewish National Library in Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup>

Dinur did not regard “Love of Zion” as an old idea that had survived through the ages due to the quirks of visionaries. Rather, it was the outcome of Jewish disappointment and disillusionment with the Russian government’s reactionary policies, a major setback after the liberal reforms of the late czar, Alexander II, who was assassinated in 1881. Dinur approached Zionism as an inner force of Jewish history, stemming from the search for a solution to the existential problems of Eastern European Jewry.

In his later studies, Dinur elaborated on this approach. He looked for the early roots of the Zionist phenomenon and summed up his theory in two articles that placed Zionism in the context of modern Jewish history. Dinur’s chronological structure and thematic emphasis differed from those of the earlier Jewish historians—Leopold Zunz, Heinrich Graetz, and Simon Dubnow—who had written comprehensive histories of the Jews. The Zionist historian and founder of the Jerusalem School of Jewish historiography suggested a new unifying power—the nation’s affiliation with its homeland. In Dinur’s view, the continuity of this bond from ancient times through the Middle Ages to the modern era was the principal inspiration for Zionism and consequently the main driving force of modern Jewish history.<sup>7</sup>

Their differences notwithstanding, both Sokolow and Dinur dated the beginnings of Zionism some centuries back: Sokolow, to mid-seventeenth-century England and Dinur to 1700 and the immigration to

Eretz-Israel of Rabbi Yehuda the Pious and his followers, which he saw as the start of the modern age and a harbinger of the ancient land's centrality in the nation's history. Dinur's approach to Zionist history was denoted by the focal role he assigned the country, whereas his colleagues stressed the roles of the idea (Sokolow), organization (Böhm), social processes (Ya'acov Katz), or political sovereignty (Ben Halpern).<sup>8</sup>

Dinur's historiographic approach distinguished between the history of the Zionist movement in the diaspora and the history of the Zionist enterprise in the prestate Yishuv. It shifted the emphasis from a stirring ideology and Zionist organization in the diaspora to the realization of Zionism in Palestine.

Apologetics characterized also the early historiography of Zionism's implementation. Kurt Nawratzky and Arthur Ruppin's pioneering books on the history of Zionist agricultural colonization in Palestine and later Alexander Bein's works in this field were written primarily to convince the reader that settling in Palestine was a feasible proposition—agriculturally, economically, socially, and politically—and met the contemporary needs of the Jewish people. These works strove to allay doubts among both Jews and non-Jews as to the prospects of the Zionist enterprise. The first agricultural colonies' jubilee books, which appeared in the 1930s and 1940s, and the volumes that celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of the first kibbutzim and moshavim also aimed at this goal.<sup>9</sup>

The absorption of immigrants from Central Europe in the 1930s extended the meaning and history of the concept of "building up the country" beyond agricultural settlement. Thus, several economists—not historians—began to write the economic history of the Zionist enterprise. Alfred Bonn , David Horowitz, and Abraham Ulitzur endeavored to demonstrate the economic prospects in Palestine and the role of the Zionist enterprise in developing the country. Their works were written to support Zionist arguments in the polemics over Palestine's part in alleviating the plight of European Jewry and over the solution to the Palestine problem, but at the same time they laid the foundation of Zionist economic historiography, which was later developed by Nahum Gross and others.<sup>10</sup>

Moshe Medzini's studies of Zionist diplomatic history tried to persuade readers that, despite disappointment with British policies after the Balfour Declaration and bewilderment in the face of Arab opposition to the Zionist enterprise, Zionism still had political prospects. Medzini wrote his first book in the late 1920s during the severe socioeconomic crisis that overtook the Yishuv in the wake of the fourth immigration

wave. Displaying a combination of criticism and hope, the book reflected the perplexed atmosphere of those years.<sup>11</sup>

Medzini wrote his second book after the shock of the 1929 riots and Chaim Weizmann's forced resignation from the leadership of the (world) Zionist Organization. The Zionist movement was preoccupied with the domestic strife between Labor and the Revisionists. The author reminded his public that the movement had endured serious crises in the past and recovered thanks to its immense inner power, meaning that Zionism would not achieve its goals by means of diplomatic accomplishments but through internal unity, self-fulfillment, and hard work.<sup>12</sup>

In a monograph on the Balfour Declaration, N. M. Gelber analyzed the political power of the Zionist movement and its ability to maneuver politically and take advantage of international circumstances. The book appeared in 1939 after the Zionist leadership had lost its bargaining position among rival powers and had become totally dependent on Britain. The result was Zionism's major political defeat, as embodied in the British White Paper of May 1939, which curtailed Zionist immigration to Palestine and land purchases.<sup>13</sup>

Gelber's book was the first in a series of scholarly works on the formation of the British-Zionist political alliance, a topic that engrossed several scholars in the years to come. He relied mostly on Zionist archival material, his access to British and other foreign sources being limited, and the resulting picture was necessarily partial. A dozen years later, when British archival material was made accessible after World War II, Leonard Stein was able to present a considerably fuller picture.<sup>14</sup> Mayir Vereté also spent many years examining British motives for issuing the Balfour Declaration, and the topic has now apparently been exhausted with Yesha'ayahu Friedman's comprehensive description and analysis.<sup>15</sup>

The historiography of the apologetic era culminated in a comprehensive, collective project, the ESCO Foundation's two-volume *Palestine: A Study of Jewish, Arab, and British Policies*, published by Yale University Press in 1947-49. Most of the chapters had been written during World War II, in anticipation of the postwar struggle over the fate of Eretz-Israel. Some of the contributors were active Zionists; others were academics sympathetic to Zionism, such as the archaeologist William Foxwell Albright, who wrote about relations between Christians and Muslims in Palestine. Joel Carmichael, the expert on Arab affairs of the ZOA, contributed a chapter on the Arab national movement in Palestine. The orientalist Gustav von Grinbaum, of Vienna, wrote the chap-

ters on the Arab world. The Polish Jewish historians Isaac Levitatz and Bernard Weinreb, provided the chapters on the Yishuv's political and socioeconomic history. One of the contributors, James McDonald, a professor of history and international relations, had served as the League of Nations' high commissioner for refugees and was soon to be appointed the first American ambassador to Israel.

The project was aimed primarily at the American public and reflected the transformation of Zionist historiography during the interwar period. The British millenarian forerunners, in the early days of Zionism prior to World War I, were mentioned only in the introduction. Three lengthy chapters analyzed the promises, claims, rights, and policies of the three parties to the Palestine problem—Jews, Arabs, and Britons—from World War I to the Peace Conference, and the granting of the Palestine Mandate to Britain. The rest of the book described the development and accomplishments of the Jewish National Home despite Arab resistance and Britain's retreat from its commitments.

True to the spirit of the period, the chapter on the Middle East during World War II stressed the Yishuv's contribution to the Allied war effort, contrasting Jewish cooperation and assistance with Arab shirking and disloyalty. The concluding chapter reviewed various past proposals for Palestine and analyzed the stances of the parties toward each of them. The apologetics of Zionist historiography, which initially had addressed domestic opponents within Jewish ranks, applied itself, after the Palestinian revolt of 1936–39 and World War II, to British and Arab arguments.

### **The Second Generation: From the History of Zionism to the History of the Yishuv**

Statehood changed the trend of Zionist historiography. Jewish alternatives to Zionism—assimilation, Bundism,<sup>16</sup> and religious orthodoxy—had disappeared during the Holocaust, and Zionism's success in establishing a Jewish state three years after the war, even if not in all of Palestine, appeared to vindicate the movement's original justification. The military achievements in the War of Independence allayed fears about the ability of the Zionist enterprise to survive Arab hostility and British intrigue. Under the new circumstances, the writing of Zionist history lost its apologetic tone and—moving to the opposite pole—began to distribute laurels to the victors.

For many years, the euphoria in the wake of the Zionist triumph

blurred the central issue of modern Jewish history—the Holocaust. A typical example is the revised version of Dinur's essay on the modern period of Jewish history.<sup>17</sup> Dinur divided the new era into three subperiods, the last one dating from 1881 to 1947. In his view, these years were “the age of political uprising, self-defense, and national strengthening,” which had begun with the Jewish reaction to the pogroms and ended with Jewish statehood. He did not mention the Holocaust.

In 1948, the history of Zionism became the history of the State of Israel, its domestic growth and its relations with the world, diaspora Jewry, and the Arab surroundings. The historiography moved from comprehensive histories that emphasized Zionism's common features to the story of Zionism's unique development in individual countries. In a sense, it was a way of commemorating a movement that had vanished in the Holocaust or, as in the Soviet Union, even earlier, its history there a thing of the past. During the first decades of statehood, a number of new books told the history of Zionism in Central and Eastern Europe: Richard Lichtheim's work on the Zionist movement in Germany, N. M. Gelber's study of the Zionist movement in Galicia, Israel Klausner's and Itzhak Maor's studies on Russian Zionism, and Zvi Zehavi's book on the roots of the Zionist movement in Hungary.<sup>18</sup> Veterans of HeHalutz and other Zionist youth movements also documented their history, especially that in Poland, in volumes such as *Sefer HeHalutz* and *Sefer HaShomer HaTza'ir*, although a comprehensive history of the Zionist movement in Poland has yet to be written.<sup>19</sup>

In time, the history of the Zionist movement in Europe lost much of its attraction. On the one hand, research and writing in the field dwindled. On the other, the study of Zionist history in Muslim countries such as Iraq, Egypt, Syria, and the states of North Africa had not yet begun. Zionist historiography after Israel's establishment focused on the history of the Yishuv at the end of the Ottoman era, during the British Mandate, and during early statehood. The story of Jewish awakening in the diaspora and the Zionist experiment in Palestine during the first third of the twentieth century was transformed, in the next third, into a tale of Zionist triumph. But the enormous toll paid for victory was consistently avoided by Zionist historians.

Triumph, evidently, has many fathers, and the historians of the Yishuv have spent plenty of time looking for them. The heterogeneous Yishuv society was a jumble of Zionists, non-Zionists, and anti-Zionists; an “organized Yishuv” and its dissidents; immigrants from a variety of countries of origin and different waves of immigration; rival ideologies

that developed both inside and outside of the Zionist movement; political organizations, parties, and movements; paramilitary organizations; and competing economic interest groups. Each of these elements claimed recognition for and even monopoly over the overall accomplishment. Each, in retrospect, attempted to justify its position in the numerous disputes that had characterized prestate history. Controversial issues in the history of the Yisuv proceeded to take their place in its historiography: Who drove the British out of the country? Who built the country? Who shaped Jewish military power? Who broke through the British blockade of the country? Who had warned of the catastrophe of European Jewry?

One outcome of these historiographic debates was a series of history projects on paramilitary organizations, political parties, trade unions, and other groups. The comprehensive history of the Zionist labor movement was the subject of three studies.<sup>20</sup> Several projects were devoted to the history of the Yishuv's paramilitary organizations. The first to appear, in 1953, commemorated the youngest force—the Palmah. Next came a history of the Haganah, at the time the most comprehensive historiographic project in the history of the Yishuv. A few years later, the prestate, right-wing, underground of Irgun Zva'i Le'umi (Etzel) responded by publishing its own historical study.<sup>21</sup> Some of these “establishment” books were written by individual historians. Others were the products of collaboration. All had editorial boards behind them composed of involved veterans and exerting an enormous influence on the writing and even the selection of source material.

The early writing of the history of the War of Independence also belongs to this period. The work on the war by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) History Department was summed up in a work by Netanel Lorch. Alongside this effort, veterans wrote histories of several of the IDF brigades during the war. Some of these brigade histories are no more than collections of testimonies and memoirs; others—such as Abraham Ayalon's study of the Giv'ati Brigade—are the products of serious research.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Third Generation: Historiography in Academia**

Questions of academic legitimacy overshadowed Zionist historiography from its inception. The reigning spirit at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (HU) at the time maintained that “Zionist agitators” had no



place in the university and the subjects of their propaganda even less so. For almost two generations, Zionist historiography developed and flourished outside of academia. Throughout the 1930s, the university treated Zionist historians as suspect and sought to avoid the ideological and academic complications entailed in the study of Zionism on campus.<sup>23</sup> All these historiographic and commemorative research projects were initiated, written, and published outside of Israeli academia. Only in the early 1960s did the study of the Zionist movement and the Yishuv penetrate the Hebrew University and subsequently its younger sister universities.

The academic study and research of the history of the Yishuv brought scholars and history makers face to face. Many of the saga's heroes were still alive, filling high-ranking posts in various walks of life. Young scholars who had made this their field of study naturally disputed axioms that had taken root in the public consciousness. Furthermore, they subjected to critical examination the consensus created by the earlier official and factional histories written outside of academia. They, and certainly their supervisors, had been educated in the light of this consensus and under the shadow of these axioms. The process of liberation from these traditions—or of challenging these myths—has been slow and is still incomplete.

Academia's scholarly apparatus has gradually transformed Zionist historiography. Prevalent trends in Western historiography as to goals, subject matter, and methods of historical research also influenced the study of Zionism. The substance of Zionist history, previously written in an epic, romantic style in the manner of Leopold von Ranke or Jules Michelet, was apparently incompatible with the universal, absolute concepts and values that Western historiography increasingly borrowed from the social sciences via the school of *Annales* or from Edward Carr's relativism. The disparity showed up the precarious status of Zionist historiography in the academic world and the dilemmas involved in its penetration, consolidation, and acceptance.

Israel Kolatt—a pioneer in the research and teaching of the history of the Yishuv—summarized this chapter of evolving Zionist historiography in a painstaking essay, "On the Research and Researcher of the History of the Yishuv and the Zionist Movement," which was written in the early 1970s and reprinted in 1976.<sup>24</sup> Kolatt linked the penetration of Zionist historiography into universities to the broader change of generations in Israeli academe and indicated the difficulties that academic research was to anticipate in this still untouched minefield.

This project of uncovering the past buried under heaps of stereotypes, images, memoirs, polemics and phraseology is a huge enterprise. . . . Even harder is the scholar's intellectual need to overcome inherited concepts, examine his prejudices, experiences, memories, feelings and preferences and regard the research object as a historical phenomenon. The burden of Zionist ideology and apologetics has turned the reassessment of Zionist history into a complex and delicate process.<sup>25</sup>

Almost a generation before the "post-Zionist" controversy broke out, Kolatt forecast the condemnation of Zionism by revisionist historians. He linked their emergence to Arab anti-Zionist propaganda and the ideas of the European and American New Left. He also identified a widening gap between dominant concepts in Western universities and the roots of the Israeli phenomenon. Enlightenment, progress, and liberalism notwithstanding, the

unique connection between the Jewish religion and Jewish nationalism deviates from the conventional definitions of national movements. The Jewish bond with the land of Israel . . . is not the normal bond of a people to its land. The international character of Jewish existence and the close tie to the State of Israel felt by Jews who are citizens of other countries mystify many people, and mysteries are always open to libelous interpretation.<sup>26</sup>

Besides the lasting ideological confrontation between Zionism and its adversaries, Kolatt pointed out the difficulty of reconciling the needs of Zionist historiography with current trends in Western historiography.

As far as the respect for the facts, the unbiased appreciation of the truth and the rejection of utilitarian myths are concerned—we are part of the Western world. However, the character and level of development of the Yishuv's historiography make it difficult to adapt the new methods that have developed in the West to the subjects that stand at the center of Zionist and Yishuv history. . . . Western historiography now gives preference to the critical and cognitive over the constituent role. The needs of Zionist historiography are different.<sup>27</sup>

A generation later, Kolatt's observations and predictions on the development of Zionist historiography under pressure from the social sciences, the media, the impact of Western historiography, and the influence of postmodernist trends appear almost prophetic.

The growth of research on the history of the Yishuv has depended on the opening of the archives of political parties, kibbutz and other movements, organizations, institutions, and persons, primarily the Central Zionist Archives, the Israel State Archives, and the IDF archives. This has been a lengthy process, and new archives, or new sections in existing archives, are still being discovered. They cast new light on domestic issues and processes and Yishuv relations with Britain and the Arabs.<sup>28</sup>

The opening of the documents in the British Public Record Office enabled scholars to study Zionist-British relations from both viewpoints. They were thus better able to understand the decision making of the Palestine government and the cabinet in London and to delve deeper into the motivations, sentiments, and considerations that had guided British policies in Palestine. Naturally, the result was a more balanced view of Britain's role in Palestine during the Mandate years. Scholars such as Bernard Wasserstein, Gabriel Cohen, Michael Cohen, and Ronald Zweig were less affected by the local stereotype formed of the British during the anti-British struggle after World War II.<sup>29</sup>

Until the opening of the archives, and sometimes even afterward, researchers of Yishuv history were greatly dependent on interviews and thus susceptible to the sway of the actual makers of history. These figures not only had a direct impact on the study of history, by publishing their diaries and memoirs, but also had an indirect impact, by passing on their version of events to historians, who, in so small a society as that of Israel, may well have been unduly influenced by these dominant personalities.

Very few national histories have been as based on oral history as Israel's "state in the making." The extensive use of oral history is commonly explained by the claim that a substantial chunk of the events took place under clandestine or semiclandestine conditions and secrecy prevented their proper documentation. But this claim hardly holds water since very few underground activities in world history have been as amply recorded as those of the Haganah fighting force, illegal immigration to Palestine in face of the British blockade, and other covert operations in Yishuv history.

The historiography, to date, has not found a satisfactory solution to the problem of individual memory—the handling of oral testimonies.<sup>30</sup>

Psychological research, too, has focused mainly on quantitative parameters of memory—how much people remember and for how long. Only recently have psychologists resumed a systematic study of memory's qualitative properties such as accuracy, bias, foreign impact, autosuggestion, distortion, and so forth. The results of these studies, as far as the link between memory and truth or accuracy is concerned, are not encouraging.<sup>31</sup> The problem of oral testimonies becomes aggravated as historical research expands into microhistory—the recording and study of undocumented fields, such as small settlements or military units, or of societies, tribes, clans, and families whose traditions are predominantly oral. In these novel fields, individual memory and oral traditions are the principal sources, and there are usually very few, if any, alternative sources for comparison and verification.

Apart from individual testimonies based on dubious memory, it has become conventional to use the vague phrase “collective memory.” Daniel Gutwein has defined revisionist criticism of Zionist and Israeli historiography as the “privatization of collective memory”—a phenomenon that he rightly perceives as one of many privatization processes that Israeli society has been undergoing.<sup>32</sup> However, definitions of the “collective,” and consequently of its “shared memory,” are obscure. If the collective is Israeli, does it include only Jews or also Arabs and other non-Jews? If it is Jewish, excluding Israel's minorities, does it include non-Israeli Jews? What about those who continually join the collective such as the young and new immigrants? Is collective memory an aggregate of private recollections or is it detached from individual memory with an independent nature of its own? Who decides which memory is collective and which is not? The government? The media? Academia?

The closest relative of collective memory seems to be that old familiar “myth.” Like the myths of other nations, Zionist and Israeli myths conceal failures or excuse fiascos. True achievement and triumph speak for themselves and require no myths. Myths are shaped and propagated by various agents: persons involved in the making of history who try to affect the way they will be remembered by posterity; and chroniclers, biographers, poets, dramatists, journalists, writers of fiction, filmmakers, curriculum planners, teachers, and radio and television producers. More recently, the Internet has become a significant medium for the creation and dissemination of old and new myths, a role that is likely to grow in the empire of information. Historians currently are engaged in deconstructing long-established myths, which has made it unfashionable to create new ones. Instead, as agents, they now shape collective memory.

Essentially, however, they are doing exactly what they did before the coining of the phrase.

History is not equivalent to memory—on neither the individual nor the collective level—and Zionist history is no exception. Categories of source material such as memoirs, oral testimonies, and coverage by the media, fiction, or the arts can, at best, tell us how events have been memorized, remembered, commemorated, conceived, or represented; they cannot tell us how the events themselves took place. However, the lack of access to official and personal archival material compels Israeli and other historians to rely on such sources.

Consequently, the study of the history of memory has been rapidly expanding. A growing number of scholars are researching the roots and development of Israeli myths, images, and stereotypes. They study the background from which the myths emerged, the reasons for their emergence, the motives behind their expansion, and the methods of their cultivation.<sup>33</sup> The study of myths is part of cultural history. Significant as it is, this work should not be confused with researching historical events and processes—political, diplomatic, military, or social. Virtual history, or the representation of history through fiction, poetry, art, films, or other popular means, is not a substitute for the real history of people, nations, organizations, institutions, societies, ideas, and other features of human activity.

### **The Historiography of Zionism and the Holocaust**

The Six Day War in 1967 marked a turning point in the development of Zionist historiography. Missing pieces of the puzzle of the ideological, diplomatic, and domestic-political history of the Yishuv were increasingly filled in. The study of fields that had been virtually taboo in the 1950s and early 1960s marked a shift in focus; historians now turned their attention to Zionism's attitude toward the plight of European Jewry before, during, and after the Holocaust and to Jewish relations with the Arab world. These two topics, along with the transition from the melting pot concept to that of a multicultural society, still play a leading role in Israeli historiography.

Benzion Dinur—among his many other achievements, the sponsor of the Yad Vashem Heroes and Holocaust Memorial—and Yehuda Bauer—a pioneer of Holocaust research in Israel—separated Zionist and Yishuv history from the Holocaust. In his first book, which deals with

Zionist diplomacy during World War II, Bauer wrote only one sentence on the Yishuv's attitude toward the Holocaust.

The response of the Yishuv (and world Jewry in general) to news of the extermination of the European Jews is one of the most crucial and dreadful issues to confront modern Jewish historiography. Certain aspects of this issue have not been clarified yet, to say nothing of being settled.<sup>34</sup>

A number of comprehensive histories of the Yishuv, written during the 1960s and even the 1970s, also steered clear of the issue. At most, they contended that the Yishuv had not known what was taking place in Europe at the time and in any case had been preoccupied with its own predicament in the wake of the Arab Revolt and the British White Paper of May 1939.<sup>35</sup>

The early chapters in the historiography of the Yishuv's attitude toward the Holocaust were written by journalists who had covered well-known Holocaust trials in Israel: Shalom Rosenfeld on Israel Kastner and Haim Guri on Adolf Eichmann.<sup>36</sup> The Eichmann trial is commonly regarded as a crossroads in the development of Israeli society's attitude toward the Holocaust and as a source of inspiration for the younger generation of Holocaust researchers, including those who studied the Zionist movement's performance during the Holocaust. It nevertheless was another twenty-five years before the first monograph on the subject was published—Dina Porat's *Hanhagah BeMilkud*.<sup>37</sup>

In the interim, noxious weeds shot up in this uncultivated historiographic field of the Yishuv's attitude toward the Holocaust, reviving prewar diaspora polemics—religious-Orthodox, Bundist, communist, and assimilationist anti-Zionist—as well as the domestic arguments between labor and revisionist Zionism.<sup>38</sup> These early critics fiercely attacked both the Yishuv in Palestine and the Zionists in occupied Europe—leaders along with rank and file. The anti-Zionists portrayed their ideological rivals as Nazi collaborators in theory and practice, who, for the sake of their own Zionist agenda, had abandoned the masses of believers (in the Orthodox version) or the masses of workers (in the communist and Bundist version) to their fate.

Shabtai B. Beit-Zvi's book, published in the mid-1970s, accused the Zionist movement of having obstructed rescue efforts that were not linked to, and could not advance, the Zionist enterprise.<sup>39</sup> This study, though written by an amateur, was the first to raise a series of

uncomfortable questions about the stance of the Zionist leadership on the eve of and in the course of the Holocaust. Beit-Zvi's "answers," however, lacked a sound basis. Israeli academe, at the time, chose—in my opinion, wrongly—to ignore not only his answers but also his questions.

Academic research had been mute on the accusations for a long time. Only in the early 1970s did scholarly research into the Zionist movement's attitudes and actions during the Holocaust begin in earnest. Bauer's and Ettinger's students in Jerusalem, and Daniel Carpi's in Tel Aviv, began studying such issues as the Yishuv's representation in Istanbul, the actions of the Yishuv Rescue Committee, and how and when the Yishuv learned of the extermination of European Jewry or the Transfer Agreement.<sup>40</sup>

In the mid-1980s, Dina Porat published *Hanhagah BeMilkud*, her pioneering monograph on the policies of the Zionist leadership. In its wake, two studies analyzed the position of Mapai, the leading party in the Yishuv. Others focused on immigration during the war years and on the Yishuv's mission on behalf of the survivors after the war.<sup>41</sup> Only a few years earlier, most of these studies would have been perceived as critical, even revisionist. By the time they were published, however, the climate had changed, and their critical and revisionist conclusions now appeared almost orthodox and apologetic.<sup>42</sup>

### **The Historiography of the Arab-Jewish Conflict**

On the whole, Zionist scholars were interested in the Arabs of Palestine as an independent, neighboring society rather than in the context of their relations with the Yishuv. Comprehensive historical projects and monographs on Zionist policies did discuss Jewish-Arab relations but as ancillary to the principal topic—the political and military struggle of the Zionist enterprise. Here historiography reflected policy. Zionist leaders believed that the fate of Zionism would be decided in London, New York, and Washington, not in Baghdad, Cairo, Damascus, or Nablus. Similarly, the historiographic effort focused on Zionist-British relations, in which Arabs occupied a minor place. One exception to this rule was the historiography sponsored or inspired by the Marxist Party, HaShomer HaTza'ir. Historians with this ideological background and a belief in the brotherhood of nations gave more emphasis to Zionist relations with the Arab world, and their studies, earlier than others, diverged from the subject's common presentation.<sup>43</sup>

The disappearance of the Palestinians from the military and political arenas after the war of 1948 removed them also from the eyes of historians. Between 1949 and 1967, the only monographs to deal with the Palestinians considered the problem of the refugees.<sup>44</sup> Israel's relations with Arab states were too new and current for discussion. They lacked historical perspective, although they did attract the attention of political scientists such as Yehoshafat Harkabi and Nadav Safran.<sup>45</sup>

After the Six Day War, the changing character of the conflict stimulated new interest in the Palestinians. Their return to the forefront of the conflict following the 1973 war, when relations between Israel and the Arab states stabilized, encouraged research into their plight and generated a new historiography of the Yishuv and the State of Israel. The history of Zionism thus became, quite late, an integral part of the history of the modern Middle East (in addition to the Jewish context and the general historical framework).

The third generation of historians on Zionism and the Yishuv shifted the emphasis from the movement, its policies, and the colonizing enterprise to the new society that Zionism had striven to build in Palestine, the origins of its social vision, and the implementation of its social revolution. Anita Shapira, a dominant historian in this field since her studies on the Labor Battalion and the struggle for the "conquest of labor," followed these up with a biography of Berl Katzenelson and a book called *Land and Power*, which examined the Zionist movement's attitude toward power and the use of force.<sup>46</sup> Yosef Gorny researched various political, diplomatic, and social aspects of the Labor Zionist movement, Zionist attitudes toward the Arab question, and Zionist utopian visions. Ya'acov Shavit studied the social and colonization ideology of the Zionist revisionist movement.<sup>47</sup> A few monographs and collective projects inquired into the various immigration waves, analyzing their part in shaping Yishuv society.<sup>48</sup> Moshe Lissak and Dan Horowitz created a comprehensive framework in which to probe the development of Yishuv society and institutions, while Yonathan Shapira explored the survival and transformation of Zionist social ideologies through changing generations.<sup>49</sup>

Biographies must also be mentioned. These include the as yet incomplete biography by Shabtai Teveth of Ben-Gurion (and its appendixes on the murder of Mapai leader Chaim Arlosoroff, on Ben-Gurion and the Arab question, and on the Lavon Affair—the 1954 intelligence mishap in Egypt);<sup>50</sup> Eyal Kafkafi's controversial biography of labor leader and minister of defense Pinhas Lavon; Ruth Bondy's important biographies of



Enzo Sereni, the pioneer and parachutist who was executed by the Nazis, the Theresienstadt Ghetto Jewish leader Jakob Edelstein, Dr. Chaim Shiba, founder of Israel's state medical system, and Pinhas Rosen, the leader of the German Aliyah; Gabriel Sheffer's biography of Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett; and Yehuda Reinharz's work in progress on Chaim Weizmann, the leader of the Zionist Organization.

In addition to a long list of dissertations and monographs, the academization of Yishuv history has generated diverse documentation, research, and publications: journals, such as *Cathedra* and *Studies in Zionism*, annual volumes such as *Ha-Tziyonut* (Zionism) and *Yahadut Zmanenu* (Contemporary Jewry), the series on Weizmann's letters, the interuniversity project on the *Ha'apala* (illegal immigration), the series of documents on Israel's foreign policy published by the Israel State Archives, the series of documents from Ben-Gurion's archives and diaries of 1948, and Sharett's diary from 1953–56. The intended flagship of this energetic output is the comprehensive history project on the Yishuv undertaken by the Israel National Academy of Arts and Sciences. So far three volumes have been published and two others are forthcoming.

The third generation also integrated history with other disciplines and used new research methods developed in the social and political sciences. These writers have been more critical of, and less involved in, the objects of study than their predecessors were. At the same time, however, they developed an image of "establishment historiography" that was soon challenged by a new school of revisionist historians.

### **The Changing Historiography of the Arab-Jewish Conflict**

New scholarly trends that emerged in the 1980s have again shifted the emphasis, this time from Zionism's triumphs and achievements to its costs and failures. Revisionist historians (and "critical" sociologists) focus on three major fields of Zionist ideological and political history: its attitude toward the Arabs, the Holocaust, and the immigrants of early statehood. This combination has mounted an assault on the legitimacy of Zionism and Jewish statehood in three separate systems of relations: Israel and its surroundings, Israel and the Jewish people, and Israel and those of its citizens who allegedly received unfair treatment.<sup>51</sup>

To date, the first of these—the history of the Arab-Jewish conflict—has been the most popular and complex since the conflict is ongoing.

None of the problems involving Jews and Arabs that emerged before, during, and after the 1948 War of Independence has been resolved. Every word written or uttered about that war, the subsequent major military confrontations, and the endless skirmishes on both sides of Israel's borders may have actual ramifications and is often interpreted and discussed outside of its historical context and in terms of the present struggle. In this sense, the historiography of the Arab-Jewish conflict is as unparalleled and unprecedented as the conflict itself.

In the 1970s, attitudes toward Israel in Western academe began to change. The same Palestinian slogans that had made little impression on European public opinion between the two world wars and in the aftermath of 1948 now found fertile ground in Europe's newfound postcolonial guilt. The process was encouraged by Arab petrodollars and other forms of funding and spread to American universities and later even to Israel. Early signs of the change in attitude appeared in the late 1980s with the emergence of the so-called New Historians, whose principal contribution to the study of the Arab-Israeli conflict has been to deflect the focus from Israeli accomplishments to the Palestinian ordeal. Palestinians are portrayed as hapless objects of violence and Israeli oppression, Israeli-Transjordanian collusion, and treacherous British and Arab diplomacy.<sup>52</sup> Some describe Israelis as intransigent, merciless, and needlessly callous usurpers who cynically exploited the Holocaust to gain world support for Jewish statehood at the expense of Palestinian rights to their country.<sup>53</sup>

In characterizing the New Historians, Anita Shapira has stressed the differences among them that make generalization difficult if not impossible. She has suggested age (biological and scholarly) as a common denominator, but this explanation, too, is unsatisfactory; while there are substantial age differences among them, several of the New Historians or sociologists are not much younger, if at all, than colleagues who do not lay claim to the title.<sup>54</sup>

What is particularly irritating about the self-proclaimed title New Historians is an implied objectivity and open-mindedness said to have been lacking in allegedly involved, partisan, Old Historians.<sup>55</sup> The New Historians have indeed revised the traditional presentation of the 1948 war and its aftermath, but their (different) methodological approaches, practical performances, and analyses have been no less open to criticism than those of their predecessors.<sup>56</sup> Nor is there cause to assume that the revisionists are impartial and free of ideological bias. Some have rendered an invaluable service to the Palestinian charge that Israel was "conceived

in sin” by sketching the Palestinians of 1948 and after as innocent victims of conspiracies and atrocities. This simplistic approach is unconvincing to anyone familiar with the sources—unless the reader is utterly prejudiced.<sup>57</sup>

Nevertheless, what appeared to be a common front of revisionists challenging a virtual establishment of Old Historians has gradually disintegrated. Ilan Pappé, Avi Shlaim, and others have radicalized their anti-Israeli stances, while Benny Morris has gained wide acceptance and recognition in Israel. At the same time, he has been sharply criticized by Palestinian historians and radical American Jews, such as Norman Finkelstein, for not being radical enough.<sup>58</sup>

When the revisionist historians first appeared on the scene in the late 1980s, they were outsiders attacking the historiographic and sociological “establishment.” Today most belong to the academic world in Israel or abroad, with university positions and tenure, and the polemics between Old and New Historians have been extended from research and writing to teaching and supervising.

### **Face to Face with Palestinian Historiography**

After several decades of separate, independent development, the current trend of positive discrimination toward the “other” has brought Israeli historiography face to face with its Arab and Palestinian counterparts. Arab narratives of the 1948 war and its consequences—usually polemics or apologetic memoirs and propaganda, rarely scholarly research—have concentrated on assigning guilt rather than analyzing events and processes. Since it was inconceivable that the tiny Yishuv could have single-handedly routed the Arabs, it was essential to mitigate the defeat by suggesting accomplices. The Arabs accused Britain of betrayal, blamed the United States for supporting its Zionist protégé, and vilified King Abdullah of Transjordan, the only Arab ruler to benefit from the general debacle.<sup>59</sup>

Arab historiography has typically been obsessed with the question of injustice and unfairness. Arab scholars have largely ignored the full context; they have scarcely endeavored to find out what really happened—the how, when, and why of things. Instead they have dwelt on right or wrong, legitimate or illegitimate claims, ascribing undue significance to official, judicial, and declarative documents such as UN resolutions and disregarding the huge corpus of archival source material on the war.

One exception worth mentioning—despite its apologetic charac-

ter—is Arif al-Arif's six volumes on the war written in the 1950s. Unfortunately, this work has not been translated and is inaccessible to most readers, Israeli or otherwise. Recent Arab works on the conflict may be more sophisticated, using the fashionable jargon of Western universities, but none approximates al-Arif's thoroughness, self-critical method, and accuracy.<sup>60</sup>

The recent Arab writings invoke postmodern terminology and theorization but still suffer from extraordinary factual and chronological errors. Often they are based on a single dubious or unreliable source (such as a book of memoirs), adopting arguments without bothering to verify what is behind them.<sup>61</sup> One wonders what findings Arab New Historians will come up with should they ever emerge in Arab countries or among the Palestinians.

Some Israeli historians think that Palestinian historiography, as representative of the other, deserves equal treatment with Israeli historiography—despite its propagandist nature and poor professional standards. Palestinians, however, tend to insist that their narrative be accepted in advance, before any serious discussion of the evidence (or lack thereof). The demand to discuss the evidence first is seen as a typical reflection of arrogant orientalism.

### **The Colonialist Paradigm of Zionism**

Palestinian scholars have been joined by Israeli revisionist sociologists, jurists, geographers, and historians in an attempt to prove Zionism's colonialist (as distinct from colonizing) nature, especially in post-1967 Israel.<sup>62</sup> Deriving from current theories on colonialism, this claim relies on a bare minimum of historical evidence—which on the whole shows the opposite—and far more on tendentious interpretations that confuse past and present and serve primarily as a propagandist and ideological weapon in the persisting Arab-Jewish conflict.

The association of Zionism with colonialism did not begin with the New Historians, sociologists, or geographers. It is as old as the conflict itself, dating back to the first Palestinian congress in Jerusalem in early 1919 if not before, as Rashid Khalidi has recently shown.<sup>63</sup> Put simply, Zionism essentially required immigration and colonization—just as the Spanish settled in South America and the Pilgrims and others in North America, followed by a long line of Europeans who occupied and settled in America, Southeast Asia, Australia, and Africa. Like them, Zionism, for

a while, was assisted by an imperialist power, Britain, though the reasons were more complex than pure imperialism. Here, however, the similarity ends, and when the colonialist paradigm confronts reality it fails to adequately explain the Zionist phenomenon.<sup>64</sup>

Unlike the conquistadors and their successors, Jewish immigrants to Eretz-Israel did not come armed to the teeth and made no attempt to take the country from the native population by force. If we take a semiotic approach, until 1948 the Hebrew word *kibbush* (occupation, conquest) referred to taming the wilderness and mastering manual labor and the arts of grazing; in its most militant form, it is referred to guarding Jewish settlements. Terms such as *g'dud* (battalion) or *pluga* (company) referred not to military but to labor units.

Economic theories of colonialism and sociological theories of migration movements are equally deficient when applied to the Zionist experience. Palestine differed from typical countries of colonialist emigration primarily because it was underdeveloped and poor. Europeans had emigrated to countries rich in natural resources and poor in manpower in order to exploit them; in contrast, Jewish immigrants came to a country that was too poor to even support its indigenous population. At the end of the Ottoman period, natives of Palestine—Jews and Arabs—were emigrating to America and Australia. Zionist ideology and the import of Jewish private and national capital compensated for the lack of natural resources and accelerated modernization. Two factors that were absent in all other colonial movements were ideology (not the missionary kind, which did not exist in Zionism) and the import of capital. In contrast, imperialist powers generally exploited the colonies for the benefit of the mother country and did not invest beyond what was necessary for that exploitation.

Until 1948, the Zionists did not conquer but—unparalleled among colonial movements—bought land in Palestine. Sellers included all the prominent clans of the Palestinian elite. Palestinian and some revisionist Israeli scholars tend to lay the blame for the eviction of Palestinian tenant farmers on foreign landowners such as the Sursuq family of Beirut, concealing the role of the resident elite families who led the Palestinian national movement.<sup>65</sup> Upon statehood, state lands were requisitioned and private lands were sometimes expropriated. But the state compensated private owners, and individual Arabs continued to sell their holdings. By the same token, during the Mandate and in the early years of statehood Jewish immigrants competed with (Arab) natives in the urban and rural manual labor markets—which was inconceivable in colonial countries.

A cultural appraisal, too, eliminates Zionism from the colonialist paradigm. Contrary to the colonialist stereotype, Jews who immigrated to Eretz-Israel severed their ties to their countries of origin and their cultural past. Instead they revived an ancient language and, on the basis of Hebrew, created a totally new culture that spread to all spheres.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, all over the world colonialist emigrants either quested after a lucrative future or sought to escape a dreary present. Jewish immigrants to Eretz-Israel shared these motives, but their primary, unique impulse, which distinguished them from the immigrants of colonialist movements, was to revive an ancient heritage.

The above should suffice to refute the identification between Zionism and colonialism. The seemingly historical argument, however, impinges significantly on the present. Palestinian argumentation has always adopted the paradigm of a national liberation movement (Palestinian) struggling against a colonialist power (Zionism). Long after most other national liberation movements have achieved their goals and thrown off colonialism, the Palestinians—who have enjoyed far greater international support—are still in the same place. This fact alone should have led Palestinian intellectuals and their Western and Israeli sympathizers to reexamine their traditional paradigm. Instead, by cultivating the Zionist-colonialist prototype, Israeli historians and social scientists continue to provide the Palestinians with an excuse to avoid such reexamination and encourage them to proceed along a road that apparently leads nowhere.

## **The Holocaust and Jewish Identity**

The position and actions of the Zionist movement and the Yishuv during the Holocaust and the attitudes toward the plight of European Jewry before World War II and toward the survivors in its wake have been another major concern of the New Historiography. Similarly, the impact of the Holocaust on Israeli society, identity, and even politics has gradually grown from a secondary field into a major issue.

During World War II, Zionist leaders or the Yishuv at large were minor players and could hardly do more than they did. But after the war their attitude toward and treatment of the survivors became a domestic Zionist issue that could not be dismissed with excuses. Tom Segev and particularly Idith Zertal have accused the Zionist leadership of manipulating the survivors after the war to promote political goals, of ignoring their war experiences, and of turning a blind eye to their suffering.<sup>67</sup>

As a pillar of Israeli distinctiveness, the Holocaust has been mobilized by Israel's detractors. Anachronistically and antihistorically, the critics project onto the past the concepts, values, and realities of the present, attributing to the leaders of the "state in the making" the values, powers, and capabilities of the present Jewish state. Moreover, they evaluate the conduct and attitude of Ben-Gurion and his colleagues according to our own frame of reference, not that in force at the time.<sup>68</sup>

As a basic component of postmodern Jewish and Israeli identity, the Holocaust feeds impassioned arguments among Israelis and Jews outside of Israel. Are its essence and lessons chiefly universal or uniquely Jewish? Are they humanist or nationalist? Israeli historians have entered the fray, whether by choice or because they were expected to. Sixty years after assimilated, emancipated, socialist, and religious-Orthodox Jews perished in the extermination camps, the axiom that the Holocaust was the ultimate justification of the Zionist solution to the modern Jewish Question can no longer be taken for granted. Zionism's prewar ideological opponents, who had seemingly receded after the Holocaust, suddenly reemerged under the modish guise of "post-Zionism": religious-Orthodox, leftists-liberals, or assimilationists. Both in Israel and elsewhere, non- and anti-Zionists have condemned Zionism's "monopolization" of the Holocaust and the emphasis placed by Israeli leaders and historians on its uniqueness.

Two elements have been prominent in this condemnation of the Zionist approach. One, dating back to Hannah Arendt in the 1950s, portrayed the Holocaust as a crime against humanity rather than against Jews. In terms of Jewish relations with non-Jews, the issue was German-Jewish—not European-Jewish, not world-Jewish. The second element lumps the Holocaust together with other genocides of the twentieth century from the persecution of the Armenians by the Turks in World War I to the wars in Cambodia, Bosnia, or Chechnya. The first element is immediately apparent to anyone visiting the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, where there is a palpable absence of reference to French, Dutch, Romanian, Hungarian, Croat, Slovak, Polish, Lithuanian, and Ukrainian anti-Semites and collaborators who helped the Nazis kill the Jews. This evasion, typical also of Daniel Goldhagen's best-selling *Hitler's Willing Executioners*,<sup>69</sup> is understandable in a country with large communities of Eastern European ethnic origin. In the United States, most American Jews and American Jewish historians are more comfortable with a limited concept of the Holocaust. But this is no reason for Israeli historiography to adopt a narrow interpretation; on the contrary,

it should continue to emphasize the crisis of emancipation and integration along with the crisis of traditional Jewish society.

The second element is even more significant. Treating the Holocaust as one genocide among many denies its uniqueness and sustains the assimilationist approach of concealing or blurring any Jewish distinctiveness. This concept flies in the face of the widely accepted periodization of the Holocaust from 1933 to 1945. How many Jews were murdered—what genocide took place—in 1935, 1938, or even 1940? Yes, the Holocaust was genocide, but it was much more than mass killing. It is precisely this increment that relativist historians, in Israel and elsewhere, aim to repudiate by likening the Holocaust to other atrocities under the trendy slogans of comparative and interdisciplinary studies.

The comparative tactic becomes stretched beyond reason when applied to Israel's attitude toward the Palestinians since 1948 and particularly after 1967. The radical Left, in Israel and abroad, introduced this linkage into its daily jargon as early as the 1970s, beginning with Israeli philosopher-scientist Yeshayahu Leibowitz's catchphrase, "Judeo-Nazis," and similar pearls. Israeli historians first joined the barrage in the summer of 1982, when Israel Guttman began a sit-down strike at the entrance to Yad Vashem to protest the war in Lebanon. HU historian Moshe Zimmerman attacked Jewish settlers in Judea and Samaria by calling their youth Hitler Jugend and comparing the Bible with *Mein Kampf*, another landmark in promoting an apparent analogy between Israel's policies toward the Palestinians and Nazi persecution of the Jews.<sup>70</sup>

Ilan Pappé's has been the most extreme voice in drawing analogies between the lot of the Palestinians and the Holocaust. To avoid dealing with violent Palestinian opposition to Zionism and massacres of non-Zionist Jews in Hebron and Safad, he ignores the pre-1948 phase of the Arab-Jewish conflict and argues that the Palestinians, too, were victims of the Holocaust. His ostensibly evenhanded treatment of the Holocaust and the Nakba degrades the Holocaust by the very comparison with isolated atrocities, which took place amid mutual fighting in 1948 and after, and comes very close to denying the Holocaust. The ulterior motive behind these allegations is the idea that the world deprived the Palestinians of their homeland in order to compensate the Jews for the Holocaust and it consequently needs to redress this historical injustice.<sup>71</sup>

The analogies between Zionism and Nazism drawn by Leibowitz, Zimmerman, and others are hardly original. As far back as 1942, radical organs of bitter, disappointed German immigrants in Palestine used terms and phrases such as *Yishuvnazim*, *Nazionismus*, and the "spirit of



*Der Stürmer* in the Yishuv.” Robert Weltsch resorted to similarly extreme expressions during the anti-British struggle in 1945–47.<sup>72</sup> In 1943, hostile British officials compared Zionism with Nazism and the Palmah with the German SS. British journalists employed the same terminology in 1948. All these examples, however, only demonstrate a hatred of Zionism; they did not, at that time, have anything to do with Palestinians.<sup>73</sup>

### **From Melting Pot to Multicultural Society**

The third key issue in Israeli history—the absorption and integration of the mass of immigrants who arrived in the 1950s and shaped post-Yishuv Israeli society—is still in the early stages of research. In the 1960s and 1970s, sociologists such as Shmuel Eisenstadt, Moshe Lissak, Rivka Bar-Yosef, and Reuven Kahane described and analyzed immigrant absorption and integration. In recent years, members of a school of new or critical sociologists have reproached their teachers for concealing ulterior motives behind the processes of immigration and absorption and ignoring the immigrants’ cultural repression. Rebelling against the older generation, critical sociologists (*critical* in this case stands for *anti-Zionist*) have diverted the focus of sociological research from mainstream Israeli society to its peripheral groups; they condemn the veteran nucleus of Yishuv society for every possible crime from deliberate discrimination toward fellow Jews to militarism toward Arabs. They have even suggested extending the colonialist paradigm to Zionism’s handling of Jewish immigrants from Islamic countries.<sup>74</sup>

Sociologists are not committed to history’s research methods, and they are certainly entitled to their own professional views and conclusions. Their findings, however, are not history, nor are their allegations about the absorption of the mass of immigrants. The few historical studies that have dealt with the same period and issues categorically refute all suggestion of a deliberate conspiracy against the immigrants, whether Holocaust survivors or Jews from Islamic lands. The relatively few new studies do, on the other hand, describe the many mistakes at the time, albeit innocently and under dire conditions, which the critical sociologists—not unintentionally—ignore.<sup>75</sup>

The melting pot concept, today, may appear to have been a fiasco, especially since the winning catchword is now *multiculturalism*. The present quandaries of Israeli society, however, shed very little light on the past. The rise of a multicultural society is due not to the failure of ab-

sorption but to a variety of processes that have affected Israeli society in the past two decades: decreasing external pressures, new waves of immigration, an influx of foreign laborers, a growing minority consciousness, and a widening economic gap.

### Concluding Remarks

Israeli historiography based on archival documentation has more or less reached the period ending with the 1956 Sinai Campaign. Limitations and delays in releasing important subsequent archival material, beyond the dictates of the ongoing Israeli-Arab conflict, have impeded research on later years. Nevertheless, historical forerunners on later issues have already appeared,<sup>76</sup> and scholarly works dealing with the road to the Six Day War and the background of the Yom Kippur War are under way.<sup>77</sup> In view of the commotion aroused by the critical examination of the first—relatively consensual—decade (1948–58) of Israeli history, one can imagine the ruckus likely to be caused by the scrutiny of the second and third decades (1958–78), a period in which every measure, every policy, and every utterance were instantly controversial and fired public debate and whose events were veiled beneath an ever-growing barrage of irresponsible media coverage. Then, again, the incessant discussion from the time of the events to the time of their historical study will possibly have cushioned the shock by the time historians publish their research findings.<sup>78</sup>

The main threat to Israeli historiography, however, is not the agreement or disagreement of historians, or of historians and academics in other disciplines. Harmony is no less detrimental than rivalry, and disagreement may well enhance scholarship. The main threat is that Israeli historiography has lost its common disciplinary base, its common language. And there can be no reasonable, constructive debate without an agreed terminology and shared principles and ethics. These, unfortunately, seem to have evaporated in the heat of the recent destructive polemics on the history of Israel's first decade.

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63. Yehoshua Porath, *The Emergence of the Palestinian-Arab National Movement* (London, 1974), 39–63; Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 96–111.

64. Recently, Derek Penslar has tried an interesting comparison between Zionism and Indian and other movements of national awakening in Southeast Asia. See his “Zionism, Colonialism, and Postcolonialism” in *Israeli Historical Revisionism: From Left to Right*, ed. A. Shapira, D. Penslar, and N. Schoerner (London, 2002). In my opinion, however, the comparison is hardly valid. While in Southeast Asia a meeting between two separate societies took place, the Jews of Europe were part of European society and their national revival was part and parcel of the all-European process of national awakening.

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66. Ron Kuzar, *Hebrew and Zionism: A Discourse Analytic Cultural Study* (New York, 2001).

67. Tom Segev, *HaMilyon HaShevi'i: HaYisraelim VeHaShoah* (Jerusalem, 1991); English: *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York, 1993); Idith Zertal, *From Catastrophe to Power: Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel* (Berkeley, 1998).

68. Yosef Grodzinsky, *Homer Enoshi Tov: Yehudim mul Zionim, 1945–1951* [Good Human Material: Jews versus Zionists, 1945–1951] (Or Yehuda, 1998).

69. Daniel J. Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York, 1996).

70. See Zimmerman's interview in the *Yediot Aharonot* network of local newspapers, 28 April 1995.

71. Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 12–13; Pappé, interview with Yona Hadari, *Yediot Aharonot*, 27 August 1993.

72. Gelber, *Moledet Hadasha*, 565, 583–97.

73. Minute by John Bennet, 7 January 1943, PRO, FO 921/58. See also Clare Hollingworth's report from Jerusalem in the *Scotsman*, 1 June 1948.

74. Uri Ram, ed. *Ha-Hevra ha-Yisraelit: Hebeitim Bikortim* [Israeli Society: Critical Perspectives] (Tel Aviv, 1993); Uri Ben-Eliezer, *Derekh ha-Kavenet: Hivatvruto shel ha-Militarism ha-Yisre'eli, 1936–1956* [Through the Rear Sight: The Emergence of Israeli Militarism, 1936–1956] (Tel Aviv, 1995).

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78. For a forerunner of the anticipated debate on Israel's later political and military history, see Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881–1999* (New York, 1999); Shlaim, *Iron Wall*; and Anita Shapira's review essay on these books, "The Past Is Not a Foreign Country," *New Republic*, 29 November 1999.

*Anita Shapira*

## **Hirbet Hizah**

### Between Remembering and Forgetting

Woe to the generation that has to commit the acts of “Hizah” and flees the pain of their recounting.

—Ephraim Kleiman

Memory—what, how, and when we remember—continues to fascinate scholars. It is elusive, complex, and difficult to define. Collective memory sits at the divide between the conscious and the subliminal, acknowledgment and denial, history and psychology. Currently in vogue is the construct of a “usable past”: collective memory as a product of national-cultural manipulation, which embeds those portions of the past that reinforce society’s self-image and foster its interests and agendas. This conception rejects the notion of spontaneous processes at work in the formation of collective memory. But if conscious intent does shape memory, who are its agents? What are their tools? In democracies, moreover, there is never one single guiding hand. How does the open arena of conflicting interests impact on memory’s configuration? When is a particular event stamped in memory? What processes catalyze its fixing; what forces act to submerge it? If the “usable past” ministers to present interests, what happens to past segments that do not serve current goals? Are they relegated to oblivion? Or do past and present interact dynamically, transforming memory as changing circumstances impact on public consciousness?

Memory confounds historical consciousness. The gray area between consciousness and memory is especially evident when dealing with topics hard to face, such as the departure/flight/removal/expulsion of Arabs in Israel’s War of Independence. This essay deals with changing representations of the past and the interrelation of memory and reality. The subject is explored by examining public attitudes over time toward an Israeli classic, “The Story of Hirbet Hizah” by S. Yizhar.

For several years now, I have shown sections of the tale’s TV version to university students as an opener for discussion of the differing war

narratives currently debated by historians. The students' head-on encounter with the 1948 expulsion of Arab villagers is invariably greeted with shocked silence. That reaction is surprising: after all, "The Story of Hirbet Hizah" has been part of the high school curriculum since 1964 and a matriculation elective, and its TV premiere in 1978 unleashed fierce and lengthy debate. Yet, nearly a decade later, Benny Morris could style himself as the man who had exposed Israel's original sin with *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949*.<sup>1</sup> The public was indignant, as if they had just heard of the Palestinian refugee problem and Israel's role in its creation. Is our public memory so short-lived? Questions about awareness are raised also by the students' surprise and unease: years have passed since the publication of and controversy over Morris's book. The issue was papered over by the media and resurfaced with the 1998 television documentary series, *Tékumah* (Revival).<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, many Israelis still react as if the subject didn't exist, is unknown, or is under wraps—best not mentioned. It is my thesis that Israeli attitudes toward the "Story of Hirbet Hizah" over the years can serve as a litmus test for the vagaries of remembering and forgetting that help form public memory.

The relationship between literature and history is complex. In the heyday of classic Rankeanism, to "tell it as it was," belles lettres would probably not have been a legitimate source for the description of reality. Today, however, with the increasing recognition of the limitations of the historical method, historians are readier to also utilize fiction to illuminate political, social, or psychological truths. Literature not only reflects reality but is a means of embedding specifics in public imagination and collective memory. More so than history, it acts on the senses, creating verbal and visual images and associations that shape the collective psyche. The seeming disparity between historical and literary reality enables readers to separate fictional portrayals from factual accounts. Literary worlds and characters can be viewed as universal, removed from place and time and grappling with eternal questions: justice and injustice, humanity and inhumanity, life and death. Readers can focus on the artistic dimensions, disregarding reality. "The Story of Hirbet Hizah" lends itself to all of these analyses; the choice of analysis sheds light on what the public does or does not wish to know.

### **The Tale and the Author**

"The Story of Hirbet Hizah" tells of the expulsion of inhabitants from an Arab village at the end of the War of Independence by an Israel De-

fense Forces (IDF) unit acting under orders. Most of the residents have already fled; only women, children, and the elderly remain. The young soldiers are callous, uncouth, bored, indifferent—neither particularly brutal nor especially compassionate. They have been ordered to “burn–blow up” the houses and “arrest–load up–and drive away” (34) the population, an order they carry out to the letter, shattering the valley’s natural beauty and tranquillity.

A whole, ancient way of life is suddenly swept away: “Mattresses . . . cooking embers . . . yard implements . . . still brimming with everyday cares and concerns . . . as if things could still return to normal” (48). Green fields, shady gardens, vegetable beds—upon all “descends . . . the grief of orphanhood. . . . Fields that will not be harvested, crops that will not be watered . . . as if it had all been for nothing” (68). The villagers gradually absorb the enormity of the calamity, and the demolition of their homes spells out its finality. They are submissive, though here and there a proud protest is heard. The eviction is replete with humiliation: residents are forced to trudge through a puddle en route to the waiting vehicles and to abandon their belongings, even blankets (for warmth), and all the while the background din of demolition punctuates the finality of their plight—it would not be undone.

The narrator balks: “If this has to be done, let others . . . defile their hands. . . . I can’t. But at once another voice spoke out within me, taunting: ‘Oh you’re so high-minded . . . so so noble’” (65). The commander’s response that “it’ll be all right,” that “immigrants will come . . . and take . . . and work [the land]” (76), wrests the narrator’s bitterest protest: “‘Colonizers,’ screamed my guts. ‘Hirbet Hizah isn’t ours! No right was ever bestowed by the barrel of an MG 42’” (77). The stream of refugees awakens Jewish associations: “Exile . . . what have we done here today, what?! We Jews sent others into exile.” In counterpoint to the “boxcars of exile,” Yizhar hears the echoing footsteps of other expellees and the “rebuke of the prophet of Anatot, rumbling like ominous, distant thunder” (75). The tale climaxes in the concluding sentence “And when stillness closes in on all, and none disturbs the hush, and this will be the soundless din beyond silence—then God will come forth and go down to the valley . . . to see whether their outcry is justified [Gen. 18:21]” (78).

Hirbet Hizah was not the name of an actual village. Does the tale describe a unique incident? Or does it symbolize the land emptying of its Arab inhabitants in the wake of the war—whether by choice, out of fear, in flight from the encroaching front, or by forcible IDF eviction? A hint is provided by the mute cry of the bare villages, “the song of objects stripped of soul . . . of human action raw and wild again . . . of . . .

unforeseen cataclysm, frozen as . . . a curse unspoken. . . . Is anyone really to blame here—or what?!” (41). If this is not just a random village but stands for all the vacant villages and towns, then the narrator’s cry, “Hirbet Hizah isn’t ours!” applies to all of Palestine, every town and hamlet conquered by the Jews in the course of the war.

Yizhar believed unwaveringly in the right of the Jewish people to return to their land. That same month he also wrote “Midnight Convoy,”<sup>3</sup> a paean to the Zionist enterprise and the “new Jew.” The convoy’s breakthrough into the Negev saves besieged Jews, rerouting the war from a hateful bloodbath to a peaceful path, “a war in which you just open up a new road in the land. . . .” Here, too, Yizhar is aware of the emptied landscape: “A land too large . . . its fields inimical . . . still bearing its owners’ distinctive scent . . . a different toil, a different desire, a different love . . . ancient . . . its heart still beating with its fellahin.”<sup>4</sup> Yet he is reconciled to the revolution that has come about without the narrator’s involvement. At the story’s end, he recognizes that “it was naive to believe that [peaceful] convoys would save us. Convoys . . . don’t get you space, freedom, peace. Oh, Mama, how we’ll still have to die.”<sup>5</sup> In “Hirbet Hizah,” Yizhar protests against injustice and the loss of humanity—of both the expelled and the expellers. But he does not say whether it might have been possible to act differently and, if so, how. When the narrator complains, “it’s . . . not right,” one of the tale’s “tougher” characters asks: “So what do you suggest?” He replies: “I don’t know” and is told to “shut up” (66).

The narrator is caught between his basic humanism and his national ideals. Yizhar’s mentor, A. D. Gordon, had taught individual redemption and elevation, as well as national deliverance. Socialist Zionism saw no inherent contradiction between the people already on the land and the new settlers. Of course, that ignored the basic conflict between the Arabs, who saw themselves as the rightful owners of the land, and the Jews, arriving to lay claim to their ancient patrimony. But Yizhar trusted in the rectitude of this claim all his life: the Jews returning to their ancient homeland had the right to settle there. Pioneer toil bestowed the right to Palestine—a right albeit circumscribed by the rights of the inhabitants. He saw prewar Jewish settlement in Palestine as a pure, grand enterprise. His adored older brother—killed in a 1940s motorcycle accident with his Arab assistant riding tandem—had been buying up land from Arabs piecemeal for Jewish settlement. Yizhar did not consider such amicable acquisition morally dubious. What happened after the state’s establishment, however, the wielding of military might to gain the upper hand, was a different story.

S. Yizhar was born into a family of settlers in Rehovot, a farming village that employed Arab workers, where Jews and Arabs lived and worked side by side. The orchard, the clang of the water pump, and the Arab fellah were an integral part of his everyday world, harmonious, organic, beautiful, and whole. The abrupt disappearance of the Arabs shattered that image—leaving him with a lifelong nostalgia for the lost world of his youth. Prestate Palestine was redolent of gardens, cultivated fields, and Arab and Jewish villages, a pastoral existence in an ancient biblical landscape. Rehovot, tranquil and rural, was removed from the pace of modernization and the massive influx of immigrants that would rub out old patterns. The destruction of the Arab village marked the end of halcyon days. As the literary critic Uri Shoham put it: “Ahmed was killed along with his brother, their motorcycle smashed to bits, and then the War of Liberation and the establishment of the ‘kingdom’ completely obliterated the myth of ‘In the beginning.’”<sup>6</sup>

Yizhar found it hard to warm to the waves of Jewish immigrants that inundated the new state with their alien ways, destroying the land’s primeval beauty and charm. Asked in the spring of 1990 at what point the old world had vanished, Yizhar told the interviewer: “When a new generation arrived that needed land—and fast. [Jewish] refugees . . . brought with them another world with its own laws. Here was a landscape of sand paths, thorn hedges. It was pretty romantic, but didn’t have much practical value. So it began to fade, and that whole world came to an abrupt, forcible end. . . . That lost world lives on inside me. . . . It had a certain . . . equilibrium. What followed is still a mess.”<sup>7</sup> Yizhar liked to quote Nathan Alterman: “On the seam between era and era / Fortune let Jews / See a land bare / No tree no water as barrier / See a land bare / Like the scene of its beginning, the scene of its end.”<sup>8</sup>

He saw the War of Independence as a watershed, the start of sovereignty and the end of the bare land in which Jews and Arabs had together sought refuge from the midday sun. The magnificent young soldiers of the War of Independence, whom he so loved, were “the last to behold the naked, passive, fatal landscape.”<sup>9</sup> The open expanses were pillaged by immigrants.<sup>10</sup> As early as 1952, the critic David Kenaani noted, “Yizhar was attached to a specific landscape (southern Palestine), social class (peasants), age group (youth), psychological type, and moment in time.”<sup>11</sup>

Yizhar mentioned the Holocaust in only one later tale and then only marginally.<sup>12</sup> Yet in “Hirbet Hizah,” on the threshold of the new era, he touches on the Holocaust and the new immigrants. The latter have

come to supplant the Arabs. The Holocaust is invoked symbolically: the machine gun, that can bestow no right to Palestine, is a German MG; the vehicles carting off the villagers to the Gaza Strip are “boxcars.” These allusions, however, are far less convincing than the prophetic echoes of Anatot and God’s descent into the valley to ascertain the truth of Sodom’s outcry, which end the story. Yizhar’s biblical resonance always rings true. While his allusion to Holocaust refugees is superficial, offhand, and unfavorable, his scriptural evocation is basic to his human understanding and outlook, which are ravaged by the invading “barbarians.” Hirbet Hizah was an unsavory consequence of the birth of statehood: the transition from the intimate, closed, appealing Jewish society in interaction with the Arab community to a mass society of immigrants, vulgar, graceless, and alien.

Statehood was also a watershed between the moral innocence of a community under the protection of British bayonets and the realities of a sovereign state acting in a manner inconsistent with the pacifist moral code of socialist Zionism. “The War of Liberation . . . was the positive end of an age, but, morally . . . also the negative end. Till then, we had known that some things are not done . . . certainly not by Jews. My tale, ‘Hirbet Hizah’ . . . which has angered everyone for almost 50 years now, is about things that before the War of Liberation I believed we Jews couldn’t do.”<sup>13</sup> “In the war . . . people lived in a myth. There was only one solution. When the war began, the naive faith of those young men received its first slap in the face. People seized and plundered. Arabs were ousted. And we . . . had believed that Jews could never expel others.”<sup>14</sup>

Alterman, in his famous poem (1950) protesting the security forces’ brutal handling of Arab infiltrators, nonetheless concedes: “You don’t build a state with white gloves. The job’s not always clean and noble.”<sup>15</sup> By contrast, Yizhar in “Hirbet Hizah” was shocked by his encounter with *raisons d’état*: “The shock of a romantic dreamer. . . I had never imagined there could be such things.”<sup>16</sup> Amid the huge controversy that erupted after the 1978 TV airing, Yizhar, for the first time, commented on his motives for writing the story.

I wasn’t writing as Jew versus Arab . . . but as someone hurt, because something happened there that I was completely unable to reconcile myself with. There was only one thing inside me—outrage . . . [and] the expulsion of residents and demolition of village homes shook me to the very core. . . . The conflict is also between that person’s past, education . . . outlook . . . con-

ception of Zionism—that always said the Arabs would not be evicted, that we would live together in peace—and the realities depicted.<sup>17</sup>

Yizhar did not deny the “no choice” aspect of the War of Independence; it was a war of defense, of life or death. But he was revolted by the new violent methods, the deviation from his values. He swung between justifying Zionism and his love for the young warriors on the one hand, and hostility to the state and hatred of war on the other, a dissonance obvious in his behavior. The author of “Hirbet Hizah” was also an intelligence officer in the Giv’ati Brigade. He knew about expulsions and had held his tongue. Later, as a Mapai Member of the Knesset (MK) in the darkest period of the military government (which Israel instituted to supervise its Arab minority), he may have condemned Israel’s treatment of its Arab citizens at Young Mapai meetings, but he never spoke out publicly.<sup>18</sup> Nor did he condemn retaliation against infiltrators, some of whom were hapless refugees attempting to return to their homes. In literature, he took the high moral ground, but in everyday life he came to terms with the realities of statehood and was silent.

Why did he write “The Story of Hirbet Hizah”? His only essay on the topic, “Be-Terem Aharish” (Before I Fall Silent), appeared during the controversy over the TV airing and begins with his artistic philosophy: “Fiction does not mirror reality, document real life or . . . any real state of affairs.” A writer takes material from reality and fashions it into an autonomous construct. Yet at the end of the essay he noted: “Everything I wrote about in a story that recently has been the subject of much negative discussion . . . is, sadly, reality. . . . Everything . . . is reported accurately, meticulously documented, from the operation order on a specific date right down to the last details.”<sup>19</sup>

Here he claimed that the story was authentic. But in a newspaper interview he gave at the same time he refused to disclose the name of the actual village, stating that it was fiction, not reportage—which is why he wanted it to remain “abstract.”<sup>20</sup> He totally rejected the idea of “Hirbet Hizah” as a metaphor for the Land of Israel: “There’s no need for a story’s specifics to represent the general . . . the total . . . or all the historical events of a people and country at a given time.”<sup>21</sup> He vehemently denied allegations that he had questioned the Jewish right to the Land of Israel and noted that Hirbet Hizah was an exception, not the norm, though he admitted that there had been other such incidents.<sup>22</sup> His oscillation—between viewing “Hirbet Hizah” as a symbol or reportage, as



imaginative fiction or a snapshot—reflected his difficulty with the arbitrary nature of state power, which shapes the destinies of its sons and enemies alike, changing reality by means of the sword.

### The First Controversy, 1949–51

“The Story of Hirbet Hizah” was written in May 1949, with the battlefields still smoking and the dead barely buried. It was published the following autumn, along with “*Ha-Shavui*” (The Prisoner), in the *Hirbet Hizah* collection of stories when the public was still reeling from grief and the staggering losses. Judging by its sales and published criticism, it was a success. By April 1951, it had sold an impressive 4,354 copies,<sup>23</sup> quite a best seller at the time, and it had been widely reviewed, mostly favorably.

Although most critics lauded Yizhar’s literary qualities and poetic gift, they differed over content and interpretation. The tale sparked public debate among the generation of ’48 and that of their fathers, and while distinctive views were espoused by Left and Right the controversy did not develop along either generational or political lines. Most of Yizhar’s readers seem to have come from the ranks of the combatants, his own generation, and most of the written critiques from an older group.

Most praised the author’s candor, courage, and voice of conscience in speaking out against the unacceptable actions of the magnificent young men who had put their lives on the line for the sake of their people. Shalom Kremer wrote in *Moznayim*: “It augurs well for the young generation that in the heat of battle, its humane conscience was not numbed.”<sup>24</sup> Dov Ber Malkhin was stirred by “our very own” literary creation but remarked on “our reflected image . . . twisted and terrifying, and that humane-Israeli conscience . . . that hovers over all and gives no respite.”<sup>25</sup> Shay Pnueli saw the age-old Jewish heritage of compassion for all God’s creatures.<sup>26</sup> HaShomer HaTza’ir’s Moshe Silbertal stressed “the protest of a conscience that cannot accept double standards . . . a faith in humankind that cannot be stilled even on the battlefield.”<sup>27</sup> S. Uriel noted the author’s anguish as a man of truth and conscience and felt that Israelis should be proud “that a literary work of such merit was produced in our midst during the armistice itself, smoke still rising from the ruins of ‘Hirbet Hizah.’”<sup>28</sup> Leah Goldberg admired the story’s honest attempt to understand the enemy and especially its “civil courage.”<sup>29</sup> Ya’akov Fichmann, like others, was troubled by the tale’s image of Jewish society

in Palestine: “When the time came for us to be different, we *weren’t*.”<sup>30</sup> Concern about Israeli society is a common motif: “Isn’t our own human image forfeited when we fail to see it in another?” asked A. Anavi.<sup>31</sup> Another critic thought Yizhar’s stories showed that independence had also produced savagery and trampling of fundamental moral values.<sup>32</sup> Someone else wondered: “Wasn’t victory a human defeat that will destroy us if we fail to overcome it?”<sup>33</sup>

What had caused “our pure youth who defended us so valiantly” or the warriors “who . . . by nature and nurture must be reckoned among the promoters of light”<sup>34</sup> to perpetrate the barbarous acts described in the story? How had they become apathetic toward others’ suffering, killing for the pleasure of the hunt, displaying stupidity and even sadism? The reason, of course, is “the terrible nature of all war,” wrote Fichmann, and Leah Goldberg followed suit. She accepted the expulsion as “dictated by necessity. . . . But the human tragedy . . . casts a recurring light of terror on the bare facts of our existence.”<sup>35</sup> This distinction between the human and political planes enabled critics to deal with the symptom—the soldiers’ conduct—rather than the primary fact of expulsion. Fichmann differentiated between wartime necessities and the mindless arrogance of the expulsion order,<sup>36</sup> that is, the problem was specific and localized. Moshe Silbertal shared this view.<sup>37</sup> The distinction between unavoidable (thus ethical and permissible) necessity and the caprice of a perverse officer allowed Fichmann and his associates to dismiss “Hirbet Hizah” as an isolated case.

Many contemporaries, however, considered it symptomatic. In June 1950, *Ner* (the organ of the “dovish” Ihud Association, headed by Martin Buber) commented:

“Hirbet Hizah” is a parable. There were many stories, even more *brutal*. . . . I still see the . . . *Arabs of Lydda and Ramle* leaving for exile. The . . . human suffering was awful to behold, wretched souls, desperate and disheartened; and even more horrible was the desecration of our human image, turned beast, robbing . . . their *last coins*, coercing them, disdainful of their pain and suffering.<sup>38</sup>

A few critics believed the matter should not have been exposed. Moshe Stavi-Stavsky accused Yizhar of dishonoring the IDF, causing the Israelis grief and the enemy joy.<sup>39</sup> Others complained of imbalance: the Arabs emerge as innocent lambs, the Jews as near fiends. Was the shepherd

in “The Prisoner” really so innocent? Don’t we all know about innocent lambs that alert enemy forces (an allusion to the thirty-five soldiers killed in January 1948 on their way to the Etzion Bloc after jeopardizing their lives by sparing a shepherd)? As for “Hirbet Hizah,” how did Yizhar know that those hapless creatures would not have posed a vital security threat? Yizhar was one-sided; he had not mentioned Arab atrocities.<sup>40</sup> Let’s not forget that had we lost, no law, no protector, would have come to our aid, and the Arabs would have totally destroyed us.<sup>41</sup> What’s more, the war was over, but there was no peace: “From exile, ‘Hirbet Hizah’s’ inhabitants still lie in ambush, exploiting our pity, ready to counterfeit the seal of our compassion.”<sup>42</sup> Occasionally there were references to the Holocaust, such as Pnueli’s: “The hour may not yet be ripe . . . for ‘Hirbet Hizah’s’ mute cry . . . because . . . the spilt blood of our brethren still cries out, drowning [it] out.”<sup>43</sup>

D. B. Malkhin also praised Yizhar’s literary merits while expressing reservations about the theme: “Why, of all the episodes of Israel’s war for liberation . . . did the author choose this one?”<sup>44</sup> The dilemma may have been shared by Noah Tamir, who observed: “It’s appalling that Yizhar’s style inspires credibility, yet the description is untruthful because one-sided.” The intent was moral, the result the reverse.<sup>45</sup>

In the summer of 1949 and the fall of 1950, *Sulam*, the Right’s intellectual periodical, edited by Yisrael Eldad, published a series of essays by Mordechai Shalev “On Israel’s War Literature,” which discusses “Hirbet Hizah.” Shalev accepted the description of Jewish youth in the stories of the generation of ’48 as authentic. This was a generation without vision, for whom the homeland was not an ideal; consequently, its sons suffered from emptiness, from lack of roots, “cut off from a whole world of historical and Land-of-Israel values.”<sup>46</sup> They were cynical and unoriginal. The writers of ’48 depicted sabras as the proverbial cactus, rough on the outside, but soft within; Shalev saw this as a cheap artistic and psychological device intended to conceal the truth: “Among Israeli youth, the biggest best-kept secret is their total confusion.” They are afraid to think but love to search their souls, “they have no goals and are going nowhere” except toward dependence on their elders. “This perplexity also [underlies] the well-known argument of ‘no choice.’ If you believe in nothing—there is nothing to fight for [except survival].” But worse still, their confusion and emptiness led to sadism, a common motif in the war literature, especially in the descriptions of senseless animal slaughter. It is a childish sadism, a substitute for more mature hatred. “The sabra warrior’s lack of hatred for the enemy . . . does not spring from humanism, but primitivism.

The sabra is not above, but beneath, hatred. . . . Israeli youth are still not humane enough to . . . hate their enemies.”<sup>47</sup>

This article led up to Shalev’s piece on “Hirbet Hizah.” He slammed Yizhar’s inability to explain the psychological changes in his heroes: “Pure souls trying to conceal that purity,”<sup>48</sup> who suddenly turned into “sadists worse than the Nazis. Because the Nazis at least had a theory of race, while Yizhar’s characters murder from boredom.”<sup>49</sup> The roots of the sadistic emptiness were to be found in the ethical values of Yizhar’s old heroes. Ethics of “no choice” engender passivity and emptiness. Shalev, ironically suggests that since Israelis went to war because attacked, and not for gain, Yizhar doesn’t understand why they must go on fighting when no longer under attack: “Yizhar’s work is further proof that the lack of positive hatred goes hand in hand with sadism.”<sup>50</sup> Shalev and his right-wing associates attributed this sadism to immaturity: true maturity means that you see the enemy as an enemy and act accordingly, from a commitment to national aims, not hamstrung by aimless soul searching.

A tenuous mutual esteem linked Shalev and Baruch Kurzweil. An observant liberal Jew, Kurzweil lauded Yizhar’s stories for their moral pathos, their rejection of narrow-minded, antihumanistic nationalism,<sup>51</sup> but he, too, explained the tale in sado-masochistic terms. The systematic destruction of the Arab village, he noted, showed “the perversion of meaning, of genuine life into its satanic and insane antipode.”<sup>52</sup> The efficient, exacting execution of the order reminded him of the zeal of Kafka’s bureaucrats. His closing note was reminiscent of Shalev: “Here is the source of desperation and cynicism. After all the lofty ideals, only sadism and masochism remain.”<sup>53</sup> He attributed the emptiness of the “native sons” to their alienation from Jewish tradition and history.

The sadism motif was shared by reviewers on both Left and Right, liberal and nationalist. This made it possible to accept Yizhar’s ethical critique, feel shocked by the psychology and mentality of young Israelis, and point out how war ravages the values of youth. But it also enabled them to sidestep the story’s real issue: the expulsion of Arabs, a subject that was neither taboo nor censored. The archaeologist Shmaryahu Gutman’s eyewitness reportage in “Lydda Departs for Exile” had been published in almost real time,<sup>54</sup> and a number of the writers cited here did comment on expulsions—though briefly. Most dealt solely with the moral mettle of the Israeli soldier.

One passionate exception was Kibbutz ‘Ein Harod’s David Maletz, an author and Mapai member whose son had fallen in the war. Like most, he began with praise, “S. Yizhar is a powerful writer,” and then got

straight to the sore point: “Precisely because the details . . . are so powerful and cruelly truthful . . . [the book] awakens an outcry all the way to heaven; we expelled . . . and took possession. . . . [T]hese are very disturbing thoughts.” But “why single out Hirbet Hizah? . . . We all had a hand in the expulsion, all grabbed what we could.” All the “splendid labor settlements, building a new life, a new society, socialism—we’re all its heirs,” including Yizhar, “not in Hirbet Hizah, but . . . in Rehovot . . . amid empty, abandoned villages.” Ya’akov Fichmann is able to live in Tel Aviv today “only thanks to our [emptying and inheriting] of Jaffa.” What’s the moral difference between Hirbet Hizah and Jaffa, Lydda, Ramle, and hundreds of villages, merely that in this instance there was an “operation order” whereas in others the terrified population fled the cannon’s roar? And even those who fled mistakenly, without cause, from fear—should we now allow them to return? All Israelis, Maletz argued, “share in that great edifice of our independence constructed over the past two years—on the ruins of their empty homes. That’s the reality, and we can’t shut our eyes to it. No nice words can help, no self-righteousness.” “Hirbet Hizah” was not simply a literary work: “Either you accept the brutal, soul-searing conclusion of the tale [namely, accepting the return of the refugees at the expense of jeopardizing the state]—if not, then sometimes there’s more moral courage in keeping a tight lip than in speaking out.” The truth behind Hirbet Hizah and other villages is “the tragic, bitter, cruel fact, that has cost us thousands of victims, of our beloved dead, and has cost them suffering and loss. . . . The fact that at a decisive point here in the land we were faced with the existential choice: us or them.” It was not the Jews who forced that choice, Maletz argued. Even today, anyone who calls for the return of the Arab refugees knows it means “the extinction of Jewish life . . . in this last haven of refuge.” This background, “with all its bitter tragedy for us and for them—is completely missing in Yizhar’s story.”<sup>55</sup>

Maletz’s article in *Davar*, the Histadrut daily, elicited responses from both Right and Left. *Sulam* was delighted with his “moral fortitude.”<sup>56</sup> The religious daily *HaTzofeh* cited him as corroboration that “in life-or-death situations . . . one cannot yield to . . . compassion”—and, just incidentally, used the brutality of “Hirbet Hizah” to chastise secular youths for having turned their backs on the Torah.<sup>57</sup> *HaPo’el HaTza’ir*, Maletz’s own party’s paper, condemned his sweeping accusation, arguing for a distinction between necessity and sadism,<sup>58</sup> while the communist *Kol Ha’Am* coupled his article with *Sulam*’s acclaim to situate Maletz alongside Louis Ferdinand Céline, André Malraux, and Knut Hamsun in the fascist camp.<sup>59</sup>

In the summer of 1950, Mapam's Menahem Dorman, a staunch leftist, took a different tack, starting with the upheaval the war had wrought on Yizhar's childhood landscape. For Yizhar, Hirbet Hizah's "organic" Arab peasants "had been like native sons."<sup>60</sup> The "cruel, radical, transformation of the landscape [of his youth] provides a powerful motive for Yizhar's moral rebellion against the expulsion." The shattering of his "nonexilic" childhood world awakened in him ancient layers of Jewish memory. He experienced exile as though something deep within himself had been exiled. Arabs and Jews had fused as people persecuted and exiled. Examining the story as Yizhar's "bill of indictment," Dorman asserted that the war had been a watershed for both peoples laying claim to the land and had destroyed the Arab community. Indeed, the events in "Hirbet Hizah" had occurred in most Arab locales—and even more violently. The power of Yizhar's tale, he said, was the fact that the narrator sought no personal exoneration, for "the accuser is among the accused." Addressing the crux of the matter, Dorman noted: "That war, forced upon us," ultimately became one stage of the return to Zion, which was a creative, selfless endeavour shared and borne by all of Yizhar's protagonists. "We did not return to this land as colonizers." And, although the realization of Zionism did not cause the war, the historical circumstances that developed were such that victory became "an absolute precondition for its continuing realization." Whereas in peacetime the end does not justify the means, "war overturns this . . . in relations between enemies." In the War of Liberation,<sup>61</sup> the eviction of Arabs was a necessary condition for victory—the alternative being "the danger of total annihilation"—just as was the self-sacrifice of thousands of young men who accepted the rule that in war all means are justified, including their own deaths. Dorman thus drew an analogy between the Arab and Jewish calamities—both were a consequence of war, in which all means justify victory. The destruction of "Hirbet Hizah" may not have been necessary, but that of other villages was: "When one's very existence is at stake the law of war knows no pity." In attempting to explain the paradox of Yizhar, pacifist and anarchist, poet of the Zionist enterprise yet author of its indictment, Dorman revealed his Marxist convictions. Yizhar did not properly appreciate the dialectical process. Sometimes peace can be achieved only through war, and man's rule over his fellow man can be abolished only by assuming state power. In Dorman's view, the problematics of "Hirbet Hizah" were bound up with Yizhar's aversion to war in general and his "special participation in the crisis of transition to statehood and Israeli rule in this land."

Like Maletz, Dorman did not skirt the ethical-moral question. He conceptualized the war, victory, and its aftermath as part of a historical process, almost deterministic, beginning with the advent of Zionism and evolving toward a finale in the 1948 war between two peoples who laid claim to one disputed piece of land.

In 1952, David Kenaani praised “Hirbet Hizah” and “The Prisoner” and stressed their social impact: “Amid a dulling of conscience . . . these stories were a breath of fresh air.”<sup>62</sup> Yizhar was a “pure soul” who did not accept social authority and protested against wrongdoing. But this is also his weakness, since he addresses sporadic brutality but not the larger question: “If the expulsion was absolutely necessary . . . a person must be brutal. . . . But if the War of Liberation could have succeeded without brutality—it is unacceptable.” Kenaani, also a Marxist, contended that certain situations call for “burning, killing, expelling.” Expulsion is justified if it is based on a conviction that it will ultimately lead to a better social order. Toward that end, we must strive to mend and reform human society, not merely lament its shortcomings. Yizhar’s protagonists are socially wanting; they do not aspire to a better world, living solely in the present imperfect, without past or future: “And by exempting themselves of real social responsibility, they end up irresponsible.” Yizhar and his heroes are noble-minded souls with a dead-end melancholy: “They engage, not in self-criticism, which leads to decisive action, but in self-analysis, stewing in their own juice.” They shun intellectual pursuits, shy away from ideology, and want no part of Zionism or any other “causes.” Any decent person can instinctively distinguish between good and bad. But in the chaos and contradictions of war, one needs a compass, an ideology, a clear orientation. Like Dorman, Kenaani linked Yizhar’s crisis and that of other war veterans to the state’s creation, the transition from the Yishuv’s sense of moral integrity to the built-in contradictions of sovereignty. And he called for ideological commitment, not Yizhar’s vague humanistic anarchism.

In the early 1950s, intellectuals and critics addressed the expulsion issue openly, apparently with few misgivings about giving the enemy cause to rejoice. Yizhar may have felt that he was seen as the “class tattletale,” but the story itself enjoyed great success, sparked lively debate, and was used by youth movements and kibbutzim to stage mock “literary trials.”<sup>63</sup> The book’s impact was endorsed also by the Ihud’s Gavriel Stern, who reported on its reception by “progressive Arab elements.”<sup>64</sup> An unsigned article, “What Is the Solution?” in a Nablus Arabic weekly (December 31, 1949) raised the possibility of a genuine peace with Israel, causing a minor sen-

sation among readers. The author noted the strong love of peace in the heart of the Jewish people, as manifested by the popularity of “Hirbet Hizah,” and appealed for Jewish understanding of Arab motives, especially the refugee problem. “We must acknowledge this as a serious attempt to . . . find common ground,” Stern concluded, “and we owe this to Yizhar’s bold self-criticism. One daring deed leads to another.”

Despite the enormous interest “Hirbet Hizah” generated among Yizhar’s contemporaries, no one of that sabra generation wrote any real critique of it apart from Mordechai Shalev. How must one interpret this silence? Sabras were writing books and stories about the war, POWs, acts of brutality, and so on, but Yizhar’s was the only published story to describe an expulsion. The soldiers were well aware of the facts Yizhar described, but these were not memories that instilled pride, scenes they enjoyed discussing. They read the tale, and perhaps many, as Stern suggested, identified with its content. But rather than explore the wounds they preferred to store away the memory, veil it in forgetfulness. They did not wish to thrash out moral conundrums. They were weary, eager to put the war with all its blood, sweat, and filth behind them as quickly as possible—especially its most inglorious, oppressive chapter: the expulsion. When friends met, the subject did not come up. By contrast, their fathers, who had played no direct role in the expulsion and had no painful memories or agonizing images, were able to speak more freely.

For these young Israelis, the War of Independence was their formative experience. Having gone through its desperate battles, they had no doubt that it had been a just defensive war of *eyn breerah* (no choice) and did not need to be told so. They shrank from the rhetoric to the point of being branded cynics.

The transformation of Jewish youth from Zionist to cynical is reflected in the astounding metamorphosis of the word *Zionist*<sup>65</sup> from the name of a movement of regeneration and rebirth to a derisive term for bombastic rhetoric about any values. When the age-old vision had to descend to the plane of mundane reality and spill the blood of both its champions and enemies, its radiance faded. And when the dream became profane substance, the very possibility of dreaming was suddenly abrogated, the option to embrace any theory or teaching.<sup>66</sup>

They spurned revealing conversation, did not bare their emotions, and formed a cynical shell to help them come to grips with the loss of comrades, with bereavement. They were caught up in a process of reorientation in the fledgling state, and many found adjustment difficult. The



suppression of painful memories of the expulsion was a component of the process, psychologically similar to the suppression of memory by Holocaust survivors—a mechanism of rehabilitation and adaptation.

When “Hirbet Hizah” first appeared, the expulsion was seen primarily as an internal Israeli moral problem. But as the political significance of the refugee problem became ever clearer, and peace, seemingly so near in 1949, grew ever more distant, Israelis were more and more inclined to emphasize Arab responsibility for the problem. It gravitated from the sparring ring of internal debate to the arena of international politics, where the expulsion, an acknowledged fact of war in the early 1950s, became almost a state secret—albeit, shared by many. The government’s interest in blurring the question, and the desire of many 1948 war veterans to suppress what Ephraim Kleiman would one day call “unpleasant memories,” coalesced.

The debate on “Hirbet Hizah” was limited to Hebrew readers who could contend with Yizhar’s demanding style: veteran Israelis, educated intellectuals, and some of the native sons,<sup>67</sup> all of whom had lived through the expulsion. The daily influx of immigrants, however, radically changed Israel’s population (from some 650,000 on the eve of the 1948 war to 1.4 million in 1951). For them, the War of Independence was a grand epic of national valor, a saga they wished to absorb into their own heritage and new identity. They were unfamiliar with prestate realities and regarded Arabs as an evil presence lurking beyond the armistice lines, eager to undermine the new life they had laboriously begun to build. They did not see a struggle between two peoples, Jews and Palestinians, for the same turf; they saw an Arab-Israeli conflict, a clash between Israel and the Arab states. For the great majority of the Israeli public, then, Yizhar’s intimate, neighborly, Jewish-Arab bond was irrelevant. The immigrants found abandoned towns, moved in, and settled in them. Their main concerns were to put a roof over their heads, find some means of livelihood, and start a family, all the workaday worries of an immigrant society. The dislocation of immigration was daunting enough, both for Holocaust refugees and for those from Arab countries. They were unfamiliar with the story of Hirbet Hizah—and likely did not ask questions about the empty towns and villages in which they embarked on new lives. Refugees from Eastern Europe had accepted the so-called *Heimatvertriebene*, the expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia and Poland in the wake of World War II, as a fait accompli: the aggressor had lost and paid the price, while those from the Middle East had also left behind homes and vacated neighborhoods where others

had moved in. In any event, they were not a part of the founding narrative: they arrived after the state's establishment. Years would pass before they, too, would be able to relate to the republic of Hebrew letters and its heated disputes.

By 1949, S. Yizhar was clearly the most important writer of the Palmah generation, a reputation enhanced by his 1958 antiwar epic, *Yemei Ziklag* (The Days of Ziklag), which again infuriated some critics and provoked vehement reactions from the Right and Left.<sup>68</sup> Most people could not cope with the novel's 1,134 pages; David Ben-Gurion told Yizhar that he'd read about 130 pages and felt that Israeli youth "were better than that."<sup>69</sup> Unexpectedly, it did not win the Bialik Prize. Two judges noted: "The freedom fighters are stripped of all positive attachment to our people or homeland" and "Yizhar presents Israeli youth as having no ethical or human values."<sup>70</sup>

Yizhar nonetheless was awarded the prestigious Israel Prize for 1959. At the ceremony, he said he had just tried to tell a story—not *the* narrative of the War of Independence. He had not intended to offer solutions to the generation's problems or to write a panegyric to Israeli youth.<sup>71</sup> But he was read otherwise. Yizhar had focused on the critical divide between individual and community, personal morality and the demands of society. In a fledgling state that felt besieged, as was Israel at the end of its first decade, readers found it difficult to accept his opus as mere fiction with little bearing on the present. A book so harsh in its attitude toward battle and the cost of human life, a book that invoked the *'akeda*—Abraham's readiness to sacrifice Isaac—could not be received as if it dealt with a random incident. Like "Hirbet Hizah," it was read as fact, not fiction, and imbued with a significance beyond its specifics.

Two years later, the critic Dan Miron shifted the focus from the historical to the purely literary. In "Hirbet Hizah" and "The Prisoner," he identified a shift from the impact of war on the conscious self to a rude encounter with human fate, "which is why the author has only a minimal interest in the inner self."<sup>72</sup> Concentrating on technique and the narrator's psyche, Miron hardly mentioned the fabula—the events at "Hirbet Hizah." This analysis, in 1961, may have already reflected the growing marginality of the problem of Palestinian Arabs for most Israelis. It was a relatively calm interlude, with Jordan controlling the West Bank. "Hirbet Hizah" had apparently lost its earlier relevance as the reflection of a pressing moral problem. The tale could be dealt with as any literary work.

This may help explain why the education ministry's decision in 1964 to incorporate it and "The Prisoner" into the high school syllabus and Bagrut matriculation raised no public objection. Although it is difficult to unearth teacher or pupil reaction, Menashe Duvshani's digest of the story sheds light on its presentation. Starting with its novelty—Jewish expulsion of others rather than Jewish suffering—he notes that the sense of power and desperate atmosphere of war sometimes drove our young men to unacceptable, unnecessary conduct, denounced by Yizhar as the moral voice of the noble Israeli soldier. Duvshani outlined the plot, gave details of the expulsion, noted that "we should feel [and admit] that we have committed an injustice we could not prevent," and set down the story's five basic elements as actions, psychological experience, natural landscape, style, and conscience.<sup>73</sup> If classroom lessons actually followed these outlines, pupils had to come face-to-face with the question of the expulsion even if Duvshani presented what was described in the story as a departure from the norm. Still, teachers could choose between "Hirbet Hizah" and "The Prisoner," which was better suited for the classroom. It was shorter, tighter, and posed no problem of official policy or expulsion, merely the inhumane behavior of soldiers toward a captive and the dilemma of whether or not to free him.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, high school literature helped instill a national consciousness, dealing with the Jewish shtetl and late-nineteenth-century European Jewry and guiding pupils toward Zionism. The new literature syllabus, however, including Yizhar's stories, emphasized aesthetics and psychology, relegating historical content to the educational dustbin. Hence, even if "Hirbet Hizah" were taught, teachers could be expected to dwell on descriptions of nature, colloquial speech, and narrator difficulties and to gloss over thematic elements.

Questions in the matriculation examinations probed such aspects as "the human struggle for truth" (summer 1979); "the mental and psychological anguish . . . of the characters"; and "the manifestation and shaping of human grief, suffering, and affliction." But Yizhar was grouped together with other writers, and pupils could elect which opus to discuss (summer 1980). In one case (summer 1980), the question was more historical: "The background of place and time for the events in the stories . . . and their significance." Yizhar again shared the list with others, as was true also the following year, and again there was a choice.<sup>74</sup> The inclusion of his story in the syllabus may thus have been more theoretical than real.

## The Second Controversy, 1978

The Six Day War ushered in a new chapter in Israeli-Palestinian relations. The problem that had lurked beyond the borders since 1949 now became Israel's major challenge. Yizhar entered the political fray, speaking out against the occupation and the nationalist movement for a "Greater Israel." His essay on "the poets of annexation" distinguished between Israelis who see people in the West Bank and those who see only territory. Echoing the machine gun that bestowed no right, Yizhar protested: "You don't gain a country by means of weapons. Any such acquisition is unjust." Jewish sensitivity to refugees resurfaced, as in 1949: "The refugee question, or dispossession, touches and is binding on all Jews. . . . [I]f there is a 'Jewish sensibility,' this is where it surfaces to stare us in the face." As if in delayed response to Maletz, Yizhar now argued that it made no difference that the Arabs had started the war, that we held out the olive branch, that our sacrifices had been huge, or that in the international arena might makes right, nor that we were expelled, banned, ousted, and dispossessed again and again through the ages. Ultimately, what remains is the question of occupation and the people there—a question of our own sense of justice.<sup>75</sup>

The public's identification of the author of "Hirbet Hizah" with the political thinker who wrote on the poets of annexation cropped up after the Yom Kippur War at a gathering of kibbutz twelfth graders. Yizhar was dumbfounded by the youngsters' antagonism toward the basic Zionist ethos, their questioning of the duty to defend the homeland, and their doubts about Jewish identity and Jewish historical rights to the Land of Israel. Troubled by the nihilistic currents, Yizhar published a summary of the questions and the complaints voiced, accusing the school system of failing to provide youngsters with the mettle and spiritual fortitude to persevere. The pupils, teachers, and educators rushed to the defense. They claimed that *he* had steered the discussion toward loaded questions and paid attention only to *negative* opinions. Kibbutz Kabri's twelfth graders published an open letter, summing up the charges against him with a pointed question: "And whom do you blame for these questions, for the young's lack of self-confidence? Only our teachers, educators, and the people around us? Why not ask yourself about the influence of the author of 'The Prisoner,' 'Hirbet Hizah,' and the piece on 'the poets of annexation' on this state of mind?"<sup>76</sup>

This is one of the few bits of evidence of the impact of "Hirbet

Hizah” on the beliefs and opinions of the younger generation that grew up along with the state and its interpretation of the story. Another comes from Yizhar’s appearance before troops during the Lebanon War (1982). After the commanding officer introduced him, a single voice pierced the darkness: “How I hate him, right from the time we studied ‘Hirbet Hizah’ at school!”<sup>77</sup>

Paradoxically, as long as he was associated with Mapai, the identification of Yizhar the writer with Yizhar the politician remained limited. In those years, until he left Parliament in 1965, he seldom took a public stand on political or controversial affairs. The great change came after the Six Day War with Yizhar’s fervent attack on the advocates of Greater Israel. At the time, he was involved in academic research on inculcating values and advocated independent thinking rather than indoctrination. The debate he sparked owed more to a misunderstanding of his views than to design. But all this was still quite tame. The real furor was to erupt in 1978 around the airing of the TV version of “The Story of Hirbet Hizah.”

The film idea originated with director Ram Levi in 1972, when it was rejected on the grounds of a weak teleplay. He broached it again in 1977, as part of an Israeli drama series for the state’s thirtieth anniversary, and was given the go-ahead.<sup>78</sup> That August the daily newspaper *Ma’ariv* reported that the shooting had been completed. In July, the Executive Committee of the Israel Broadcasting Authority (IBA) had raised objections to its screening, but the film was referred to and approved by the IBA’s plenum.<sup>79</sup>

Between that decision and the broadcast, however, Israeli politics underwent a revolution: for the first time, a right-wing government came to power, headed by Menachem Begin (in 1977). Officials at the IBA firmly denied that they were under political pressure to shelve the film and pointed out that misgivings about the prospective broadcast were not restricted to the Right.<sup>80</sup> Yet there is no doubt that the tension surrounding it stemmed from the network’s confusion and insecurity over the historic change of government.

For several months, there was a hush. Meanwhile, Anwar Sadat had come to Jerusalem and the peace process with Egypt had begun. The screening had been set for January 16, 1978, but the Israel-Egypt Political Committee was to meet in Jerusalem that day and the IBA Executive Committee deemed the moment inopportune for so sensitive a subject.<sup>81</sup> Its postponement aroused no response. The controversy over showing the film erupted in earnest in February, as a new crisis in the

talks with Egypt impacted on domestic Israeli politics and bolstered the Right. Meanwhile, in a bid to soften the anticipated public criticism, the board slotted the film on a prestigious talk show. This would allow for broad discussion of the issues, provide a platform for all shades of political opinion, and place the story in its historical context. News of the scheduling caused an enormous uproar. Two MKs (from the Labor Alignment and Agudat Yisrael) tabled an urgent motion for discussion. The head of the Knesset Education Committee (Labor) invited Yizhar to a forum on the film and broadcast, even though he was not directly involved in the production. Two members of the IBA Executive Committee (from Likud and the National Religious Party [NRP]) formally appealed the decision to broadcast, which entailed reconvening the plenum to review the issue.<sup>82</sup>

While everyone was embroiled in argument, the new NRP education minister, Zevulun Hammer, decided at the last minute to scrap the broadcast, which united the entire Left behind the demand to show it. The dispute shifted from content to a discussion of IBA autonomy, the principle of government noninterference in cultural affairs, and freedom of expression. Meretz MK Yossi Sarid declared that “Israel’s free-speech flag has been lowered to half-mast”;<sup>83</sup> *HaAretz* reported that Prime Minister Begin was perplexed by the education minister’s decision, though this was not corroborated by other sources;<sup>84</sup> artists, politicians, and the Writers Association mobilized, including Yizhar;<sup>85</sup> television employees staged a forty-minute solidarity strike; and Amnon Zikhroni, a lawyer, petitioned the High Court of Justice against the minister (the hearing having been deferred until after the convening of the plenum). At the same time, thirteen members and deputies of the Histadrut Executive (all Labor) openly backed the minister, saying that they did not consider his action antidemocratic, and Israel TV broadcast an emotional demonstration against the film by the nationalist-religious Bnei Akiva Youth, with one youngster complaining that it showed IDF soldiers beating Arabs.<sup>86</sup> While these players squared off, American TV crews took to the countryside to find the real Hirbet Hizah.<sup>87</sup> Yizhar’s old story was suddenly the talk of the day again. Two dailies vied for the right to publish it in installments, and *Ma’ariv*, the paper most opposed to the broadcast, won out. There was a report that the Arabs in the territories (the historically loaded designations of Judea and Samaria were not yet in common currency) were much puzzled by the entire business. Arabs did not see the story as any great revelation—after all, they knew of hundreds of such incidents, they said. But the furor over freedom of expression gave

them an opportunity to point out that there could be no real democracy on one side of the Green Line while it was being systematically trampled on, on the other.<sup>88</sup>

At this stage, discussion centered on the legality of the minister's postponement of the broadcast. The substance of the film receded into the background; front and center were occupied by the fate of Israeli democracy. Formally, legally, the minister had apparently not overstepped his brief.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, there was some logic to the argument of the advocates of postponement, that the principle of freedom of expression and artistic creativity did not apply to national public television; the medium was, from the start, not open to the entire public but based on selectivity according to criteria of professionalism and guidelines of content.<sup>90</sup> The demand to uphold a majority decision made by the IBA Executive Committee was formally justified, but the decision to screen the film reflected the majority opinion of a board appointed by a government defeated in the elections of 1977.<sup>91</sup> One right-wing periodical termed the intended screening a "scorched-earth tactic" of the preelection Executive Committee.<sup>92</sup> Basically, however, in the climate of 1978 it was hard to imagine that a film would be censored for political reasons. Even the writer-journalist Benjamin Galai, who was identified with the Right, commented that "there was only one thing worse than the decision to air the film *Hirbet Hizah*—not to air it."<sup>93</sup> So it was no accident that about a week after the minister decided to block the film, the IBA plenum voted to broadcast it. On 13 February 1978, the film was shown, as planned, on *The Third Hour*, hosted by philosophy lecturer Yermiyahu Yovel.

The screening sharpened the controversy but refocused discussion on the actual content: did the story represent a general phenomenon or an "aberration" (*harig*)—a new term. Did it reflect historical truth, stretch the truth, or present a one-sided picture? Why did Israel State Television not show Arab atrocities as well? Why pick at old wounds? Was it right to again expose past traumas or was it better to leave them until the reign of peace? What should we say to the Arabs, to our children, to our grandchildren? Opponents also included prominent Laborites, who said the film distorted the image of the War of Independence. Still, there was artistic criticism as well: most of the detractors thought the film poorly done; most of the champions lauded its cinematic virtues.

*Ma'ariv* devoted the most space to the issue. Basically, the newspaper condemned the story and the broadcast while ostensibly seeking a "bal-

anced” approach. In a telephone survey it conducted after the screening, most viewers expressed misgivings about the broadcast. Not so Ya‘akov Shimshon Shapira, a former (Labor) justice minister: it was wrong to block the film, he said, “since everything it contained was well-known material readily available in print.” The film “portrayed the war’s tragedy, a side that must be squarely faced. It is wrong . . . to avoid that confrontation.”<sup>94</sup> *Davar* journalist Teddy Preuss argued similarly: refugees were a universal phenomenon in the wake of war; it happened everywhere. Fourteen million Germans had been expelled from the eastern territories annexed by Poland, tens of millions of Moslems and Hindus had been displaced with the creation of India and Pakistan, half a million Finns had been expelled from Karelia when it was annexed by the Soviet Union, Greeks had been ousted from Cyprus—and then there were the millions of Jews. The approximately seven hundred thousand Palestinian refugees were not unique. The film highlighted the inherent tragedy of war, and “it would be hypocrisy on our part to claim that the 1948 war was any different.” The conflict had already been immortalized in thousands of works that dealt with “the clash between humane individual sentiments and the interests of national survival.”<sup>95</sup> Preuss considered the expulsion an unavoidable by-product of the war, not praiseworthy but certainly not something to be hidden, avoided, or justified by blaming the Arabs: “What can be done if two peoples are fighting, not about how to slice an egg, but . . . for life and death?”

The right-wing theorist Yisrael Eldad made a similar point: “There is a Jewish people, [and] it longs for and must return to its ancient homeland. The Arabs, rightfully or not, are opposed to this. That’s the underlying reason for these wars.” Not content with this, he intimated that Yizhar and his followers had in effect decided against the establishment of a Jewish state if it entailed injustice toward Arabs.<sup>96</sup> Returning to his essays of the 1950s, he reiterated the whole panoply of iniquities perpetrated against Jews: the Holocaust, Arab wrongdoing, and British misdeeds during the Mandate. He also elaborated the offenses of the Allies against innocent German civilians, all this in order to argue that such “sensitivity to the injustices done an enemy people that seeks our blood . . . as the resonance of an absolute sense of justice—such selectivity is rather sick.” After rehashing all the old arguments, Eldad raised the topical sore point: Israel was engaged in a struggle to win over world opinion. International public opinion had been looking for moral justification for its support of the Arabs, in any case fueled by the clout of Arab oil, in the global propaganda struggle. That had now been conveniently supplied by the story



and film: “The State of Israel arose on [the ruins of] ‘Hirbet Hizah’—that’s how the story and film will be received abroad . . . Jewish and Israeli evidence . . . straight from Israeli public TV.” In the same vein, but more moderately, Ya‘akov Karoz predicted that the film would likely bolster the U.S. State Department’s charges of Israeli human rights offenses in the occupied territories.<sup>97</sup> The journalist Yosef Lapid remarked that “even if the Fatah Information Bureau were run by a genius, he couldn’t have come up with anything better.”<sup>98</sup> These comments reflected the relevance of the story and plot: the controversy was not about what happened in 1948 but about what was happening “here and now.” Advocates of Jewish settlement in Judea and Samaria feared that the story from the past could be used to denounce this policy in the present; opponents of the policy could use the story to oppose settling the territories.

This was a new line of reasoning against *Hirbet Hizah*: damage to Israeli propaganda and the image of Israel it sought to project. Ya’ir Burla’s article in *Ma’ariv* was typical.

For years, our information services have been seeking to disseminate . . . our argument abroad: that we didn’t come here to dispossess anyone, that we weren’t to blame for the wars but were forced to act in self-defense. That we didn’t expel the Arabs: most of those hundreds of thousands who left their homes in the War of Independence did so responding to the “advice” of the Arab leadership, promising them a return on the heels of the victorious Arab armies. This is how we have argued again and again because it’s the truth.<sup>99</sup>

Burla said that the world would see the film “as a confession of guilt straight from the mouth of the accused, in . . . a film that looked like a documentary, a confession that all our actions since the start of the return to Zion were based on dispossession, murder of the innocent, and expulsion of old men, women, and children.” Benjamin Galai was more literary: “Any Frenchman, Englishman, Russian or American seeing the film must agree that there’s something rotten in the State of Israel.”<sup>100</sup> The idea of collateral damage to Israel’s information and propaganda efforts pointed to a changing self-awareness since the War of Independence; the expulsion, once a proper subject for discussion, was now beyond the pale, internally taboo as well. Moreover, it was argued, discussion of that past expulsion undermined Israel’s right to exist. This reasoning blurred the crucial distinction between a just Zionism and a

Zionism based on force. An all-or-nothing approach emerged: if we acknowledge the expulsion of the Arabs, Zionism as a whole, from its very inception, is illegitimate. Thus, the image created for propaganda purposes abroad percolated into local self-awareness, acting as a kind of anaesthetic to block out the unpleasant bits of national memory. A new version of memory was created based on a favorable reprocessing of the past. It was not false, but it ignored the episodes that clashed with the self-image fostered by official state propaganda, doing its utmost to dim and block them out.

Eldad, who witnessed the events of 1948, swung between propaganda considerations and his natural instinct for truth, justifying his position by the necessity of survival. Burla, by contrast, presented an “improved, reconditioned version,” simpler, one dimensional, in tune with changing norms, and necessary because what had been acceptable in the stormy world of 1948 was less so in the calmer world of the late 1970s. The widespread norm of expelling civilian populations from territory that changed hands as a result of war may be convincing to those who were alive then but not to the generation raised in the latter half of the twentieth century, when norms that favored greater understanding for the “loser,” regardless of fault, prevailed.

The same issue of *Ma'ariv* featured a piece by Ofra Yeshe'a, claiming that the film revealed nothing new and “the practical considerations behind the expulsion of a hostile Arab population are . . . still relevant to events taking place right now.” Commenting on the clash between *Hirbet Hizah's shmulik*s (tough guys) and *mikhas* (good guys), she says: “Not to worry, Shmulik will always be victorious, and Mikha will even help him win. It's better not to seal Mikha's mouth.” Every war has innocent victims, including 1948. On the question of propaganda, she underscored the paradox of the Right: on the one hand, proud and indifferent to what the gentiles have to say since, in any case, “the whole world is against us”; and, on the other hand, overly sensitive on the subject of “self-incrimination.” Yeshe'a brought the debate back to the present, saying it was not *Hirbet Hizah* that was damaging Israel's good name: “If it is shameful to dispossess someone of land, we can also be ashamed of [settling] Shiloh and Rafah Approaches.”<sup>101</sup> Amos Oz wrote in a similar vein. He said the Right was inclined to act harshly in relation to Arabs but to denounce talking about it: “Those wolfish creatures treat the war's horrors like the pious bourgeoisie treats sexual exploits: act whenever opportunity knocks, but talk about it only in the male wolf pack. Not, God forbid, in front of children or neighbors. What would become of our good name?!”<sup>102</sup>

In Oz's view, the basic point of Yizhar's story was not the fate of the Arabs but the narrator's unease over the rupture between his two value systems, humanity and patriotism. The lesson, according to Oz, was not to abandon either system but to wage war on war itself. The analysis is reminiscent of Fichmann's and Goldberg's, focusing on humanistic sensibilities and sidestepping the problem of expulsion. But Oz took it a step farther. He saw a real danger in the fact that "we behave as though we were hiding a dead body in the basement . . . burying a sore that will only fester." Zionism is a just movement whose practical realization entailed certain acts of injustice—a necessary prerequisite for state building. This does not vitiate Zionism's basic justice, but only on condition that "convenience or plain callousness do not tempt us to derive from unavoidable past evils a license to commit further injustices." Mapam's Gadi Yatziv also mobilized the past for present battles. In 1949, it was important for "Hirbet Hizah" to shed light on the tragedy in which we were caught up against our will. Survival meant setting aside moral considerations. But the state's establishment created a new situation. It freed us of the compulsion of "no choice." "Today things can be different. We can live in security and peace—without ruling over others, without administering their lands or consigning them to exile."<sup>103</sup>

Characteristic of the Left's position on *Hirbet Hizah* (occasionally articulated by Yizhar as well) was that it was, purportedly, an "aberration" in the heat of battle.<sup>104</sup> Yermiyahu Yovel had made a similar point on *The Third Hour*, and Oz, too, had started his article this way. The aberration argument featured also on the other side of the political divide: numerous critiques of the film had charged that the TV version had not presented Hirbet Hizah as an exception. In response, writer Amos Keinan decried the hypocrisy of "the children of a 'bananas-and-cream Zionism,'" who contend that Zionism had never sinned. "I saw the columns of refugees we ordered to leave, as did everyone who fought in this land. . . . There are still people around who were soldiers back then, and it's both ridiculous and shocking to think that we can tell stories and sweep ourselves and our War of Liberation right under the carpet."<sup>105</sup> Keinan evinced no guilt feelings: it was a life and death struggle over this land, and it resulted in the State of Israel. But the time had come to decide to end the war and fix a border at the Green (armistice) Line. This was the path to peace and justice. In an interview to *'Al HaMishmar* at the same time, Yizhar also disassociated himself from any sense of guilt, suggesting that it was a poor counselor in peace negotiations with the Arabs.<sup>106</sup>

As the shadows of the past mingled with the present, memory and

politics began to fuse. Neither the story's literary merit nor the film's artistic quality was at the heart of the debate. The main issue was "we and our neighbours." The changes in Israeli society and the political realities after the Six Day and Yom Kippur wars retrieved the topic from history's archives with renewed vigor. Political and religious radicalization and polarization between Left and Right, between advocates of a Greater Israel and would-be negotiators with the Palestinians—everyone was drawn into the vortex of the dispute over *Hirbet Hizah*. Predictably, the "Young Guard" of Mapam came up with the slogan, "Dig in Shiloh and you'll find Hirbet Hizah." An activist of the religious Right countered: "Sink a spade in Shiloh and you'll find proof of Jewish life there long before the Arabs." And, for good measure, he added: "Many of HaShomer HaTza'ir's settlements are built right over a 'Hirbet Hizah.'" <sup>107</sup>

The polarization of Israeli society led to a "meeting of the extremes." Yitzhak Shalev of the far Right and members of Matzpen, the far Left, did not stop at the 1948 expulsion but presented Zionism as a movement founded on dispossession and injustice from its very inception, intrinsically oblivious to morality and ethics.<sup>108</sup> In response, several 1948 war veterans came forward to explain the expulsion in the war's broader context. Writer Hanoah Bartov commented on the differences in historical memory between the generation of '48 and the generation that grew up afterward in the new state. When Yizhar's story was first published, contemporaries were quite familiar with the military background, the need to fight time and again for control of the roads and passes commanded by Arab villages. That backdrop, still vivid and vital to readers in 1949, was absent from the film. "The film was taken out of its historical context,"<sup>109</sup> causing distortion or what the philosopher Nathan Rotenstreich termed "overemphasis on a single aspect" of reality.<sup>110</sup> Moshe Carmel, commanding officer of Northern Front in the War of Independence, mused about "how present-day concerns and pressing needs becloud the view of past events as they really were."<sup>111</sup> Carmel did not idealize. He acknowledged the outrages committed in the fury of war but attributed them to the nature of war itself, and no war is immune. In contrast to the expulsions, Carmel cited the example of Haifa, where Jewish leaders had asked Arabs to stay and go on living there; the Arabs had chosen to follow the ill-conceived advice of their leadership and go into exile.<sup>112</sup> Carmel and Bartov attempted to sketch a balanced picture shaped by the memories of people who had lived through the events. But the memories of war are not uniform. It is no mere coincidence that it was Carmel who spoke out; in his Northern Front there

was no policy of expulsion (by war's end, his area of jurisdiction had the largest Arab population in Israel). By the same token, it is no accident that other key commanders in the 1948 war did not go public with recollections of 1948 tainted by Hirbet Hizahs.

Yizhar's aura as the most important writer of the "native sons" seems to have shielded him from frontal attack. It was easier to fault the film as slanted,<sup>113</sup> especially as its quasi-documentary cinematography lent it a credibility that blurred its fictitiousness. Similar criticism had been leveled at the story thirty years earlier. The interplay of truth and fiction, history and literature, returned to center stage. Someone stepped forth, claiming to be the officer who had given the expulsion order in Yizhar's story (though he knew only the film version).<sup>114</sup> As for the filming location (chosen for its antenna-free, authentic look), the village of Midiya was later identified as the home of villagers who had killed IDF soldiers (and mutilated their bodies) during the Second Truce in September 1948.<sup>115</sup> By a curious equivalence, the expulsion from Hirbet Hizah seemed to be offset by the outrages of Midiya's fellahin.

Yizhar's own statements, as mentioned earlier, nourished the post-modern amalgam of truth and fiction, past and present. This intrusion of literature into real life did not particularly please the poet Haim Guri. Yizhar had erred, he said, in claiming that the plot depicted concrete reality. Guri did not seek to sweeten the pill: "I still think that the events the story deals with are well known to the generation of '48," but the story "was both distant and very near, a fusion of various incidents, its theme bound up with the irreconcilable clash between the absolute and the historical." He would have preferred to confine it to the literature of 1948 rather than imbuing it with current significance: "Long live literature if it has the power to unleash such a controversial storm, especially on TV." But "woe to literature if it is thus invoked as a political-historical component of such a controversy." Ultimately: "Let the story be. Life is not a bed of roses! Hebrew literature of that period would be poorer without it!" Literary merit seems to have compensated for the "irreconcilable clash." Yizhar inclined toward the absolute, Guri, toward the historical.<sup>116</sup> But this attempt to distinguish between the story's artistic dimension and its political implications stood in complete contrast to the reception of "Hirbet Hizah" since 1949.

The dispute galvanized the broader public as well, as indicated by letters to the editor in four dailies (albeit a limited empirical measure of public opinion). While all the papers professed objectivity and openness to opposing opinions, their predominant editorial views were hardly a

secret. *Ma'ariv* was the most steadfast against the film's broadcast; *Yediot* expressed a similar, though more balanced, position; and *Davar* and *HaAretz* supported the screening. In all the papers, most of the letters were negative about the film, its airing, the IBA, and the "left-wing mafia" that allegedly controlled it; many praised the minister's (abortive) decision to scrap it. Even in the left-wing press, most writers expressed serious reservations about the film, regarding it as an expression of self-hatred and sick self-criticism that reflected unfavorably on the state and its armed forces for all the world to see. Majority opinion was summed up in *Davar*: "The airing . . . offends the sensibilities of thousands of people opposed to the unruliness of a handful of leftists who use the medium as they . . . see fit, to the detriment of the State of Israel."<sup>117</sup> Many also pointed to the inappropriate timing—while delicate negotiations with Egypt were under way. Others protested (whether in earnest or ironically) that films would now be made on Deir Yassin, Qibya, or Kafr Qassim, the sites of the most notorious Israeli atrocities. Still others demanded that it be balanced by broadcasts about Arab atrocities against Israelis.

One letter writer, Lena Kichler-Silberman, the author of *My Hundred Children* (which describes her rescue of Jewish children during the Holocaust), had neither read the story nor seen the film but reacted to Yizhar's TV statements. She objected to the analogy between trucking Arabs off to exile and transporting Jews in boxcars to death. She called on him to destroy the film, arguing that it could play into the hands of Israel's enemies.<sup>118</sup> Immigrants from Soviet Russia complained that the film was a boon to Soviet anti-Israel propaganda.

Readers did not merely criticize the film but attacked what they saw as its portrayal of the War of Independence. The question of Hirbet Hizah being an aberration came up again; the IDF was commended for its humane comportment and relative restraint, as opposed to soldiers' conduct the world over, and some lauded the image of Israelis struggling with their consciences. Only sporadically was there an echo of the suppressed story: Yosef Liyubin, the grandchild of Hadera pioneers and a 1948 war veteran, wrote that the film had left a bad taste in his mouth because of its untruths. Hirbet Hizah was not an aberration, he said. The soldiers had to do what they did in keeping with the general rule of striking first against those who come to kill you. They still have nightmares, but, if need be, they would do the same again because the expulsion was a necessary military measure. Liyubin protested that the war discourse had been expropriated from the combatants, who were well

aware of the necessities, by politicians, professors, and the like who were “chasing wondrous butterflies in green meadows.”<sup>119</sup>

Zehava Neumann, a philosophy student born eight years after the War of Independence, wrote: “At school we were taught that we had bought land from the Arabs, turned swamps into orchards and, in 1948, had tried to dissuade the Arabs from leaving.” Teachers interpreted “The Prisoner” and “Hirbet Hizah” as a welcome display of sensitivity to injustices and proof that Israelis are not saints, but that we learn from our mistakes: “What will I say now to people who claim that we founded a state on the bodies of the Arabs we evicted? Is what we were always taught a lie?”<sup>120</sup>

The letters by Liyubin and Neumann reflect a generational difference. For the generation of '48, the memories, however painful, were part of their own lives and did not dent or diminish the justice of that difficult war. But Israel's school pupils had been taught a benign historical narrative that sidestepped the tragic complexities of the war. So that when they came up against reality—accidentally, almost, due to the furor raised—they found it difficult to deal with. In the foreground were Jewish offenses against Arabs, while the force of circumstances faded in a haze. The Israeli worldview in 1978 was markedly different from that of 1948. Born and raised in a strong Israel, now an occupying power, sensitive young people newly exposed to “Hirbet Hizah” began to question the justice and humanity of Zionism, the justification for the state's existence. It was a relatively small minority, though culturally not insignificant. By contrast, the majority of the public was unprepared to acknowledge that the Arabs had suffered a catastrophe, preferring a one-sided version of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

One of the features of the discourse on “Hirbet Hizah” was the active participation of writers and the virtual silence of historians. “The Story of Hirbet Hizah” had a considerable impact on post-1948 Hebrew literature. The surfacing of a suppressed past is treated, for example, in works by A. B. Yehoshua (“Opposite the Forests,” *The Lover*) and Amos Oz (*My Michael*). But in historical inquiry the War of Independence languished on the margins. Archives were still sealed, and, aside from general eyewitness accounts, it is doubtful that historians could have contributed anything substantial. In this sense, fiction had the advantage; it could deal with the ethical issues unfettered by historical fact.

The issue of remembrance, of coming to terms with and recognizing the suffering inflicted on the Arabs by the state's establishment—without disavowing the “bottom line, that either the justice of our cause

or the fact that the injustices committed were a matter of survival”—was the key question of a compelling essay by Ephraim Kleiman, in 1948 a diffident young soldier and thirty years later a professor of economics at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.<sup>121</sup> Kleiman proceeds from personal recollections to an analysis of the expulsion before grappling with the issue of memory: “This country is full of people who suppress memory; every Israeli has his own Hirbet Hizah” (24). Kleiman’s story is about the “cleansing” of the Negev by Druze soldiers at winter’s end in 1949, of Bedouin tribes defined as semihostile. He does not present the Bedouins as saints or the Druze as devils. It was a kind of drama in which everyone played a role assigned by fate. The reaction of the Jewish soldiers to the mission echoes Yizhar’s story almost word for word: “‘Dirty rotten business,’ some guy cursed. And when no one responded, he said again—‘dirty, rotten job.’” The platoon commander, older, from a Galilee farming community, knowing Arabic, and familiar with Druze customs, replied: “Dirty rotten job . . . but someone has to do it.” “But why . . . me?” the first soldier asked. And the commander replied: “So that you’ll know what you’re doing . . . get it. . . ? So that you won’t be able to sit by and enjoy the fact of a Jewish state, and pretend that you don’t know how it came about. . . . If you’re ready for dirt to be done for your sake, you have to be ready to do it yourself” (24–25). Six months later, when Kleiman read Yizhar’s story, he found that it expressed his personal experience (25).

Kleiman also tried to analyze and explain the flight and expulsion of Palestinian Arabs in 1948: “The incident I have described, and our attitude toward it, cannot be understood without the backdrop of the Arab population’s mass flight in the War of Liberation” (25). He explains the start of the flight by the natural desire of the civilian population to flee the area of hostilities. Second, even before the Deir Yassin Massacre (on 9 April 1948), the Arabs were terrified of Jewish maltreatment: “Perhaps . . . they projected onto us the punishment that the average Arab wished on us” (25). Third, the Arab Higher Committee encouraged the Arab population to evacuate areas conquered by the Jews:<sup>122</sup> “That encouragement transformed individual flight into a national exodus” (25).

On the Jewish side, Kleiman continued, views on the expulsion were initially mixed. At the local level, commanders wanted to remove from the war zone a population that might aid the enemy. Nor did they want to have to deal with the needs of an occupied civilian population, preferring to remove it. At the political level, the Partition Plan had left an Arab population of about half a million within the borders of the



Jewish state. It is not clear if the Yishuv's leaders had given serious thought to this problem and its resolution (massive Jewish immigration, a future population transfer?) or if, in their enthusiasm at the prospect of independence, they had simply disregarded the demographics. The Arab flight took them by surprise. Initially, they were apprehensive (as in Haifa). But they soon understood the opportunity it presented for an almost completely Jewish state: "What, till then, had been a by-product on the Jewish side, or the result of a local initiative, ultimately became deliberate policy" (25). In Kleiman's view, Haifa marked the turning point for evacuation on the Arab side and Ramle and Lydda for expulsion on the Jewish side. Here, too, the eviction began as a local initiative designed to remove a hostile population from the war zone and avoid taking responsibility for civilian needs. The commanders also hoped that the stream of refugees would confound the Arab Legion's military measures: "But the scope of the evacuation, and its systematic handling, indicates that the decision . . . had been made at the highest levels, reflecting policy" (25). Kleiman's conclusions, based on impressions, conversations with contemporaries, memories, and similar sources, are not essentially different from Benny Morris's comprehensive analysis, which was based on archival evidence and published in 1988.

As long as the Arab population was ousted in the heat of battle, no ethical problem was posed for the soldiers. But expulsions such as that of the Bedouin encampment after hostilities had died down aroused the total opposition of some, while others saw the force of circumstances as justice: "Most of us, however, were well aware of the inherent contradiction between our use of force and our inbred values, of the clash between the slogan of 'purity of arms' and, in this case, not individual hot-headedness but rather society's cold calculation" (27). The majority reaction was that it was a dirty job, but it had to be done. The total faith and respect that the young felt for the leadership contributed to their readiness to execute the expulsion orders. They reasoned that if their leaders, who had schooled them in humanistic values, had decided on an operation, they had certainly thought it through carefully. That faith began to waver among most of the young only at the end of the War of Independence. Nor could the generation of '48 accept that the war had been a historical necessity. They believed it had been forced on the Jews and expulsion was one of the consequences of that duress: "We never asked ourselves: had there not been a war, would we not have aspired (or been compelled) to achieve the same results?" (27).

Two more factors helped salve the consciences of the combatants.

The outrages committed by the Arabs, the slaughter of the wounded and mutilation of the dead, kindled vengeance and acrimony and chalked up a debt of blood to be balanced with expulsion. The second factor was Arab alienness, otherness. They looked different, miserable, part of a different cultural world. That alienation made it hard for Israelis to identify with their suffering: “The young do not have much compassion, especially for what strikes them as alien” (27).

On the problem of suppressed memory, Kleiman compared our criticism of others for the suffering they inflicted on us with our self-criticism for the suffering we caused others. The latter requires far greater moral courage. The force of Zola’s “J’Accuse” in the Dreyfus affair sprang from the fact that a Frenchman was denouncing the injustices of the French government. The bid to conceal the truth—even if in the name of an ostensibly worthy cause such as keeping up morale or defending the troops’ good name or national honor—ultimately corrupts because the measures of concealment lead to further evils. Truth will out, and the attempts at denial or suppression only heighten the sense of a warped morality compounded by anger over concealment, lies, and hypocrisy (29). For the sake of a healthy society, Israel must deal with the suppressed memories and integrate them into collective memory, Kleiman asserted. In 1986, his article appeared in English.<sup>123</sup> But neither version struck a responsive chord. The generation wasn’t ready for it.

## Interim Epilogue

The 1978 controversy was not cathartic but rather the reverse. This is a clear example of the mutual interaction between the present and collective memory. At the end of the 1970s, the antagonism between Israel’s two main political currents, Left and Right, deepened. The primary divisive issue became the question of “we and our neighbors,” with the topic of expulsion “present in/absent from” the domestic debate: present, since otherwise the screening of a film based on an Israeli classic would not have caused such a public uproar, absent since the topic was barely mentioned in the discussion. The soul-searching, merciless candor and also compassion (for the Palestinian cataclysm) expressed in the major essays of the first debate were virtually absent from the second round. Even Yizhar now described “Hirbet Hizah” as an aberration and protested against blaming Israel. Basically, the first debate had revolved around moral issues: the character of the Israeli soldier, the moral disposition of

Israeli society, what is permitted, what is forbidden in time of war, the force of circumstances, and victory and tragedy. By contrast, the second debate centered on political issues. What serves the purposes of Israeli image making and information? What aids the aims of enemy propaganda? What is the legitimate national narrative? Who and what represent Israeli patriotism? Was Zionism morally flawed from its inception, founded solely on national egoism? Or was it corrupted by war and we must restore its humanity? The first debate looked to the past, taking personal stock at the end of Israel's most difficult war. The second stemmed from problems in the present and looked to the future—namely, the fate of the settlements in Judea and Samaria. In both, there was no lack of pretense, hypocrisy, and smugness. But there is no doubt that in the second round the hypocrisy level was higher.

Frustration with the fact that military victories brought no neat solutions to existential problems of state survival and security, the intractable problem of the Palestinians, the ongoing terror and violence—all these acted on Israelis to quench any compassion for the vanquished enemy, sympathy for their plight, and readiness to recognize the overall picture of interrelations, all of which had been present in the first discussion of “Hirbet Hizah” in 1949. Gone was the hidden kernel of empathy that springs from the immediacy of a problem and that characterized many of the combatants of 1948. It was the heyday of self-righteousness.

Despite the public uproar over the TV showing, it is doubtful that the “empty land” had penetrated Israeli consciousness. Thousands of people who had not read the story now viewed the film, yet many of them saw it as “just another (rather bland) war movie” rather than the portrayal of a crucial historical experience. Literature's fictitiousness combined with the notion of aberration to blur the element of reality. Many commentators preferred to stress literary and artistic features rather than the concrete background, contributing to the suppression of the memory of expulsion. Despite the enormous exposure given the expulsion, the events grew more distant with the passage of time, and new concerns, such as the war in Lebanon and the Intifada, relegated it to the margins of memory. With the exception of relatively small circles in the republic of Hebrew letters or the Israeli intelligentsia, the subject barely existed in Israel's collective awareness. Or, more precisely, it was there but in limbo—not totally forgotten, not consciously remembered.

Between the English publication of Benny Morris's book in early 1988 and its Hebrew version in 1991, the first Intifada broke out, lending the work a dramatic energy: the relevance of past sins to present iniqui-

ties. The Palestinian problem bore its way into public consciousness as a pressing national problem and has remained so ever since in Israeli society and politics. The (temporary) mellowing of the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation in the wake of the Oslo accords, and mutual recognition, made Israel more amenable to acknowledging the other side's suffering. The timing of Morris's publication was almost uncanny. The endless discussions in the 1990s on the New Historians (a term he coined) and the discourse on "post-Zionism" bared, before the public, an array of painful questions about Israel's relations with its neighbors. Nonetheless, by the end of the 1990s there did not seem to have been any heightened public awareness of the IDF's 1948 expulsion of a portion of Palestine's Arabs. Historiographical efforts to address the topic met the same fate as Yizhar's tale: partial oblivion or dimming of memory. It lived on among a small intellectual class but did not seep through to broader Israeli circles. Every year university freshmen "discover" that past anew. It does not exist, on its own strength, in collective memory but is submerged and resurfaces over and over again.

The suspension of memory, or denial, is a well-known phenomenon. The remembrance of the Holocaust provides a striking example. For decades, Israeli society put off dealing with the memory in any real, personal sense. Years had to pass before both the survivors and Jewish society were able to confront the horror face-to-face. But this example applies only partially for it involves victims coming to grips with their own experiences and the ability of society to assimilate the terrible memories of some of its members into collective memory. The Arab expulsion involves the memory of suffering we caused others. As Kleiman observed, there is a fundamental difference between recognizing injustices you have suffered and injustices you have caused.

A more apt example is French society's confrontation with the memory of the Vichy regime and its integration, as a controversial chapter, into French history. This process has begun only recently, expressed *inter alia* in the acknowledgment of French collective responsibility for the wrongs of that regime. But here, too, there is only a partial parallel between Israel's attitude toward the 1948 war, with all its lights and shadows, and the French attitude toward the World War II era. The one crucial difference that may help explain Israel's ongoing suspension of memory is that the Vichy period in French history belongs entirely to the past. As the generation personally involved passes away, fewer restraints inhibit frank discussion, and this discussion impinges on the present only marginally, a kind of domestic purging with no IOUs.

By contrast, Israeli-Palestinian relations are still topical—politically, socially, and culturally—reaching down to the roots of Israeli society and present-day reality. This is no academic discussion of events long past but a pivotal issue on the agendas of the Israeli state, the Palestinians, and the Middle East as a whole. An acknowledgment that not all Palestinian Arabs left of their own accord is likely to be interpreted as Israeli accountability for the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem. Yes, the blame for starting the war rests squarely with the Arabs and consequently, so common (Israeli) wisdom has it, their suffering is mainly of their own making. But Israeli unease over dealing with the memory of expulsion stems largely from the insight that the discussion is relevant to current political realities. It is far easier to contend with remembrance of a past that has become inoperative, that is, having no immediate implications for the present, than with a past that still challenges the present.

Furthermore, the question of collective memory in immigrant society warrants separate investigation. The dynamic processes of collective memory are clearly more complex than in stable societies with a strong sense of national identity. The connection with the “dominant” image of the past is problematic. Many immigrants may not regard it as part of their own past. The accepted image of the War of Independence in Israeli society is associated with the “nuclear Jewish community,” that is, the “old-timers” who preceded and promoted statehood. This image, in every decade, is inculcated by the state school system in youngsters who, to one degree or another, have internalized the old ethos and the myths that express it. But for other strata of Israeli society their Israeli identity is bound up with their own formative experiences and those of their parents and only to a limited extent with the War of Independence. As Israel’s demographic mix changes, so, too, does the conception of the past and the importance accorded specific episodes. In this dialectical process and the integration of new components into Israeli identity amid constant change and reconfiguration, the chapters in state history that do not forge a common identity are omitted from memory. “The Story of Hirbet Hizah” is one such chapter.

Collective memory’s incorporation (or exclusion) of “Hirbet Hizah” sheds light on a broader issue: ethics and the right of the Jews’ state to exist. Although the founding fathers held that Israel exists for Jews, and not in order to demonstrate its moral superiority over other nations of the world, they were nevertheless impelled by moral aspirations. Even Ben-Gurion, that great political pragmatist, paid lip service to the aim of making Israel a “light unto the nations.” At some level, he may even have

believed in it as a mission to be realized after Israel had achieved lasting security. Yizhar's approach—demanding from Zionism a commitment to absolute ethical norms and rejecting “reasons of state” as a justification for wrongdoing—reflects the same aspirations, emanating from the age-old traditions of a small, persecuted people that exalted and embraced moral principles in its conduct toward the weak and the stranger. This was the only way Jews could survive and keep their self-respect in the jungle of the world's peoples. Prior to the state's establishment, they did not have to put those principles to the practical test. Inevitably, however, the double standard in conduct toward Jews and Arabs aroused both associations with the Jewish condition in the diaspora and pangs of conscience. As time passed, it became more difficult to reconcile key questions: how to educate the young in patriotism and the unique value of a Jewish state as the first expression of Jewish independence in nearly two thousand years and at the same time recognize the toll that independence exacted from both Jews and Arabs. The more the less pleasant aspects of the War of Independence were cloaked in oblivion, the greater was the sense of guilt. What was not talked about became, as Amos Oz put it, a skeleton in the national cupboard. The recognition that some Palestine Arabs had been expelled by the IDF in the War of Independence seemed to undermine the self-image of a state founded on moral principles.

The question of expulsion has never been a secret. At times, it was discussed more openly, at other times more self-righteously. But a society that for decades has included “The Story of Hirbet Hizah” in its high school syllabi cannot be accused of trying to bury the traumas of 1948. This is on the conscious level. On the subliminal level, however, collective memory has not absorbed the messages of the story. The memory of expulsion continues to hover in the twilight zone between conscious and unconscious, between repression and recognition. We prefer not to remember it, just as we would anything unpleasant that is disturbing, oppressive, or damaging to our self-image. “Hirbet Hizah” has remained an unpleasant memory.

## NOTES

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The author of “Sipur Hirbet Hizah,” in *Sipur Hirbet Hizah* [The Story of Hirbet Hizah] (Tel Aviv, 1989), S. Yizhar (Yizhar Smilansky), has been acclaimed since the late 1930s as the most talented prose writer of the native sabra generation. Hereafter, page numbers of the passages quoted from the Hebrew text appear alongside the quotes in parentheses.

1. Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949* (Cambridge, 1988).

2. *Tekumah* was a controversial history series on Israel State Television (IST) aired as one of the state’s fiftieth anniversary events.

3. S. Yizhar, “Shayara shel hatzot” [Midnight Convoy], in Yizhar, *Sipur Hirbet Hizah*, 113. The only collection of Yizhar’s stories to appear in English is *Midnight Convoy and Other Stories* (Jerusalem, 1969), which does not include “The Story of Hirbet Hizah.”

4. Yizhar, “Midnight Convoy,” 108.

5. *Ibid.*, 178.

6. Uri Shoham, “Ha-‘arava ha-ptuha, ha-pardes ha-sagur” [Open Plain, Shut Orchard], *Siman Kriah* 3–4 (1974): 339.

7. Yigal Sarna, “Ha-arets she-hayta ve-enenna” [The Land That Was and Is Gone], *Yediot Aharonot*, 27 April 1990 (interview with S. Yizhar).

8. Nathan Alterman, “Ki-ve-yad sufa” [As if by Storm], in *Ir ha-Yona* [Town of the Dove] (Israel, 1978), 120. Yizhar cited the poem in interviews with Sarna and the author. It is echoed also in interviews in Shmuel Hupert, “Gam hallelujah ve-gam rekvi’em” [Both Hallelujah and Requiem], *Yediot Aharonot*, 10 December 1993; and Yotam Reuveni, “Shi’ur moledet” [Homeland Lesson], *Yediot Aharonot*, 26 April 1985.

9. Reuveni, “Homeland” (interview).

10. Sarna, “The Land” (interview).

11. David Kenaani, “Ba-shayara u-ve-tzida” [In and along the Convoy], in *Yizhar: Mivhar Maamrei Bikoret ‘al Yetzirat* [Selected Critical Essays on Yizhar], ed. Hayim Nagid (Tel Aviv, 1972), 79. First published in *Orlogin* 5 (1952): 45–65.

12. S. Yizhar, “Gilah,” in *Tzedadiim* [Sidelines] (Tel Aviv, 1996).

13. Hupert, “Hallelujah” (interview).

14. Reuveni, “Homeland” (interview).

15. Nathan Alterman, “Tzorkhei bitahon” [Security Needs], in *Ha-Tur ha-Shvi’i* [The Seventh Column], vol. 2 (Tel Aviv, 1954), 269.

16. Eti Hasid, “S. Yizhar, ‘al ha-shtika” [Yizhar’s Silence], *Hadashot*, 20 November 1987.

17. Hayim Nagid, “Katavti et ‘Hirbet Hizah’ lo ke-Yehudi mul ‘Aravi, ela ke-adam she-nifg’a” [I Wrote “Hirbet Hizah” Not as Jew versus Arab but as Someone Hurt], *Ma’ariv*, 10 February 1978.

18. See Y. Adam, “Madu’a nimna’ta, S. Yizhar?” [Why Did You Refrain, S. Yizhar?], *BaSha’ar*, 20 July 1950, which questions the silence of the author during the strong-arm searches in Abu Ghosh.

19. S. Yizhar, "Be-terem aharish" [Before I Fall Silent], *Yediot Aharonot*, 24 February 1978.
20. Nagid, "I Wrote."
21. Yizhar, "Before I Fall Silent."
22. Nagid, "I Wrote."
23. Letter from the Sifriyat Poalim publishing house to S. Yizhar, 14 April 1951. Folder: Hirbet Hizah, Sifriyat Poalim Archives.
24. Shalom Kremer, "Al ha-sipur ha-Yisraeli ha-tza'ir" [On the Young Israeli Story], *Moznayim*, August–September 1957.
25. D. B. Malkin, "Hirbet Hizah," *MiBifnim* 14, nos. 2–3 (January 1950): 465. The allusion is to Y. H. Brenner.
26. S. Y. Pnueli, "'Al sipurav ha-hadashim shel S. Yizhar" [On Yizhar's New Stories], *Dorot* 1 (September 1949).
27. Moshe Silbertal, "Kol koreh mi-Hirbet Hizah" [A Call from Hirbet Hizah], *BaSha'ar*, 13 October 1949.
28. S. Uriel, "Shnei sipurei hafuga le-S. Yizhar" [Two Tales of Truce by Yizhar], *HaAretz*, 21 October, 1949.
29. Leah Goldberg, "Ha-sifrut ha-'Ivrit bi-shnat tav shin tet ve-reishit tav shin yod" [Hebrew Literature in 1949 and Early 1950], *Shivat Tz'iyon* 1 (1950): 361.
30. Ya'akov Fichmann, "Be-'einei adam" [Through Human Eyes], *Davar*, 13 January 1950.
31. A. Anavi, "Hirbet Hizah le-S. Yizhar" [Yizhar's Hirbet Hizah], *Ashmoret*, 17 November 1949.
32. M. Roshuld, [Untitled], *Be Terem* 12–13 (November–December, 1949): 75.
33. Sh. Eli, "Agav kariat ha-sipur 'Hirbet Hizah' le-S. Yizhar" [On Reading Yizhar's "Hirbet Hizah"] *Ner*, 29 June 1950 (reprinted from *Shdemot*).
34. The first quote is from Fichmann, "Through Human Eyes," the second is from Yosef Aricha, "S. Yizhar: Hirbet Hizah," *Davar*, 11 November 1949.
35. Fichmann, "Through Human Eyes"; Goldberg, "Hebrew Literature."
36. Fichmann, "Through Human Eyes."
37. Silbertal, "A Call."
38. Eli, "On Reading."
39. Moshe Stavi-Stavsky, "S. Yizhar ha-kri'a be-sefarav" [Reading Yizhar's Books], *HaAretz*, 11 May 1951.
40. See Menachem Talmi, "Musar haskel—le-mi?" [A Moral—for Whom?], *Ashmoret*, 15 September 1949; Sh. Hagai, "'Od 'al Hirbet Hizah" [More on Hirbet Hizah], *BaSha'ar*, 23 February 1950; Noah Tamir, "S. Yizhar ve-Hirbet Hizah" [Yizhar and Hirbet Hizah], *Bitzaron* 23, no. 10 (September–October 1950): 62–64.
41. See Yitzhak Rav, "Zimrat Ha-aretz" [Song of the Land], a photocopy of which is in the Hirbet Hizah folder at Sifriyat Poalim, though no source or date is given. The censure is mentioned ironically by Moshe Shamir, who praises Yizhar in "Sefer hadash le-S. Yizhar" [A New Book of Yizhar's], *BaSha'ar*, 25 August 1949.
42. Pnueli, "New Stories."
43. *Ibid.*
44. Malkin, "Hirbet Hizah."
45. Tamir, "Yizhar."



46. Sh. [Shalev] Mordechai, "Dvar ha-hayalim ha-aforim—o tahlifim le-hazon" [Voice of the Gray Soldiers—or Alternatives to the Vision], *Sulam* 2 (May 1949).
47. Sh. [Shalev] Mordechai, "Mevukha ve-sadizm" [Confusion and Sadism], *Sulam* 5 (August–September 1949).
48. S. Yizhar, "Al snob ve-'al . . ." [On Snobs and on . . .], *HaAretz*, 5 August 1949.
49. Sh. [Shalev] Mordechai, "S. Yizhar: Hirbet Hizah," *Sulam* 7 (November–December 1950).
50. Ibid.
51. Baruch Kurzweil, *Bein Hazon le-vein Ha-Absurdi* [The Vision and the Absurd] (Jerusalem, 1966), 391.
52. Ibid., 357.
53. Ibid.
54. Avi-Yiftah, "Lod yotzet la-golah" [Lydda Leaves for Exile], *MiBifnim* 13 (March 1948–April 1949).
55. David Maletz, "Ometz musari, mahu?" [What Is Moral Courage?] *Davar*, 3 March 1950. All the preceding quotes are from this article.
56. Y. Ahidov [Israel Eldad], "Hedei Hirbet Hizah" [Echoes of Hirbet Hizah], *Sulam* 12 (March–April 1950).
57. Shin. Yud. Nun. "Ha-ketza'akata?" [The Truth of the Outcry?], *HaTzofeh*, 10 March 1950.
58. Yitzhak Zimmermann, "Hirbet Hizah ve-ometz musari" [Hirbet Hizah and Moral Courage], *HaPo'el HaTza'ir*, 26 April 1950.
59. A. Gavrielit, "Sulam ve-David Maletz" [*Sulam* and David Maletz], *Kol Ha'Am*, 24 March 1950.
60. Menahem Dorman, "Al S. Yizhar" [On S. Yizhar], *MiBifnim* 14, no. 4 (August 1950): 571–84. The following quotes are from this article.
61. The War of Liberation, so termed by that generation, and the more official and neutral War of Independence have become loaded Zionist terms. War of 1948 is more neutral. The term used in Palestinian discourse is Al-Nakba (The Catastrophe).
62. Kenaani, "Convoy," 57–83. The following quotes are from this work.
63. Information on this is scattered and hard to locate. I happened upon two references, one in the *Ha-'Oved Ha-Tziyoni*, 30 March 1950, reporting on a trial staged by Zionist Youth, the other a mock trial held at Kibbutz Mizra.
64. Gavriel Stern, "Sifrut u-politika (beshulei 'pulmus Yizhar)" [Literature and Politics (on the Edge of the "Yizhar controversy")], *'Al HaMishmar*, 25 May 1951. The following quotes are from this article.
65. The difference is a single letter and single sound in Hebrew: *Tziyoni* and *tzini*.
66. S. Uriel, "Mei'ever le-Tziyonut, mei'ever le-tziniut" [Beyond Zionism, beyond Cynicism], *Molad* 6, no. 31 (October 1950): 59.
67. Addressing the Hebrew Writers Association on the state's tenth anniversary, in *Davar*, 10 April 1958, Yizhar estimated that his readers represented no more than a fifth of the country's adult population.
68. See, for example, Michael Asaf, "Korim kotvim 'al Yemei Ziklag" [Readers Write about *The Days of Tziklag*], *Davar*, 3 October 1958; Yisrael Eldad, "Bavu'at hatoda'a mul zerem ha-historya" [The Reflection of Consciousness vis-à-vis the Stream of History], *Sulam* 10 (September–November 1958).

69. S. Yizhar, interview with the author, 5 March 2000.
70. "Se'ara sviv Pras Bialik" [A Storm over the Bialik Prize], *Ma'ariv*, 31 December 1958.
71. S. Yizhar, "Yizhar 'Al Yemei Ziklag" [Yizhar on *The Days of Tziklag*], *Al HaMishmar*, 22 May 1959.
72. Dan Miron, "'Arba'a sipurei milhama shel Yizhar" [Four War Stories by Yizhar], *La-Merhav*, 21 April 1961.
73. Menashe Duvshani, *Shi'urim be-Sifrut 'Ivrit u-Klalit le-Vatei Sefer Tikhoniym* [Lessons in Hebrew and General Literature for High Schools], pt. 2, according to the new curriculum of the Ministry of Education and Culture (Tel Aviv, 1969), 202–7. The following quotes are from this work. I am grateful to Nava Eisen and the staff of the Archives of Jewish Education in Israel, at Tel Aviv University, who kindly placed educational material at my disposal.
74. Bagrut (matriculation) papers in Hebrew and general literature, 1979, 1980, 1981, collection of the Archives of Jewish Education in Israel, Tel Aviv University, 7.99–9. A sample check at the Israel State Archives and the archive of matriculation exams at the Ministry of Education and Culture showed a similar trend in exams in later years.
75. S. Yizhar, "'Al meshorerei ha-sipuah" [On the Poets of Annexation], *HaAretz*, 8 December 1967.
76. The questions of the twelfth graders were published in *Davar*, 19 April 1974; and *Shdemot* 54 (spring 1974): 62–63. Their responses appeared in *Shdemot* 55 (summer 1974): 74–75.
77. Hupert, "Hallelujah" (interview).
78. Gideon Alon, "Ha-krav ha-sheni 'al Hirbet Hizah" [The Second Battle for Hirbet Hizah], *HaAretz*, 10 February 1978.
79. *Ibid.*
80. Yosef Waxmann, "Ha-netiya hi lidhot et hakranat *Hirbet Hizah*" [The Tendency is to Postpone the Screening of *Hirbet Hizah*], *Ma'ariv*, 7 August 1977. According to Waxmann, TV directors Yitzhak Livni, Aaron Zuckerman, and Mordechai Kirschenbaum also had misgivings. In a recent discussion with the author, Livni denied this.
81. Yaakov Karoz, "Ha-lekah ha-tov shel ha-se'ara" [The Moral of the Storm], *Yediot Aharonot*, 17 February 1978.
82. For details on all the developments, see Alon, "Second Battle."
83. Amos Carmel, "Hirbet Hizah: Hagah shel ha-demagogiya" [Hirbet Hizah: Carnival of Demagoguery], *Davar*, 2 February 1978.
84. Gideon Alon, "Begin hebi'a pli'a 'al hahlatat ha-sar le-'akev hakranat *Hirbet Hizah*" [Begin Expressed Surprise at the Minister's Decision to Hold up *Hirbet Hizah*'s Screening], *HaAretz*, 8 February 1978.
85. Yizhar Smilansky, "'Et la-kum ve-limhot" [Time to Stand up and Protest], *Davar*, 2 February 1978.
86. Television interview with Yizhar, 7 February 1978; television report, "Bnei Akiva neged *Hirbet Hizah*" [Bnei Akiva against *Hirbet Hizah*], 8 February 1978.
87. "Agudat Ha-Sofrim koret la-'amod 'al mishmar ekron hofesh hayetzira" [The Writers Association Calls for Creative Freedom], *Davar*, 10 February 1978.
88. Dani Rubinstein, "Hedei Hirbet Hizah ba-rehov ha-'Aravi" [Echoes of Hirbet Hizah on the Arab Street], *Davar*, 13 February 1978.

89. Carmel, "Hirbet Hizah."
90. Ibid.
91. Yisrael Eldad, "Hirbet Hofesh" [The Destruction of Freedom], *Yediot Aharonot*, 10 February 1978.
92. U. Ephraim, "Ba ba-'et" [At the Same Time], *BeEretz Yisrael*, February 1978.
93. G. Binyamin, "Divrei shtut u-ma'asei kessel" [Folly and Stupidity], *Ma'ariv*, 10 February, 1978.
94. Survey by *Ma'ariv* conducted after the airing of *Hirbet Hizah*, reported in "Yotzeh dofen, harig u-mazik" [Unusual, Deviant, and Damaging], *Ma'ariv*, February 14, 1978. The entire paragraph is based on the survey.
95. Teddy Preuss, "Im atah lo yode'a az tishtok" [If You Don't Know, Shut Up], *Davar*, 14 February 1978. The following quotes are from this article.
96. Eldad, "Destruction."
97. Karoz, "The Moral."
98. Yosef Lapid, "Herpat Hizah" [The Shame of Hizah], *Ma'ariv*, 14 February 1978.
99. Ya'ir Burla, "Tapuah mur'al matnat ha-televisiya" [Poison Apple, Television's Gift], *Ma'ariv*, 16 February 1978. The following quotes are from this article.
100. G[alal] Binyamin, "Be'ita she-lo be-'itah" [Untimely Kick], *Ma'ariv*, 17 February 1978.
101. Ofra Yeshua, "Ma yomru ha-Goyim?" [What Will the Non-Jews Say?], *Ma'ariv*, 16 February 1978.
102. Amos Oz, "Hirbet Hizah ve-sakanat nefashot" [Hirbet Hizah and Mortal Danger], *Davar*, 17 February 1978. The following quotes are from this article.
103. Gadi Yatziv, "Ha-Tziyonut shel Hirbet Hizah ha-yom" [Hirbet Hizah's Zionism Today], *Davar*, 23 February 1978.
104. See Nagid, "I Wrote."
105. Amos Keinan, "Lishtol 'atzei zayit" [Plant Olive Trees], *Yediot Aharonot*, 17 February 1978.
106. Yehiel Hazak (moderator), "Lo le-hishtaker mi-ashma" [Don't Get Drunk on Guilt], interview with S. Yizhar, *Al HaMishmar*, 17 February 1978.
107. G. Amitay, "Ahavat amim ve-ahavat ha-am" [Love of Nations and Love of the Jews], letter to the editor, *Yediot Aharonot*, 16 February 1978.
108. According to press reports, Shalev's comments were broadcast on *The Third Hour* in a postscreening discussion of the film; IST's film archives contain no copy of the program. Matzpen's well-known views are mentioned in Zvi Shiloah, "Ha-televisiya lo timkor toztarta" [IST Can't Sell Its Product], *Davar*, 2 March 1978.
109. Hanoch Bartov, "Mehandesei ha-nefesh" [Engineers of the Soul], *Ma'ariv*, 17 February 1978.
110. H. L., "Hirbet Hizah ve-hinukh ha-dor" [Hirbet Hizah and the Generation's Education], *Bitzaaron* 68 (April 1978). The author quotes Rotenstreich.
111. Moshe Carmel, "Paneha ha-me'uvatim shel Milhemet ha-Shihur" [The Distorted Face of the War of Liberation], *Davar*, 19 February 1978.
112. Ibid.
113. See, for example, Yaakov Malkin, "Ha-tasrit har'a ve-ha-mazik shel Hirbet Hizah" [Hirbet Hizah's Bad and Harmful Script], *Ma'ariv*, 17 February 1978.

114. Gil Kesari, "Hayiti ktzin hamivtz'a be-Hirbet Hezaz" [I Was the Operations Officer at Hirbet Hezaz], *Ma'ariv*, 17 February 1978.

115. Reuven Shapira, "Krovei ha-halalim: Toshvei ha-kfar ratzhu be-ahzariyut 23 mi-lohamei mishlat 219" [Families of the Fallen: Villagers Brutally Murdered Twenty-three of the Fighters at Command Post 219], *Davar*, February 28, 1978.

116. Haim Guri, "'Arav, 'Arav" [Arabia, Arabia], *Ma'ariv*, 3 March 1978. The following quotes are from this article.

117. Mordechai Herzog, letter to the editor, *Davar*, 6 February 1978.

118. Lena Kichler-Silberman, "Mutav she-yushmad ha-seret mi-she-yesuknu hayei ha-am" [Rather the Film Destroyed Than the People Endangered], letter to the editor, *Ma'ariv*, 13 February 1978.

119. Yosef Liyubin, "Makhiv akh hekhrahi," letter to the editor, *HaAretz*, 21 February 1978.

120. Zehava Neumann, "Al gufot ha-'Aravim she-silaknu" [On the Bodies of the Arabs We Evicted], letter to the editor, *Yediot Aharonot*, 19 February 1978.

121. Epraim Kleiman, "Hirbet Hizah ve-zikhronot lo ne'imim aherim," *Proza* 25 (1978): 28. Hereafter, the page numbers of passages quoted from the Hebrew text appear in parentheses following the quotes.

122. Benny Morris (*Birth*) claims that there was no general instruction from the Arab authorities to evacuate the villages and towns in order to avoid suffering during the fighting and then to return later with the victorious Arab armies. But such a general directive need not have been broadcast on the radio, something for which Morris could find no evidence. It would have been enough for the notables in each settlement to have given a signal.

123. Epraim Kleiman, "Khirbet Khiz'ah and Other Unpleasant Memories," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 40 (1986): 102-18.

*Avi Shlaim*

## **The Debate about 1948**

“Conquerors, my son, consider as true history only what they themselves have fabricated.”<sup>1</sup> Thus remarked the old Arab headmaster to young Saeed on his return to Haifa in the summer of 1948 in Emile Habiby’s tragicomic novel *The Secret Life of Saeed, the Ill-Fated Pessimist*. The headmaster spoke about the Israelis more in sorrow than in anger: “It is true they did demolish those villages . . . and did evict their inhabitants. But, my son, they are far more merciful than the conquerors our forefathers had years before.”<sup>2</sup>

Most Israelis would be outraged by the suggestion that they are conquerors, yet this is how they are perceived by the Palestinians. But the point of the quote is that there can be no agreement on what actually happened in 1948; each side subscribes to a different version of events. The Palestinians regard Israelis as the conquerors and themselves as the true victims of the first Arab Israeli War, which they call al-Nakba, (The Disaster). Palestinian historiography reflects these perceptions. The Israelis, on the other hand, whether conquerors or not, were the indisputable victors in the 1948 war, which they call the War of Independence. Because they were the victors, among other reasons, they were able to propagate more effectively than their opponents their version of this fateful war. History, in a sense, is the propaganda of the victors.

The conventional Zionist account of the 1948 war goes roughly as follows. The conflict between Jews and Arabs in Palestine came to a head following the passage, on 29 November 1947, of the United Nations partition resolution, which called for the establishment of two states, one Jewish and one Arab. The Jews accepted the UN plan despite the painful sacrifices it entailed, but the Palestinians, the neighboring Arab states, and the Arab League rejected it. Great Britain did everything in its power toward the end of the Palestine Mandate to frustrate the establishment of the Jewish state envisaged in the UN plan. With the expiry of the Mandate and the proclamation of the State of Israel, five Arab states sent their

armies into Palestine with the firm intention of strangling the Jewish state at birth. The subsequent struggle was an unequal one between a Jewish David and an Arab Goliath. The infant Jewish state fought a desperate, heroic, and ultimately successful battle for survival against overwhelming odds. During the war, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled to the neighboring Arab states, mainly in response to orders from their leaders and despite Jewish pleas to stay and demonstrate that peaceful coexistence was possible. After the war, the story continues, Israeli leaders sought peace with all their heart and all their might, but there was no one to talk to on the other side. Arab intransigence was alone responsible for the political deadlock, which was not broken until President Anwar Sadat's visit to Jerusalem thirty years later.

This conventional Zionist account or Old History of the 1948 war displays a number of features. In the first place, it is not history in the proper sense of the word. Most of the voluminous literature on the war was written not by professional historians but by participants, by politicians, soldiers, official historians, and a large host of sympathetic chroniclers, journalists, biographers, and hagiographers. Second, this literature is very short on political analysis of the war and long on chronicles of the military operations, especially the heroic feats of the Israeli fighters. Third, this literature maintains that Israel's conduct during the war was governed by higher moral standards than those of its enemies. Of particular relevance here is the precept of *tohar haneshek*, or the "purity of arms," which posits that weapons remain pure as long as they are used only for defensive purposes. This popular-heroic-moralistic version of the 1948 war is the one that is taught in Israeli schools and used extensively in the quest for legitimacy abroad. It is a prime example of the use of a nationalist version of history in the process of nation building.

Until recently, this standard Zionist version of the events surrounding the birth of the State of Israel remained largely unchallenged outside the Arab world. The fortieth anniversary of the birth of the state, however, witnessed the publication of a number of books that challenged various aspects of the standard Zionist version. First in the field, most polemical in its tone, and most comprehensive in its scope was Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities*. A former director of the Arab Affairs Department of the left-wing Mapam Party and editor of the Middle East monthly *New Outlook*, Flapan wrote his book with an explicit political rather than academic aim in mind: to expose the myths that he claimed served as the basis of Israeli propaganda and policy. "The myths that Israel forged during the formation of the state," writes Flapan,

“have hardened into this impenetrable and dangerous ideological shield.”<sup>3</sup> After listing seven myths, to each of which a chapter in the book is devoted, Flapan frankly admits the political purpose of the whole exercise: “It is the purpose of this book to debunk these myths, not as an academic exercise but as a contribution to a better understanding of the Palestinian problem and to a more constructive approach to its solution.”<sup>4</sup>

Other books that were critical in their treatment of the Zionist rendition of events, though without an explicit political agenda, included Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949*,<sup>5</sup> Ilan Pappé, *Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948–51*,<sup>6</sup> and my own *Collusion across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement, and the Partition of Palestine*.<sup>7</sup> Collectively we came to be called the Israeli revisionists or the New Historians. Neither term is entirely satisfactory. The term *revisionists* in the Zionist lexicon refers to the right-wing followers of Ze’ev Jabotinsky, who broke away from mainstream Zionism in 1925, whereas the New Historians are located on the political map somewhere to the left of the mainstream. On the other hand the term *New Historians* is rather self-congratulatory and dismissive, by implication, of everything written before they appeared on the scene as old and worthless. Professor Yehoshua Porath of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem has suggested as alternative terms *prehistory* and *history*. But this is only slightly less offensive toward the first category of historians. So, for lack of a better word, I shall use the label *Old* to refer to the proponents of the standard Zionist version on the 1948 war and the label *New* to the recent left-wing critics of this version, including myself.

The first thing to note about the New Historiography is that much of it is not new. Many of the arguments that are central to the New Historiography were advanced long ago by Israeli writers, not to mention Palestinian, Arab, and Western writers. To list all these Israeli writers is beyond the scope of this essay, but a few examples might suffice. One common thread that runs through the New Historiography is a critical stance toward David Ben-Gurion, the founder of the State of Israel and its first prime minister. Many of the recent criticisms of Ben-Gurion are foreshadowed in a book written by a former Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) official historian, Lt. Col. Israel Baer, in prison after he was convicted of spying for the Soviet Union.<sup>8</sup>

A significant start in revising the conventional Zionist view of British policy toward the end of the Palestine Mandate was made by Gabriel Cohen in a volume with a characteristically old-fashioned title:

*Hayinu Ke-Holmim* [We Were as Dreamers].<sup>9</sup> Ya'acov Shim'oni, deputy director of the Middle East Department of the Foreign Ministry in 1948, published a highly perceptive article on the hesitations, doubts, reservations, and differences of opinion that attended the Arab decision to intervene in Palestine in May 1948.<sup>10</sup> This article, which is at odds with the dominant Zionist narrative, is all the more noteworthy for having been written by an insider. Col. Meir Pa'il wrote another corrective to the notion of a monolithic Arab world, focusing in particular on the conflict between King Abdullah of Jordan and the Palestinians.<sup>11</sup> The Zionist version of the causes of the Palestinian refugee problem was called into question by a number of Israeli writers and most convincingly by Rony Gabbay.<sup>12</sup> Finally, the argument that Israel's commitment to peace with the Arabs did not match the official rhetoric can be traced to a book published under a pseudonym by two members of the Israeli Communist Party.<sup>13</sup>

Although many of the arguments of the New Historiography are not new, there is a qualitative difference between this historiography and the bulk of the earlier studies, whether they accepted or contradicted the official Zionist line. The difference, in a nutshell, is that the New Historiography is written with access to the official Israeli and Western documents whereas the earlier writers had no access, or only partial access, to the official documents. This is not a hard and fast rule; there are many exceptions, and there are also degrees of access. Nevertheless, it is generally true to say that the new historians, with the exception of the late Simha Flapan, have carried out extensive archival research in Israel, Britain, and America and that their arguments are backed by hard documentary evidence and a Western-style scholarly apparatus.

Indeed, the upsurge of new histories would not have been possible without the declassification of the official government documents. Israel adopted the British thirty-year rule for the review and declassification of foreign policy documents. If this rule is not applied by Israel as systematically as it is in Britain, it is applied rather more liberally. Both Britain and Israel have also started to follow the American example of publishing volumes of documents, which are professionally selected and edited. The first four volumes in the series *Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel* are an invaluable and indispensable aid to research on the 1948 war and the armistice negotiations that ended it.<sup>14</sup>

On the Arab side, no government allows open access to its documents, and this restriction does pose a serious problem to the researcher. It is sometimes argued that no definitive account of the 1948 war, least



of all an account of what happened behind the scenes on the Arab side, is possible without access to the Arab state archives. But difficulty should not be construed as impossibility. In the first place, some official Arab documents are available. A prime example is the report of the Iraqi parliamentary committee of inquiry into the Palestine question, which is packed with high-level documents.<sup>15</sup> Another example is the collection of official, semiofficial, and private papers gathered by the Institute for Palestine Studies.<sup>16</sup> In addition, there is a far from negligible literature in Arabic that consists of firsthand accounts of the disaster, including the diaries and memoirs of prominent politicians and soldiers.<sup>17</sup> But even if none of these Arabic sources existed the other available sources would provide a basis for an informed analysis of the 1948 war. A military historian of the Middle Ages would be green with envy at the sight of the sources available to his contemporary Middle Eastern counterpart. Historians of the 1948 war would do much better to explore in depth the manifold sources that are available to them than to lament the denial of access to the Arab state archives.

If the release of rich new sources of information was one important reason behind the advent of historical revisionism, a change in the general political climate was another.<sup>18</sup> For many Israelis, especially liberal-minded ones, the Likud's ill-conceived and ill-fated invasion of Lebanon in 1982 marked a watershed. Until then, Zionist leaders had been careful to cultivate the image of peace lovers who would stand up and fight only if war was forced on them. Until then, the notion of *ein breira*, "no alternative," was central to the explanation of why Israel went to war and a means of legitimizing its involvement in wars. But while the fierce debate between supporters and opponents of the Lebanon War was still raging, Prime Minister Menachem Begin gave a lecture to the IDF Staff College on wars of choice and wars of no choice. He argued that the Lebanon War, like the Sinai War of 1956, was a war of choice designed to achieve national objectives. With this admission, unprecedented in the history of the Zionist movement, the national consensus around the notion of *ein breira* began to crumble, creating political space for a critical reexamination of the country's earlier history.<sup>19</sup>

The appearance of the new books on the 1948 war excited a great deal of interest and controversy in Israeli academic and political circles. A two-day conference on the end of the War of Independence organized by the Dayan Center and the Institute for Zionist Research at Tel Aviv University in April 1989 turned into a confrontation between the old Zionist version represented by historians, journalists, and veterans of that

war and the new version represented by Benny Morris and myself. Several of the speakers argued, with good reason, that the New Historians did not develop a new school or new methodology of historical writing but used conventional historical methods to advance new interpretations of the events of 1948. On the merits of the new interpretations, opinions were sharply divided. Members of the old guard, especially the Mapai old guard, bristled with hostility and roundly condemned the new interpretations. The response of the Israeli academic community, both at the conference and in subsequent reviews and discussions, was more measured. Some of the findings of the New Historiography, and especially the findings reported in Benny Morris's book, became widely accepted in the Israeli academic community and found their way into university reading lists and high school textbooks.

Among the critics of the New Historians, the most strident and vitriolic was Shabtai Teveth, David Ben-Gurion's biographer. Teveth's attack, entitled "The New Historians," appeared in four successive, full-page installments in the Israeli daily *HaAretz* on 7, 14, and 21 April and 19 May 1989. Teveth subsequently published an abridged and revised version of this series in an article entitled "Charging Israel with Original Sin" in the American Jewish monthly, *Commentary*. In this article, Teveth describes the New History as a "farrago of distortions, omissions, tendentious readings, and outright falsifications."<sup>20</sup> Teveth pursues two lines of attack. One is that the New Historiography "rests in part on defective evidence, and is characterized by serious professional flaws."<sup>21</sup> The other is that the New Historiography is pro-Palestinian, politically motivated, and aimed at delegitimizing Zionism and the State of Israel.

In support of this last claim, Teveth quotes a passage from Benny Morris's article "The New Historiography," a passage that states that "how one perceives 1948 bears heavily on how one perceives the whole Zionist/Israeli experience. . . . If Israel was born tarnished, besmirched by original sin then it was no more deserving of that [Western] grace and assistance than were its neighbours." Teveth goes on to say that the original sin Shlaim charges Israel with consists of "the denial to the Palestinian Arabs of a country" while Morris charges Israel with "creating the refugee problem," and both charges "are false."<sup>22</sup>

Teveth must have gone through the two books in question with a fine-tooth comb to discover evidence of the political motive that he attributes to their authors, but he came up with nothing. This is why he was reduced to quoting from the *Tikkun* article, which he builds up in a farrago of distortions of his own into the political manifesto of what

he calls “the new historical club.” But even the quote from the article does not demonstrate any political purpose; all it does is to point out that Western attitudes toward Israel are influenced by perceptions of how Israel came into the world. This is surely undeniable. Benny Morris replied in *HaAretz* and in a second article in *Tikkun* that, as far as he is concerned, the New Historiography has no political purposes whatsoever. The task and function of the historian, in his view, is to illuminate the past.<sup>23</sup> My own view is that the historian’s most fundamental task is not to chronicle but to evaluate. The historian’s task is to subject the claims of all the protagonists to rigorous scrutiny and to reject all the claims, however deeply cherished, that do not stand up to such scrutiny. In my view, many of the claims advanced by the Old Historians do not stand up to serious scrutiny. But that does not mean that everything they say is untrue or that Israel is the sole villain of the piece. In fact, neither Benny Morris nor I have charged Israel with original sin. It is Shabtai Teveth who, in face of all the evidence to the contrary, continues to cling to the doctrine of Israel’s immaculate conception.<sup>24</sup>

It is Teveth’s counterattack that is politically motivated. Like so many other members of the Mapai old guard, he is unable to distinguish between history and propaganda. Any attempt to revise the conventional wisdom with the help of new evidence that has come to light is therefore immediately suspect as unpatriotic and calculated to harm the reputation of the leader and party that led the struggle for independence. For Teveth and other members of the Mapai old guard, the events in question do not yet fully belong to history but represent their party’s and country’s finest hour. They are too wedded, personally and politically, to the heroic version of the creation of the State of Israel to be able to treat the new historiography with an open mind.

Interestingly, individuals on the political Right in Israel, whether scholars or not, respond to the findings of the New Historiography with far greater equanimity. They readily admit, for example, that Israel did expel Palestinians and even express regret that it did not expel more of them since it was they who launched the war. Right-wingers tend to treat the 1948 war from a realpolitik point of view rather than a moralistic one. They are therefore spared the anguish of trying to reconcile the practices of Zionism with the precepts of liberalism. It is perhaps for this reason that they are generally less self-righteous and more receptive to new evidence and new analyses of the 1948 war than are members of the Mapai old guard. The latter put so much store by Israel’s claim to moral rectitude that they cannot face up to the evidence of cynical Israeli double-dealings or

the brutal expulsion and dispossession of the Palestinians. It is an axiom of their narrative that Israel is the innocent victim. Not content with the thirty pieces of silver, these people insist on retaining for Israel the crown of thorns.

Although politics and history have gotten mixed up in the debate about 1948, and this debate often resembles a dialogue of the deaf, the very fact that a debate is taking place is a welcome change from the stifling conformity of the past. A. J. P. Taylor once remarked that history does not repeat itself, it is historians who repeat one another. The Old Historiography on the emergence of Israel is a striking example of this general phenomenon. As for the New Historiography, whatever its faults, it at least has the merit of stimulating a reexamination of time-hallowed conventions.

Six major bones of contention can be identified in the ongoing debate between the New and the Old Historians: Britain's policy at the end of the Palestine Mandate, the Arab-Israeli military balance in 1948, the origins of the Palestinian refugee problem, the nature of Israeli-Jordanian relations during the war, Arab war aims, and the reasons for the continuing political deadlock after the guns fell silent. Let me now review briefly the main arguments and counterarguments on these six key issues in the debate, bearing in mind that I am not a detached or neutral observer but one of the protagonists in the debate.

## **British Policy**

The first bone of contention concerns British policy in Palestine between 29 November 1947 and 14 May 1948. Zionist historiography, reflecting the suspicions of Zionist leaders at that time, is laden with charges of hostile plots that are alleged to have been hatched against the Yishuv during the twilight of British rule in Palestine. The central charge is that Britain armed and secretly encouraged its Arab allies, and especially its client, King Abdullah of Jordan, to invade Palestine upon expiry of the British Mandate and do battle with the Jewish state as soon as it came into the world. For Ernest Bevin, the foreign secretary in the Labor government headed by Clement Attlee, is reserved the role of chief villain in this alleged conspiracy.

Ilan Pappé, using English, Arabic, and Hebrew sources, has driven a coach and horses through the traditional Zionist rendition of British policy toward the end of the Mandate, and I tried to follow along the

trail that he had blazed.<sup>25</sup> The key to British policy during this period is summed up by Pappé in two words: Greater Transjordan. Bevin felt that if Palestine had to be partitioned the Arab area could not be left to stand on its own but should be united with Transjordan. A Greater Transjordan would compensate Britain for the loss of bases in Palestine. Hostility to Hajj Amin al-Husseini, who had cast his lot with the Nazis during World War II, and hostility toward a Palestinian Arab state, which in British eyes was always equated with a mufti state, were important and constant features of British policy after the war. By February 1948, Bevin and his Foreign Office advisers were pragmatically reconciled to the inevitable emergence of the Jewish state. What they were not reconciled to was the emergence of a Palestinian Arab state.

The policy of Greater Transjordan implied discreet support for a bid by Abdullah, nicknamed “Mr Bevin’s little king” by the officials at the Foreign Office, to enlarge his kingdom by taking over the West Bank. At a secret meeting in London on 7 February 1948, Bevin gave Tawfiq Abul Huda, Jordan’s prime minister, the green light to send the Arab Legion into Palestine immediately following the departure of the British forces. But Bevin also warned Jordan not to invade the area allocated by the UN to the Jews. An attack on Jewish state territory, he said, would compel Britain to withdraw its subsidy and officers from the Arab Legion. Far from being driven by blind anti-Semitic prejudice to unleash the Arab Legion against the Jews, Bevin in fact urged restraint on the Arabs in general and on Jordan in particular. Whatever sins were committed by the British foreign secretary as the British Mandate approached its inglorious end, inciting King Abdullah to use force to prevent the emergence of a Jewish state was not one of them.

If Bevin was guilty of conspiring to unleash the Arab Legion, his target was not the Jews but the Palestinians. The prospect of a Palestinian state was pretty remote in any case because the Palestinians themselves had done so little to build it. But by supporting Abdullah’s bid to capture the Arab part of Palestine adjacent to his kingdom Bevin indirectly helped to ensure that the Palestinian state envisaged in the UN partition plan would be stillborn. In short, if there is a case to be made against Bevin, it is not that he tried to abort the birth of the Jewish state but that he endorsed the understanding between King Abdullah and the Jewish Agency to partition Palestine between themselves and leave the Palestinians out in the cold.

The Zionist charge that Bevin deliberately instigated hostilities in Palestine and gave encouragement and arms to the Arabs to crush the

infant Jewish state thus represents almost the exact opposite of the historical truth as it emerges from the British, Arab, and Israeli documents. The charge is without substance and may be safely discarded as the first in the series of myths that have come to surround the founding of the State of Israel.

### **The Military Balance**

A second myth, fostered by official and semiofficial accounts of the 1948 war, is that the Israeli victory was achieved in the face of insurmountable military odds. Israel is pictured in these accounts as a little Jewish David confronting a giant Arab Goliath. The war is portrayed as a desperate, costly, and heroic struggle for survival with plucky little Israel fighting off marauding armies from five Arab states. Israel's ultimate victory in this war is treated as nothing short of a miracle.

The heroism of the Jewish fighters is not in question. Nor is there any doubt about the heavy price that the Yishuv paid for its victory. It suffered 6,000 dead, 4,000 soldiers and 2,000 civilians, or about 1 percent of the entire population. Nevertheless, the Yishuv was not as hopelessly outnumbered and outgunned as the official history would have us believe. It is true that the Yishuv numbered merely 650,000 souls, compared with 1.2 million Palestine Arabs and nearly 30 million Arabs in the surrounding states. It is true that the senior military advisers told the political leadership on 12 May 1948 that the Haganah had only a fifty-fifty chance of withstanding the imminent Arab attack. It is true that the sense of weakness and vulnerability in the Jewish population was as acute as it was pervasive and that some segments of this population were gripped by feelings of gloom and doom. And it is true that during four critical weeks, from the invasion of Palestine by the regular armies of the Arab states on 15 May until the First Truce on 11 June, this community had to struggle for its very survival.

But the Yishuv also enjoyed a number of advantages, which are commonly downplayed by the Old Historians. The Yishuv was better prepared, mobilized, and organized when the struggle for Palestine reached its crucial stage than its local opponents were. The Haganah, which was renamed the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) on 31 May, could draw on a large reserve of Western-trained and homegrown officers with military experience. It had an effective centralized system of command and control. And, in contrast to the armies of the Arab states, especially those of

Iraq and Egypt, it had short, internal lines of communication, which enabled it to operate with greater speed and mobility.

During the unofficial phase of the war, from December 1947 to 14 May 1948, the Yishuv had a decisive edge over its Palestinian opponents. Its armed forces were larger, better trained, better equipped and technologically more advanced. Despite some initial setbacks, these advantages enabled it to win and win decisively the battle against the Palestine Arabs. Even when the Arab states committed their regular armies, marking the beginning of the official phase of the war, the Yishuv retained its numerical superiority. In mid-May, the total number of Arab troops operating in Palestine, both regular and irregular, was between 20,000 and 25,000. The IDF fielded 35,000 first-line troops, not counting the second-line troops in the settlements. By mid-July, the IDF fully mobilized 65,000 men under arms, by September the number rose to 90,000, and by December it reached a peak of 96,441. The Arab states could not match this rate of increase. Thus, at each stage of the war the IDF significantly outnumbered all the Arab forces ranged against it and by the final stage of the war its superiority was in the region of two to one.<sup>26</sup>

The IDF's gravest weakness during the first round of fighting in May and June was in firepower. The Arab armies were much better equipped, especially with heavy arms. But during the First Truce, in violation of the UN arms embargo, Israel imported from all over Europe, and especially from Czechoslovakia, rifles, machine guns, armored cars, field guns, tanks, airplanes, and all kinds of ammunition in large quantities. These illicit arms acquisitions enabled the IDF to tip the scales decisively in its own favor. In the second round of fighting, the IDF took the offensive, and in the third round it picked off the Arab armies and defeated them one by one. The final outcome of the war was thus not a miracle but a faithful reflection of the underlying Arab-Israeli military balance. In this war, as in most wars, the stronger side ultimately prevailed.

### **The Origins of the Palestinian Refugee Problem**

A third bone of contention between the Old and New Historians concerns the origins of the Palestinian refugee problem. The question is: did they leave or were they pushed out? Ever since 1948, Israeli spokesmen have maintained that the Palestinians left the country on orders from their own leaders and in the expectation of a triumphant return. Accounts written by Old Historians echo the official line. Arab spokesmen

have with equal consistency maintained that Israel forcibly expelled some 750,000 Palestinians from their homes and that Israel therefore bears the full responsibility for the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem. The question of origins is thus directly related to the question of responsibility for solving the problem. Arab claims that the notion of forcible “transfer” is inherent in Zionism and that in 1948 the Zionists simply seized the opportunity to displace and dispossess the Arab inhabitants of the country rendered this controversy all the more acrimonious.

Benny Morris, in *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, investigated this subject as carefully, dispassionately, and objectively as it is ever likely to be. Morris found no evidence of Arab leaders issuing calls to Palestine’s Arabs to leave their homes and villages nor any trace of a radio or press campaign urging them to flee. On the Israeli side, he found no blanket orders handed down from above for the systematic expulsion of the Palestinians. Morris’s conclusion is that “The Palestinian refugee problem was born of war, not by design, Jewish or Arab. It was largely a by-product of Arab and Jewish fears and of the protracted, bitter fighting that characterized the first Arab-Israeli war; in smaller part, it was the deliberate creation of Jewish and Arab military commanders and politicians.”<sup>27</sup> Benny Morris has already replied in detail to Teveth’s criticisms, and it would serve no useful purpose for me to give a blow-by-blow account of the battle between them.<sup>28</sup> But it seems to me that Teveth’s position on the origins of the Palestinian refugee problem is about as sophisticated as the old saying “Haya ness vehem nassu” (there was a miracle, and they ran away). Anyone who believes that will believe anything.

Another category of critics of Benny Morris’s book consists of Israeli orientalists. Some orientalists, such as Yehoshua Porath, have been highly supportive. Others, such as Asher Susser, Emmanuel Sivan, and Avraham Sela, have written in a more critical vein while giving credit where credit is due. The recurrent criticism from this professional quarter is that Morris has made very little use in his book of Arabic sources. In response to this criticism, Morris posed a question. Would consulting the Arabic materials mentioned by the critics have resulted in a fundamental revision of the analysis of the Palestinian exodus or added significantly to the description of this exodus given in his book?<sup>29</sup> Avraham Sela concedes that the use of the Arabic sources would probably not have changed the main conclusions of Morris’s study on the causes of the Palestinian exodus. But he goes on to argue that neglect of the available Arabic sources and heavy reliance on the Israeli documents are liable to produce an unbalanced picture.<sup>30</sup> I agree with Sela.



While a number of Israeli orientalists believe that Morris attached too much weight to Israeli actions, compared to other factors, in the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem, many other reviewers feel that in his conclusion Morris lets Israel off rather lightly. An observation that is frequently made, by Western as well as Palestinian reviewers, is that the evidence presented in the body of the book suggests a far higher degree of Israeli responsibility than that implied by Morris in his conclusion.<sup>31</sup> I agree with this observation. Having said that, I still consider Morris's book to be an outstandingly original, scholarly, and important contribution to the study of a problem that lies at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

### **Israeli-Jordanian Relations**

A fourth issue that gave rise to a lively controversy in Israel is the nature of Israeli-Jordanian relations and, more specifically, the contention that there was collusion or tacit understanding between King Abdullah and the Jewish Agency in 1947–49. That there was traffic between these two parties has been widely known for some time, and the two meetings between Golda Meir and King Abdullah in November 1947 and May 1948 have even been featured in popular films. Nor is the charge of collusion a new one. It was made in a book published by Col. Abdullah Tall, who had served as a messenger between King Abdullah and the Jews, following Tall's abortive coup and defection to Egypt.<sup>32</sup> A similar charge was leveled against Ben-Gurion by Lt. Col. Israel Baer in the book he wrote in his prison cell following his conviction of spying for the Soviet Union.<sup>33</sup> Tall condemned King Abdullah for betraying his fellow Arabs and selling the Palestinians down the river. Baer condemned Ben-Gurion for forming an unholy alliance with Arab reaction and British imperialism. A number of books and articles on Zionist-Hashemite relations have also been written by Israeli scholars, the most recent of which are by Dan Schueftan and Uri Bar-Joseph.<sup>34</sup> But out of the recent crop of books on this rather unusual bilateral relationship, it is my own *Collusion across the Jordan* that achieved real notoriety on both sides of the Jordan and has been singled out for attack by the Old Historians.

The central thesis advanced in my book is that in November 1947 an unwritten agreement was reached between King Abdullah and the Jewish Agency to divide Palestine between themselves following the termination of the British Mandate and that this agreement laid the foun-

dation for mutual restraint during the first Arab Israeli War and for continuing collaboration in its aftermath. A subsidiary thesis is that Britain knew and approved of this secret Hashemite-Zionist agreement to divide up Palestine between themselves rather than along the lines of the UN partition plan.

This thesis challenges the conventional view of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a simple bipolar affair in which a monolithic and implacably hostile Arab world is pitted against the Jews. It suggests that the Arab rulers were deeply divided among themselves on how to deal with the Zionist challenge and that one of these rulers favored accommodation rather than confrontation and had indeed cut a deal with the Jewish Agency to partition Palestine at the expense of the Palestinians. The thesis also detracts from the heroic version, which pictures Israel as ringed by an unbroken circle of Arab hostility and having to repel a concerted, all-out attack on all fronts. Not surprisingly, the official history of the War of Independence fails to even mention the unwritten agreement with King Abdullah.<sup>35</sup> Even when this agreement is acknowledged, the official line is that Abdullah went back on it at the critical moment and consequently it had no influence, or only a marginal influence, on the conduct of the war.<sup>36</sup>

Regurgitating the official line, Shabtai Teveth hotly denies that the Jewish leaders were involved in collusion or had an ally on the Arab side. He coyly admits that "Israel and Jordan did maintain a dialogue" but goes on to argue that "at most theirs was an understanding of convenience. . . . There was nothing in such an understanding to suggest collusion designed to deceive a third party, in this case the Palestinian Arabs."<sup>37</sup> Again, anyone who believes this will believe anything. If all that transpired between Israel and Jordan was a dialogue, then it was a rather curious kind of a dialogue because it lasted thirty years, because it was clandestine, because it was directed against a common rival, and because money changed hands. That the dialogue broke down between May and August 1948 is not in doubt. But surely, if one takes a long-term view of this relationship, a strategic partnership, if not an unholy alliance, would be a more appropriate term than a dialogue.

Teveth is evidently so wedded to the doctrine of Israel's immaculate conception that he is impervious to any evidence that contradicts it. He has made up his mind, and he does not want to be confused by the facts. His article provides a fine example of the absurd lengths to which the Old Historians are capable of going to suppress unpalatable truths about the way in which Israel came into the world. Judged by the rough standards

of the game of nations, the dalliance between the Zionists and the Hashemite king was neither extraordinary nor particularly reprehensible. Both sides acted in a pragmatic fashion to advance their own interests. A problem arises only as a result of the claim that Israel's conduct was based on morality rather than self-interest.

The relations between Jordan and Israel in the 1948 war were reviewed recently by Avraham Sela in a long article in *Middle Eastern Studies*. A careful examination of the secondary literature on this subject and close study of the Arabic sources make this a valuable contribution to the historiography of the 1948 war. It does not lead me, however, to revise any of the arguments I advanced in *Collusion across the Jordan*. Sela's thesis is that "the conditions and basic assumptions that had constituted the foundations of the unwritten agreement between Abdullah and the Jewish Agency regarding the partition of Palestine as early as the summer of 1946 were altered so substantially during the unofficial war (December 1947–May 1948) as to render that agreement antiquated and impracticable."<sup>38</sup>

I believe that, despite all the changes, the earlier accord and the long history of cooperation going back to the foundation of the Amirate of Transjordan in 1921 continued to exert some influence over the conduct of the two sides. Sela maintains that in the early part of the war the two sides, and especially the Israeli side, behaved according to the old adage "à la guerre comme à la guerre." Even if this is a valid conclusion regarding Israel, it is emphatically not valid, in my view, in relation to Jordan. Although the accord was no longer binding and contact was severed, each side, and especially Jordan, continued to pursue limited objectives and acted with restraint toward the other until the war ended. Although they became enemies at the height of the war, they remained, in Uri Bar-Joseph's apt phrase, the best of enemies.

In conclusion, Sela tells us that war is a complex and intricate phenomenon. I could not agree more. One reason for this complexity is that war involves both politics and the use of force. The Old Historiography deals mostly with the military side of the war. I tried to redress the balance by looking at the political side of the war and more particularly at the interplay between politics and strategy. Sela goes on to state: "The collusion myth implicitly assumes the possibility for both Zionist and Palestinian acceptance of the partition plan and its peaceful implementation."<sup>39</sup> I assume nothing of the kind. On the contrary, precisely because the Palestinians rejected partition I consider collaboration between Abdullah and the Jewish Agency to have been a reasonable and realistic strat-

egy for both sides. In other words, I accept that in the period 1947–49 Israel had no Palestinian option or any other Arab option save the Jordanian one. King Abdullah was the only Arab head of state who was willing to accept the principle of partition and to coexist peacefully with a Jewish state after the dust had settled. Between May and July of 1948, the two sides came to blows. From Abdullah's postwar vantage point, this was merely a *fitna*, a "family quarrel," and the Jews had started it. And after the initial outburst of violence both sides began to pull their punches, as one does in a family quarrel.

There remains the question of whether the term *collusion* is appropriate for describing the relations between Abdullah and the Jewish Agency and later the State of Israel. Some of the criticisms of my book were directed at its title rather than its substance. It was for this reason that for the abridged and revised paperback version of my book I opted for the more neutral title *The Politics of Partition*.<sup>40</sup> In the preface to the new edition, I explained that, although I had dropped the offensive word from the title, I was still of the opinion that the Israel-Jordan link involved at least some of the elements associated with collusion, as "it was held behind a thick veil of secrecy; its existence was hotly denied by the participants; it was directed against a third party; it involved more than a modicum of underhand scheming and plotting; and it was consciously and deliberately intended to frustrate the will of the international community, as expressed through the United Nations General Assembly, in favour of creating an independent Arab state in part of Palestine."<sup>41</sup> On reflection, I rather regret that I changed the title of my book. The original title was an apt one. *Collusion* is as good a word as any to describe the traffic between the Hashemite king and the Zionist movement during the period 1921–51, despite the violent interlude in the hot summer of 1948.

### **Arab War Aims**

Closely related to Israeli-Jordanian relations is the question of Arab war aims in 1948, a fifth bone of contention between the Old and New Historians. The question is: why did the Arab states invade Palestine with their regular armies the day the British Mandate expired and the State of Israel was proclaimed? The conventional Zionist answer is that the motive behind the invasion was to destroy the newly born Jewish state and throw the Jews into the sea. The reality was more complex.

It is true that all the Arab states, with the exception of Jordan, rejected the UN partition plan. It is true that the declared aim of the invasion was the liberation of Palestine. It is true that the invasion was accompanied by bloodcurdling rhetoric and threats to throw the Jews into the sea. It is true that in addition to the regular Arab armies and the mufti's Holy War Army various groups of volunteers arrived in Palestine, the most important of which was the Arab Liberation Army, sponsored by the Arab League and led by the Syrian adventurer Fawzi al-Qawuqji. More important, it is true that the military experts of the Arab League had worked out a unified plan for the invasion and that this plan was all the more dangerous for having had more limited and realistic objectives than those implied by the wild pan-Arab rhetoric.

But King Abdullah, who was given nominal command over all the Arab forces in Palestine, wrecked this plan by making last-minute changes. His objective in sending his army into Palestine was not to prevent the establishment of a Jewish state but to make himself master of the Arab part of Palestine, which meant preventing the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Since the Palestinians had done next to nothing to create an independent state, the Arab part of Palestine would have probably gone to Abdullah without all the scheming and plotting, but that is another matter. What is clear is that, under the command of Glubb Pasha, the Arab Legion made every effort to avert a head-on collision and, with the exception of one of two minor incidents, made no attempt to encroach on the territory allocated to the Jewish state by the UN cartographers.

There was no love lost between Abdullah and the other Arab rulers, who suspected him of being in cahoots with the enemy. Abdullah had always been something of a pariah in the rest of the Arab world, not least because of his friendship with the Jews. Syria and Lebanon felt threatened by his long-standing ambition to make himself master of Greater Syria. Egypt, the leader of the anti-Hashemite bloc within the Arab League, also felt threatened by Abdullah's plans for territorial aggrandizement in Palestine. King Farouk made his decision to intervene in Palestine at the last moment, and against the advice of his civilian and military advisers, at least in part in order to check the growth of his rival's power. There were thus rather mixed motives behind the invasion of Palestine. And there was no single Arab plan of action during the 1948 war. On the contrary, it was the inability of the Arabs to coordinate their diplomatic and military plans that was in large measure responsible for the disaster that overwhelmed them.

The one purpose that the Arab invasion did not serve was the ostensible one of coming to the rescue of the embattled Palestinians. Nowhere was the disparity between pan-Arab rhetoric and the reality greater than in relation to the Palestinian Arabs.<sup>42</sup> The reality was one of national selfishness, with each Arab state trying to carve out chunks of Palestine for itself. What was supposed to be a holy war against the Jews quickly turned into a general land grab. Division and discord within the ranks of the ramshackle Arab coalition deepened with every successive defeat. Israel's leaders knew about these divisions and exploited them to the full. Thus, they launched an offensive against the Egyptian army in October and again in December 1948 in the confident expectation that their old friend in Amman would keep out. The Old Historians, by concentrating almost exclusively on the military operations of 1948, ended up with the familiar picture of an Arab-Israeli war in which all the Arabs were united by a single purpose and all were bent on the defeat and destruction of Israel. The political lineup during the war was slightly more complicated.

### **The Elusive Peace**

Last but not least of the contentious questions in the debate between the Old and New Historians is the question of why peace proved unattainable in the aftermath of the first Arab Israeli War. At the core of the old version lies the notion of Arab intransigence. According to this version, Israel strove indefatigably toward a peaceful settlement of the conflict, but all its efforts foundered on the rocks of Arab intransigence. The New Historians believe that postwar Israel was more intransigent than the Arab states and that it consequently bears a larger share of the responsibility for the political deadlock that followed the formal end of hostilities.<sup>43</sup>

Evidence to back the new interpretation comes mainly from the files of the Israeli Foreign Ministry. These files burst at the seams with evidence of Arab peace feelers and Arab readiness to negotiate with Israel from September 1948 onward. The two key issues in dispute were refugees and borders. Each of the neighboring Arab states was prepared to negotiate with Israel directly and to bargain about both refugees and borders.

King Abdullah proposed an overall political settlement with Israel in return for certain territorial concessions, particularly a land corridor to link Jordan with the Mediterranean, which would have enabled him to

counter Arab criticisms of a separate peace with Israel. Col. Husni Za‘im, who took power in Syria in March 1949 and was overthrown four months later, offered Israel full peace with an exchange of ambassadors, normal economic relations, and the resettlement of three hundred thousand Palestinian refugees in Syria in return for an adjustment of the boundary between the two countries through the middle of Lake Tiberias.<sup>44</sup> King Farouk of Egypt demanded the cession of Gaza and a substantial strip of desert bordering on Sinai as his price for a *de facto* recognition of Israel. All three Arab rulers displayed remarkable pragmatism in their approach to negotiations with the Jewish state. They were even anxious to preempt one another because they assumed that whoever settled up with Israel first would get the best terms. Zaim openly declared his ambition to be the first Arab leader to make peace with Israel.

In each case, though for slightly different reasons, David Ben-Gurion considered the price being asked for peace too high. He was ready to conclude peace on the basis of the status quo; he was unwilling to proceed to a peace that involved more than minuscule Israeli concessions on refugees or borders. Ben-Gurion, as his diary reveals, considered that the armistice agreements with the neighboring Arab states met Israel’s essential needs for recognition, security, and stability.<sup>45</sup> He knew that for formal peace agreements Israel would have to pay by yielding substantial tracts of territory and by permitting the return of a substantial number of Palestinian refugees, and he did not consider this a price worth paying. Whether Ben-Gurion made the right choice is a matter of opinion. That he had a choice is now undeniable.

The controversy surrounding the elusive peace is examined in a recent book by Itamar Rabinovich, the former rector of Tel Aviv University and one of Israel’s leading experts on modern Arab politics. His account of the early talks between Israel and its neighbors is informative, scholarly, and fair-minded. The title of the book implies that the failure of these talks was not inevitable and that there was another road leading to peace—the road not taken. But the book does not advance any thesis, nor does it engage directly in the debate between the Old and the New Historians. Rabinovich prefers to remain above the battle. So reluctant is he to impute shame or assign blame that his book ends without an explicit conclusion. All he would say is that “the choices of 1948–49 were made by Arabs, Israelis, Americans and others. The credit and responsibility for them belong to all.”<sup>46</sup> You cannot get much blander than that. Rabinovich’s implicit conclusion, however, is that because of the instability of the Arab regimes Ben-Gurion was justified in his refusal to assume any

political risks for the sake of peace. Yet in every crucial respect Rabinovich's account undermines the claim of the Old Historians that Israel encountered total Arab intransigence and confirms the revisionist argument that Israeli intransigence was a much more serious obstacle on the road to peace.

## Conclusion

This essay is concerned with the old Zionist version of the first Arab Israeli War and with the challenge to this version posed by the New Historiography. My conclusion is that this version is deeply flawed and needs to be radically revised in light of the new information that is now available. To put it bluntly, this version is little more than the propaganda of the victors. The debate between the Old and the New Historiography, moreover, is not one of merely historical interest. It cuts to the very core of Israel's image of itself. It is for this reason that the battle of the historians has excited such intense popular interest and stirred such strong political passions.

The debate about 1948 between the Old and New Historians resembles the American debate on the origins of the Cold War. That debate evolved in stages. During the 1950s, the so-called traditionalist view held sway. According to this view, Soviet expansionism was responsible for the outbreak of the Cold War while American policy was essentially reactive and defensive. Then, in the context of the Vietnam War and the crisis of American self-confidence that accompanied it, a new school of thought emerged, a revisionist school of mostly younger, left-wing scholars. According to this school, the Cold War was the result of the onward march of American capitalism, and it was the Soviet Union that reacted defensively. Following the opening of the archives, a third school of thought emerged, the postrevisionist school. A reexamination of the assumptions and arguments of both traditionalists and revisionists in the light of new evidence gradually yielded a postrevisionist synthesis. The hallmark of postrevisionism is not to allocate blame to this or that party but to try to understand the dynamics of the conflict that we call the Cold War.

The debate about the origins of the Arab-Israeli conflict seems to be following a similar pattern. A traditionalist school, consisting of policymakers and historians close to the political establishment, laid the entire blame for the 1948 war and its consequences at the door of the



Arabs. Then, following the opening of the archives, a new school of mostly left-wing historians began to reinterpret many of the events surrounding the creation of the State of Israel. These historians take a much more critical view of Israel's conduct in the years 1947–49 and place on her a larger share of the blame for the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem and for the continuing political impasse in the Middle East. The debate between the Old and New Historians is bitter and acrimonious, and it is conducted in a highly charged political atmosphere. It is melancholy to have to add that there is no sign yet of the emergence of a postrevisionist synthesis. Battles between historians, like real battles, evidently have to run their course.

## NOTES

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2. *Ibid.*, 35.

3. Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities* (New York, 1987), 8.

4. *Ibid.*, 10.

5. Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949* (Cambridge, 1988).

6. Ilan Pappé, *Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948–51* (London, 1988).

7. Avi Shlaim, *Collusion across the Jordan: King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement, and the Partition of Palestine* (Oxford, 1988).

8. Israel Baer, *Bitahon Israel: Etmol, Hayom, Ma'har* [Israel's Security: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow] (Tel Aviv, 1966).

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15. Parliament of Iraq, *Taqirir Lajnat al-Tahqiq al-Niyabiya fi Qadiyat Filastin* [Report of the Iraqi Parliamentary Committee Investigations of the Palestine Affair] (Baghdad, 1949).

16. See the references in Walid Khalidi, “The Arab Perspective,” in *The End of the Palestine Mandate*, ed. William Roger Louis and Robert W. Stookey (London, 1986).

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18. Benny Morris, “The New Historiography: Israel Confronts Its Past,” *Tikkun* 3 (November–December 1988), 19–23, 99–102.

19. One historian of Zionism, Anita Shapira, was prompted by Menachem Begin’s claim to embark on a reexamination of the defensive ethos of Zionism throughout the prestate period. See Tom Segev, “The Anguish of Poor Samson,” *HaAretz*, 16 October 1992; and Anita Shapira, *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force, 1881–1948* (Oxford, 1992), vii.

20. Shabtai Teveth, “Charging Israel with Original Sin,” *Commentary*, September 1989.

21. *Ibid.*, 25.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Benny Morris, *HaAretz*, 9 May 1989; “The Eel and History: A Reply to Shabtai Teveth,” *Tikkun*, 5, no. 1 (January–February 1990); *1948 and After*, 27–29.

24. See my letters to the editor, *Commentary*, February and July 1990.

25. Pappé, *Britain*; Shlaim, *Collusion*; Avi Shlaim, “Britain and the Arab-Israeli War of 1948,” *JPS* 16, no. 4 (summer 1987).

26. See Flapan, *Birth*, myth 6, especially the table with three different estimates of troop numbers on page 196; and Morris, *1948 and After*, 13–16.

27. Morris, *Birth*, 286.

28. In addition to the articles in *HaAretz* and *Commentary*, Teveth published “The Palestine Arab Refugee Problem and Its Origins,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 26, no. 2 (April 1990): 214–49.

29. Benny Morris, *HaAretz*, 23 April and 1 May 1992.

30. Avraham Sela, *HaAretz*, 4 and 11 October 1991.

31. See, for example, Michael Palumbo, “What Happened to Palestine? The Revisionists Revisited,” *Link*, 23, no. 4, (September–October 1990); Rashid Khalidi, “Revisionist Views of the Modern History of Palestine, 1948,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 10, no. 4 (autumn 1988); and Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, “The War of 1948: Disputed Perspectives and Outcomes,” *JPS* 18, no. 2 (winter 1989).

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34. Dan Schueftan, *Optz'ya Yardenit: Israel, Yarden, Vehapalestinim* [Jordanian Option: Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinians] (Tel Aviv, 1986); Uri Bar-Joseph, *The Best of Enemies: Israel and Transjordan in the War of 1948* (London, 1987).
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36. See, for example, the author's interview with Yigael Yadin, acting chief of staff in 1948, in Shlaim, *Collusion*, 236.
37. Teveth, "Charging," 28.
38. Avraham Sela, "Transjordan, Israel, and the 1948 War: Myth, Historiography, and Reality," *Middle Eastern Studies* 28, no. 4 (October 1992): 627.
39. *Ibid.*, 680.
40. Avi Shlaim, *The Politics of Partition: King Abdullah, the Zionists, and Palestine, 1921–1951* (Oxford, 1990).
41. *Ibid.*, viii.
42. See, for example, Avi Shlaim, "The Rise and Fall of the All-Palestine Government in Gaza," *JPS* 20, no. 1, (autumn 1990).
43. Flapan, *Birth*, myth 7; Shlaim, *Collusion*; Morris, *1948 and After*, 22–27; Ilan Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israel Conflict, 1947–1951* (London, 1992), chaps. 8–10.
44. Avi Shlaim, "Husni Zaim and the Plan to Resettle Palestinian Refugees in Syria," *JPS* 15, no. 4, (summer 1986).
45. David Ben-Gurion, *Yoman ha-Milhama* [War Diary], vol. 3, ed. Gershon Rivlin and Elhanan Orren (Tel Aviv, 1982), 993.
46. Itamar Rabinovich, *The Road Not Taken: Early Arab-Israeli Negotiations* (Oxford, 1991), viii.

*Yossi Ben-Artzi*

## **The Contribution of Historical Geography to the Historiography of the Establishment of Israel**

### **Historiographic Background**

A century of Zionist strivings to create a Jewish polity in Eretz-Israel and half a century of Israeli statehood have spawned a stratified historiography.<sup>1</sup> The events, typically enough, were recorded in both real time and after the fact. The first instance produced a literature of memoirs and diaries; the second resulted in volumes of documentation and the development of research by both a founding generation and a generation of critics representing historiographic revisionism.

As might be expected, the historiography of the State of Israel, especially as regards its early years, is still in its incipient stages, given that the archives were opened and documents released for the 1950s and 1960s only recently. This access to primary sources permitted Israeli history to be written by a generation removed from its making and committed to its research. In this sense, the term *New Historians* reflects neither a New History, methodologically, nor New Historians, as concerns changing generations, but simply the beginning of professional history. It signals a transition from a generation of writers who were themselves involved in the historical events or who relied on secondary sources to a generation of writers laying the foundations for a historiography based on primary sources.

In effect, historical revisionism per se is still a few years down the road, although its thrust can already be seen in the present historiography. This thrust, evident in the public furor sparked by researchers of the past decade, may be attributed to the relatively short time that has passed since the period under study and the lingering impact of those days on Israel's current events and problems. The ink on their pages not yet dry, historians of the state period have thus, and not surprisingly, found themselves at the hub of public debate, professional polemics, and sharp personal clashes.

The growing number of studies and the ensuing reactions have produced numerous essay collections that examine the historiography of the period from a perspective of “zero time.” This phenomenon is unique. Historiographic review generally takes place after enough research has accumulated and enough time has elapsed to allow for a variety of fresh historical or methodological approaches. In Israel’s case, the nature of the research, the public, and the events seem to be organically linked, significantly shrinking the interval between the writing and evaluation of history. Thus, the past decade has seen a substantial number of historiographic anthologies on the rise of the State of Israel, the preceding decade (touching on World War II and the Holocaust), and the first decade of statehood.

One example, *Zionism: A Contemporary Controversy*, published in 1996, contains no less than twenty polemical articles on Zionism and post-Zionism in relation to the creation of the State of Israel.<sup>2</sup> It was followed a year later by another collection—*From Vision to Revision*—which, like the symposium on which it was based, was meant to examine historiographically a century of Zionism but focused instead on episodes surrounding the British Mandate and the establishment of the state.<sup>3</sup> Some of the contributing authors participated in both anthologies and the collateral public debates.

A different approach is represented by Mordechai Bar-On, who dates the start of the historiography of the State of Israel to early statehood. During and after the actual events, reports were written and research was begun on the 1948 war.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, entire journals are devoted to the polemics on the state’s creation, and the subject is treated in dozens of books, hundreds of articles, and the intense public discourse in the media. Taken all together, they attest to the central position occupied by the historiography on the State of Israel and its establishment, including the historiography of Eretz-Israel and Zionism. And all this has developed in the very brief period since the writing of professional history on these subjects began.

The academic disciplines chiefly involved in this historiography are history (political and social) and sociology, with many points of contact and mutual stimulation. This can be seen in the volumes just mentioned, in *Studies in Zionism, Theory and Criticism, Cathedra*, and *Israeli Sociology*; and other collections. The participants in the discourse come mostly from the disciplines of (Zionist) history, sociology and, to a certain extent, political science. Contributions by Israeli geographers have been

steadily increasing, mainly from the subdiscipline of historical geography, though also from other subfields.

### **Disciplinary Setting: (Historical) Geography in Israel**

Since the first half of the twentieth century, modern geography has been forced to make a radical adjustment to the advancing frontiers of knowledge in the natural sciences, the humanities, and the social sciences. The regional paradigm that ruled geography from the end of the nineteenth century was marked by attempts to integrate knowledge that tried to explain the landscape features of different areas by means of local, continental, and global criteria. To this end, geographers availed themselves of information in the natural and earth sciences, humanities (history, languages), and social sciences (economics, statistics, demography). Tremendous strides in all these disciplines, particularly in the social sciences, caused geographers to delve deeper into their own subdisciplines—physical geography, human geography, settlement geography, urban geography, transport, and the like—so much so that there was a centrifugal effect as scholars began to cluster around three separate axes. Physical geographers gathered around the earth sciences (geology, climate, land, soils, water), human geographers around the social sciences and the quantitative revolution that has come to characterize them, and a smaller stream chose to remain with the humanities, particularly history, to explain the landscapes of the past and the geographical conditions of different historical periods.

Historical geography owes its beginnings to the researches of Clifford Darby in England in the 1920s. The field flourished, however, mainly in the 1970s, a quasi reaction to the quantitative revolution and the modular approach of geographers in the social sciences.

In the main, historical geography is distinguished by the nature of its sources, as well as its research goals, which have been variously defined by different scholars. Essentially, it studies a geographically significant historical period or process. The historical geographer treats the landscape of the past just as the geographer of the present treats the existing landscape; however, whereas the latter is able to rely on substantial contemporary data or to create the necessary data (surveys, mapping, or measurements), the former is restricted to the available sources of the period under study. As a result, historical geography drew nearer history as

a supporting discipline, using the tools of historians: documents, papers, maps, data, and so forth. But, while the methods are the historian's, the approach is the geographer's: an emphasis on findings that help to reconstruct the landscape of a given era. The geographer lends historical sources a geographic interpretation: settlement and its characteristics, the cultural landscape and its design, and the connection of changes in the landscape to historical processes. In contrast to the historian, the geographer of the past not only will deal with documents and papers but will prefer maps, photographs, pictures, drawings, building plans, travel accounts, and so on. Often he or she will also go into the field to study the remains of the past landscape and the role that these play in the present landscape—whether this role is functional or inert, whether the remains perpetuate the past or belong to it.

Schematically, the methodology of historical geography may be seen as a segment of knowledge derived from overlapping segments of the two larger circles comprising its parent disciplines. Drawing on materials from both, it attempts to reconstruct a new, integrated picture of a bygone landscape, thereby contributing, in turn, to both larger circles: to geography an understanding of the past, to history an understanding of the landscape in which historical processes took place. The research was of course influenced by methodological and historiographical developments and branched out in three main approaches.

Horizontal or “cross-sectional”: creating a geographical picture of a given past period

Vertical or “long-sectional”: tracing changes and processes in the landscape over time

Visual: researching remains of the past in the landscape and their applied modern expression, essentially contributing to the preservation of sites (akin to archaeology)

Historical geography has been considerably influenced also by post-modern methodologies (feminist, Marxist, structuralist, semiotic, and others), which in the past two decades have made it, too, a multifaceted and heterogeneous discipline.

All these developments were mirrored by Israeli progress in the field, which was pioneered by Yehoshua Ben-Arieh in his study of nineteenth-century Eretz-Israel and Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> Although prior to Ben-Arieh, geographers such as David Amiran, Moshe Brawer, Itzhak Shatner, and Yehuda

Karmon had also dealt with historical aspects, Ben-Arieh created *ex nihilo* a school of historical geography that was distinct from both Israeli geography and historical geography abroad. He in fact helped mold three generations of students and researchers who have determined the boundaries and characteristics of Israeli historical geography.<sup>6</sup>

Israeli historical geographers use more or less the same methods and materials as other scholars. They prefer primary, archival sources alongside cartographic sources, which are available for Eretz-Israel mostly from the nineteenth century on. As for fields of research, inroads have thus far been made into several major subjects. Within the historical periods of the nineteenth century and the British Mandate, these include such diverse aspects of Jewish settlement in Eretz-Israel as land acquisition, settlement forms, urban development, agriculture, and settlement institutions.<sup>7</sup> The present generation of historical geographers has moved on to topics current in international research: women, minorities, the establishment, landscapes, and more.<sup>8</sup>

Nor, as noted, has the contribution of Israeli historical geography been limited to purely geographical knowledge. It has extended the scope of historical research on Eretz-Israel by treating topics ignored by historians, by using typically geographic research sources, and by revealing the actual landscapes of past periods. This has resulted in a better understanding of daily life in bygone centuries, an acquaintance with the material culture, a picture of the past landscape, and original insights into major historical processes. Instances of the latter pertain to determining borders; population growth and areal spread; land acquisition processes; rural settlement and urban expansion; modernization of construction, agriculture, and preparation of infrastructure; changes in the traditional village; and so on.

These insights have enabled historical geographers to join the scholarly and public discourse on major events and qualitative issues such as the essence of Zionism and its activity in Eretz-Israel, relations between Jews and Arabs, the formation of the Jewish entity in Eretz-Israel, and so on.

The contribution of Israeli geography, and specifically of historical geography, to the historiography of the State of Israel, its establishment and initial development, has not received its due in the publications noted here, nor has it enjoyed the same recognition as the inputs of history, sociology, and political science.

In general, Israeli historical geography and the historiographic discourse intersect at six main points.



The population of Eretz-Israel: growth, distribution, and changes

The borders of Eretz-Israel and the State of Israel

Land and settlement prior to 1948 (rural and urban)

Geographic aspects of the 1948 war

Immigrant absorption, population distribution, and settlement prior to 1967 (and after)

The historiographic polemic itself

The remainder of the essay considers these issues.

### **Historical Geography Research Areas Pertaining to the Establishment of the State of Israel**

#### 1. The Population of Eretz-Israel

The question of Eretz-Israel's population prior to Zionist settlement (which began in 1882) and during the Mandate has aroused sharp controversy not only politically but also in demographic, geographic, and historical geographic research. The controversy may be phrased as the "eternal" theoretical question of whom the land belongs to or who are/were its "local" inhabitants. This question is no longer relevant. The country now has some nine million inhabitants. Nevertheless, so long as the political conflict remains unresolved the issue continues to feature in both political and media debates and confrontations: how many inhabitants lived in Eretz-Israel in the decisive modern periods, that is, before the Jews came to create a new entity, and under the British Mandate, when plans were drawn up for the land's partition? Related aspects are the origins of the Arab population in Eretz-Israel in modern times and the time of their settlement in the country.

As is well known, at the start of the British Mandate and according to its 1922 census, the population of Eretz-Israel was approximately 752,000, comprising some 590,000 Muslims (78.5 percent), 72,000 Christians (9.5 percent), 84,000 Jews (11 percent), and others (1 percent).

At the end of the Mandate, the population of the entire country was estimated at about 1.8 million inhabitants, of whom 630,000 were Jews (about 35 percent). Thus, between 1922 and 1948, the Jewish population

grew at an accelerated rate, mainly due to immigration (about 430,000 people).

Since no comprehensive censuses were conducted by the Ottoman Empire, the issue of population size in the nineteenth century remains academic. Commonly accepted estimates put the country's population in the early nineteenth century at about 250,000, the great majority (about 80 percent), Muslim. On the eve of Zionist settlement in 1882, there were in Palestine west of the Jordan between 350,000 and 450,000 inhabitants, about 10 percent of them Jews. By 1914, the overall figure had risen to about 750,000, about 85,000 (11 percent), Jews. This population growth was due mainly to migration from nearby regions such as (today's) Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, as well as from Europe; a small percentage stemmed from natural increase.

Without going into the diverse research on the topic, suffice it to say that the subject developed into a full-blown historiographic conflict in the 1980s and 1990s, when the Palestinian question appeared on the world agenda as a political issue. In 1984, Joan Peters's controversial book was published.<sup>9</sup> This work presented the "Zionist" argument that the Land of Israel had been sparsely populated, mostly "empty," until the start of the Jewish settlement and its ensuing development and modernization led to a large increase in the population of the Arabs, who were drawn to the hubs of growth. Thus, according to Peters, the great majority of Palestine's Arabs arrived in the country at the onset of, or only slightly before, Jewish-Zionist settlement. These arguments crowned the accumulation of much sundry data and sources put together with little scholarly discipline. Their purpose, of course, was to counter the Arab argument of ownership of Palestine. Peters was neither the first nor the last to try to substantiate the well-known Zionist phrase "a land without a people for a people without a land." Her book provoked fierce public debate, though not a single scholar sided with her; on the contrary, Israeli researchers panned the book and its methods and do not relate to it as a source worth citing.<sup>10</sup>

In those years, the historiographic debate encompassed a number of historians and demographers, who published a great deal of data, tables, and in-depth historical demographic discussions on the subject.<sup>11</sup> The geographers involved adopted the profession's basic inductive method: they plowed through most of the relevant sources, culling information on the distribution of settlement in Eretz-Israel at various periods in the nineteenth century. Their sources included travel literature, official demographic figures, tax figures, maps, reports of consuls, surveys and estimates,

and wherever possible (principally for the Mandate period) lists of settlements and official demographic censuses.

The main researchers involved were Yehoshua Ben-Arieh and David Grossman. Ben-Arieh strove to reconstruct as fully as possible the settlement landscape at the levels of district and region, village and town, for Christians, Muslims, and Jews, respectively. With the help of his students, he compiled long lists of villages in every subdistrict (*qadha*) and district (*sanjaq*), as well as lists of towns and urban settlements, and juxtaposed the data with the figures for population growth in various periods from the beginning of the nineteenth century until the British census of 1922. The results of this meticulous work, based on every available source, were published as a series of six articles on each of the four *sanjaqs* (Acre, Nablus, Jerusalem, and Gaza) and two summary essays published in different books.<sup>12</sup> In a number of additional articles, Ben-Arieh examined Jerusalem and other nineteenth-century urban settlements in Eretz-Israel.

This research provides a marvelous example of historical geography's contribution to the controversial historiography of Eretz-Israel. Historians and demographers tended to work with large units of information on the macrolevel, using tables to explain pan-Ottoman or pan-Middle Eastern processes. In contrast, Ben-Arieh chose the classic geographic method of gleaning data on the microlevel from every relevant source and assembling them into general tables and summary maps both at intermediate levels and in an overall picture of Eretz-Israel. This full, transparent presentation of data, free of deliberate bias, can serve as a reliable foundation for historiographic discussions and even political polemics on the sensitive subject. In general, Ben-Arieh determined that Eretz-Israel in the mid-1870s had a population of some 350,000 permanent inhabitants, dispersed in some seven hundred settlements, with an additional nomadic population of some 20,000 to 30,000. The country was not empty, but it could certainly be defined as sparsely populated and able to absorb many more settlers, as indeed it did in due course. The prevailing Western image of an empty land stemmed from the large expanses of terrain with few sedentary dwellers and small settlements. This image, exaggerated by Western travelers, was also expedient for Jewish purposes.

David Grossman addressed Arab rural settlement and population in Eretz-Israel from the sixteenth century on with an emphasis on the nineteenth century.<sup>13</sup> He studied the country area by area, analyzing the relative size of villages given the restricted expansion opportunities

under Turkish land laws and noting the formation of “daughter villages” as offshoots of a major one. He produced a comprehensive, plausible map of rural settlement in Palestine that illustrated patterns of landownership, utilizing a particularist-inductive analysis that had not been attempted by historians.

These two scholars contributed decisively to the historiographic discourse, providing an understanding of population size and distribution in Eretz-Israel’s past. Neither eclectic nor polemical, their approach both reconstructed the past and created tools with which to comprehend it: data, maps, and explication. While their findings may still be subject to ideological or scientific discussion, the finely detailed picture they painted cannot be overlooked.

## 2. Borders and Partition

The question of borders is a highly charged issue, borders of both the State of Israel and, prior to the state, Palestine under the British Mandate, as well as the proposed partition between Jews and Arabs. The subject remains relevant, as Israel’s permanent borders, internally (with the Palestinians) and externally (with Syria and Lebanon) have yet to be determined by international agreement.

As is well known, the borders of Eretz-Israel/Palestine, as a political unit in modern history, were first fixed at the end of World War I. Earlier, in 1906, the country’s southern boundary with Egypt had been agreed between Britain and the Ottoman Empire. The northern and northeastern boundaries, with Lebanon and Syria, were also set by Britain, now the mandatory for Palestine, and France, the mandatory for the Levant. These two powers drew an arbitrary line between the Mediterranean Sea and the Hasbani River, dividing Palestine and Lebanon chiefly along the watershed of the Jordan and Litani rivers. As a result, south of this line there were only a few Shi’ite settlements; most were Sunni, Christian, and Druze. The Jewish *moshavot* (early farming communities featuring some mutual cooperation) in the Hula Valley and the north, particularly Metulla, were also taken into consideration and were included in the area of Eretz-Israel. The border with Syria was set at the foot of the Golan mountains so that all the water sources, especially the whole of Lake Kinneret (the Sea of Galilee) and the entire Jordan River, would be within Palestinian rather than Syrian territory, thereby ensuring control of the water supply.

Britain alone determined the border between (western) Palestine

and (eastern) Transjordan, creating from scratch the entity that we know today as the [Hashemite] Kingdom of Jordan. The frontier was demarcated in 1922, along (from north to south) the natural course of the Yarmuk and Jordan rivers, the midline of the Dead Sea, and the line connecting the lowest points in the 'Arava Valley with the head of the Gulf of Eilat ('Aqaba). The borders of Eretz-Israel (Palestine—Land of Israel) were thus determined by the British mandatory with the country's inhabitants having no real say in the matter.

Since, by their very nature, borders are “a matter of geography,” it is hardly surprising that geographers were drawn to them. Moshe Brawer and Gideon Biger were the principal geographers to address the subject. Brawer, like his father, Y. A. Brawer, specialized in producing atlases and leaned toward political and rural geography.<sup>14</sup> His cartographic expertise led to his appointment as a reporter who covered the 1949 armistice negotiations with the Arabs. The combination of professional specialization, historical research, and hands-on experience made Brawer a recognized scientific authority on the country's borders, as reflected by numerous articles, as well as a book,<sup>15</sup> which first addresses the question of how the borders had been determined between Britain and France, Britain and Turkey, and Britain as the mandatory for Palestine, dividing the country between eastern Transjordan and western Eretz-Israel. Against this background, Brawer expounds on the borders drawn at the armistice agreements, making two key points. The first is the almost perfect congruence between the mandatory borders and the borders finalized between Israel and Egypt, and Israel and Jordan, in the armistice agreements, even though the respective borders had been drawn at different times and by different parties. The earlier borders had long been recognized as international boundaries, and recognized international boundaries, it would seem, are not easily changed.

The second point relates to the geographic pattern of settlement: the extent to which the border demarcators considered—and affected—the needs and wishes of villages and inhabitants, the ethnic element (the northern border), and the human element (the division of villages in 1949). By providing the necessary geographic background, Brawer contributed significantly to an understanding of the phenomenon of “infiltration” in early statehood.

Following Brawer, Gideon Biger delved deeper into the historical geographic background and with the help of maps and relevant documents set out, in a series of articles and a recent book, the manner in which Palestine's international boundaries had been demarcated since

Turkish times.<sup>16</sup> In so doing, he furnished the international context for the determination of the mandatory borders, which is not only important per se but still relevant today.

Another border question relates to the political partition between Jews and Arabs. In this field, the literature is rich and diverse, historians having dealt with such topics as the political setting, international and British aspects, the Jewish-Arab dispute, internal Jewish conflicts, and internal Arab conflicts.<sup>17</sup>

The question of partition, which to this day has not been implemented, has benefited from treatment by researchers in a range of disciplines, resulting in a variegated literature. Scant attention has been paid, however, to the geographic aspects of partition apart from the work of Biger and, primarily, Yossi Katz.<sup>18</sup>

Katz published a series of articles (summarized in a book) on the practical aspects of settlement in which he shows that the Jewish Agency accepted the partition principle on the basis of the proposals of the Peel Commission and its successors, a principle that has never been put into practice.

He sheds light on the variety of alternative partition proposals that the Jewish Agency prepared, which included a broad array of derivative issues: the division of Jerusalem, population transfer by agreement, the status of the Arab minority in the Jewish state, the structure of the regime in the Jewish state, and of course wide-ranging settlement plans in various regions of the country, including land acquisition, preparation of the infrastructure for water and roads, and allocation of land for settlement.

Such thorough preparation, in Katz's view, helped shape Zionist policy in the 1940s in anticipation of the state's establishment and the 1947 partition plan. His contribution to the historiographic discourse on partition and "transfer" is thus not limited to a presentation of the facts; it suggests that partition be viewed as a leitmotif dictating elements of Zionist policy in the decade preceding statehood. To some extent thereby, he aligns himself with Benny Morris on the connection between the transfer plans of those years (1937–38) and their seeming materialization in the War of Independence.<sup>19</sup> While there is a huge difference between the "transfer by agreement" of which Katz speaks and the creation of the refugee problem, which, according to Morris, occurred without either a guiding hand or a definite plan, Katz reinforces Morris's reading of events, highlighting its similarity to the earlier Jewish Agency plans and policies.<sup>20</sup>

### 3. Land Purchase and Settlement prior to 1947

Israeli historiography has devoted much time and effort to the question of land and Jewish settlement prior to statehood, especially in the context of the Arab-Jewish confrontation during the British Mandate. More than three generations of researchers have examined the issues of land, ownership, settlement, and settlement features and the impact of all these on Eretz-Israel and its Arab inhabitants, yet, there is still room for quite a few basic studies and certainly for discussion.

From the dawn of the Zionist movement, and even before, Jewish national aspirations were marked by a drive to “return to the soil.”<sup>21</sup> The new national identity was to be formed by Jews reverting to a “healthy, normal” existence, living off agriculture in rural communities. Thus, from the start of Zionism’s practical work in the country through the establishment of the State of Israel, supreme importance was attached to land acquisition and agricultural settlement. Most of the obtainable land (whether from the government or private owners) was to be settled as massively as possible. This was basic both normatively and in terms of political goals. Dozens of books from various disciplines, including history, sociology, political science, and law, have been written on the question of land, land acquisition, and the different systems and forms of settlement created.<sup>22</sup>

Since land and settlement draw on classic geographical elements such as maps, measurements, considerations of location, accessibility, physical planning, and all the other spatial facets, the subject fell naturally within the purview of historical geography. Equally germane to the historical geographic approach is the development of the cultural settlement landscape (the genesis of landscape). Israeli geography is thus closely bound up with the major issues of the historiography of settlement and has made a decisive contribution to the historiographic discussion on the questions of land acquisition and rural and urban settlement.

Apart from Yehoshua Ben-Arieh, whose work broadly covered this field too, the subject at its formative stage was addressed by Shalom Reichman. Unfortunately, his work was cut short by his untimely death. Reichman, a geographer with a predilection for economics and planning, explored the roots of Israel’s physical planning. Finding it necessary to clarify the basic instruments of planning, namely, land and settlement, he set out to trace the original design of Zionist policy on regional land preferences and the physical planning of Jewish space. His study, *From Foothold to Settled Territory*,<sup>23</sup> consisting of a central essay and wide-rang-

ing historical documents, sheds light on the constitution of Jewish space in Eretz-Israel prior to statehood: the reasons for preferring particular sections of land at different periods, the input of political factors, geopolitical considerations in the preference for certain lands in other periods, the creation of the so-called N-shaped spatial pattern of the Jewish settlement map (up the coastal plain, across the Jezreel Valley, and up the Hula Valley), and the attempts to diverge from it.<sup>24</sup>

Ben-Arieh, and Reichman after him, created the conceptual underpinnings of the geographical approach to historical research into settlement and land acquisition, which spawned three generations of students and researchers, who in turn cultivated other students. Among the first generation, Ruth Kark stands out. She pioneered studies on Jewish interests in the Negev from 1880 to 1948,<sup>25</sup> before moving on to aspects of urban settlement in Jaffa and Jerusalem.<sup>26</sup> These basic studies yielded a series of substantive works on processes of land acquisition in various regions and periods, the stress being on geographic preferences in terms of area, locale and placement, as well as the feasibility of farming, construction, and so on.<sup>27</sup>

The conceptualization of acquisition processes enabled Kark to take a broad historiographic view and abstract insightful generalities. For example, she suggested linking “land, man, and divinity” in the traditional cultures of Eretz-Israel and elsewhere, and she extended the time span to include lands for sale in Eretz-Israel from the mid-nineteenth century to the middle of the Mandate period. Going beyond Zionist activity, she examined pre-Zionist land purchases and the land dealings of non-Zionist entities such as missionaries, Christian communities, and others.<sup>28</sup>

The second generation of Ben-Arieh’s pupils to address the subject of land and settlement fundamentally changed the classic settlement historiography by focusing on pioneering sectors that had been inadequately illuminated and underrepresented. Yossi Ben-Artzi, Ran Aaronsohn, Zvi Shiloni, and Yossi Katz examined the roles of the *moshavot*, of the settlement work by Baron Edmond de Rothschild’s officials, and of private enterprise. Ben-Artzi’s and Aaronsohn’s studies on the *moshavot* and the baron’s administration revamped the historiographical approach.<sup>29</sup> The part played by the *moshavot* in the development of Jewish settlement in Eretz-Israel was duly acknowledged and has featured in studies published since.<sup>30</sup>

The new place accorded the First *Aliya* (immigration wave) (1882–1904) in settlement history—Hovevei Zion, Baron de Rothschild, the Jewish Colonization Association, the *moshavot*—stemmed from a more



balanced treatment. The same trend, to a large extent, marked also Zvi Shiloni's trailblazing work on the Jewish National Fund (JNF). His was the first scholarly and academic (as opposed to propaganda and biographic) attempt to deal with the most significant institution in land acquisition in Eretz-Israel and the changing landscapes in the prestate period.<sup>31</sup>

Yossi Katz has published dozens of essays and several books on land and Jewish settlement prior to statehood. His initial focus, the private sector, had been overlooked by settlement historiography, and he demonstrated its significant contribution to land purchases and the development of towns and villages before 1914.<sup>32</sup>

Studying the activities of the JNF, he found the period from 1936 to 1947 to have been decisive in charting the map of Jewish settlement prior to the partition plan. In those years, the JNF bought six hundred thousand dunams of land, about a third of all the Jewish-owned land in Eretz-Israel prior to 1947. In other studies, he shed light on Jewish holdings in the Hebron Hills and the Etzion Bloc, as well as the role of the religious kibbutz movement in the country's settlement.<sup>33</sup> Katz's work rests on an enormous compendium of historical documents with spatial-geographic and economic relevance.

The third generation of historical geographers took the knowledge accumulated on land and settlement and carried it forward to the Mandate period, illuminating "hidden corners" in the historiography. Irit Amit and Rina Idan shed light on settlement activity in the center of the country, the Hefer Valley and the southern Sharon Plain. They illustrated the enormous complexity of national and class factors—which enjoyed priority in Zionist settlement—combined with private capital and new forms of settlement in this part of the land.<sup>34</sup>

The data amassed by historical geographers have won them a central position in the research of the history of modern Jewish settlement. The past is no longer studied just in terms of political, social, economic, or cultural processes but also as changing landscapes due to intensive settlement activity: land purchase, physical planning, and land reclamation. This new focus has produced fresh insights not only into changing landscapes but also into historical processes themselves and the major factors affecting these processes. Historical geography has added a new dimension to the work of recent historians; the historiography of the Yishuv and of Eretz-Israel prior to 1947 has been advanced not only by historical research but to a large extent also by the historical geographic insights introduced.

#### 4. Research on the War of Independence and Its Impact

The War of Independence has remained a constant on the research agenda of various disciplines: military history, political history, social history, geography, political science, law, and so on. Both the period of the war and its course have provided fertile ground for a multilayered historiography. The impressive harvest of scholarly war literature in recent years, even though it has been seen as historical revisionism,<sup>35</sup> in fact constitutes the first stratum of professional, directed historical research.

Benny Morris's outstanding contribution to a fuller understanding of the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem has laid the foundations of Israeli historiography for this issue and led him to define himself and others as New Historians.<sup>36</sup> But Morris's study of the problem cannot be defined as pure history for—in contrast to other historical issues—it remains a major factor in the political relationship between Israel and the Palestinians.

Unlike the earlier research, which was based on memoirs and oral documentation, the new, broader research, as stated earlier, was made possible by the opening of official (institutional) and private archives. At this stage, geographers, too, could enter the picture, contributing their own viewpoint on the war and its effect on the start of statehood and the fashioning of the settlement landscape in the early decades.

In fact, an important study on the war had been produced in the late 1950s, and formed the basis of the historiography on the subject for an entire generation. In anticipation of the state's tenth anniversary in 1958, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) History Department, headed by Netanel Lorch, undertook an extensive research project aimed at producing an official volume on the war as part of the Book of the State project. This official history was never published because of internal conflicts, which recently were described by Bar-On. Instead two abbreviated works were issued: an internal booklet, "The War of Independence," intended as a methodological tool for military lecturers and commanders; and a book entitled *The History of the War of Establishment (Toldot Mu'hemet Hakomemiyut)* based on Lorch's work, although his name was omitted.<sup>37</sup>

Less well known is the preparatory study conducted by Yehoshua Ben-Arieh and Teddy Preuss, who mapped the battles of the War of Independence as background to the military-historical research just described. The only work of its kind done so far, this study was not published until recently, in a limited edition. Its value, in military historical terms, lies not only in its precise identification of the land battles but also

in its quantitative analysis of the war burden borne by various sectors and brigades.<sup>38</sup>

The first geographic treatment of the landscape changes caused by the war and its aftermath (1947–49) was Shalom Reichman's 1988 article on the partition of the land and the "*post-factum* transfer" of the Palestinian population from areas of the newly established state.<sup>39</sup> His article coincided with the initial books of the current wave of historiography on that period and received little notice, even though some of its formulations (such as *post-factum* transfer) are no less caustic than those of the New Historians. Reichman presented the shift in settlement policy from spatial-regional planning (settlement blocks), which was suited to the prewar land divisions, to a spatial policy adapted to the needs of state, covering far larger areas and including the exploitation of abandoned "Arab space" for Israeli spatial distribution, immigrant absorption, and agricultural production.

His geographic viewpoint rested partly on primary sources and partly on the diaries of Yosef Weitz; Benny Morris did likewise at precisely the same time.<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, Reichman passed away in 1992 before he had managed to flesh out his research or ground his outlook in the spatial changes caused by the war. His assertion that the political and settlement institutions had indeed accepted partition and anticipated the country's division from the end of the 1930s, and even more earnestly in the following decade, is partly buttressed by my own study on Mapai's settlement plans after the partition resolution of November 1947. Mapai, the main party in David Ben-Gurion's coalition, was fully aware of the enormous task it faced in having to establish a state. Various committees were involved in molding the basic image of the state to be; one of these, comprising representatives of all the settlement bodies, dealt with the questions of water and settlement.<sup>41</sup>

At a succession of meetings between December 1947 and February 1948, water expert Simha Blass and settlement expert Yosef Weitz put forward two main plans. These, more or less, became settlement policy guidelines for handling the absorption of the million immigrants anticipated over the course of the next decade.

Anyone perusing this settlement program cannot but conclude that Ben-Gurion's close associates believed that steps had to be taken for the establishment of a state within the borders of the UN partition plan. According to the plan, some 150 new settlements were to be set up, about half of them in the Negev, which was slated for inclusion in the Jewish state, and the rest along the lines of the partition map for the north and center of the country.

The program never reached the stage of detailed planning on account of the war's progression and consequent frontier changes. Nevertheless, many of its elements were assimilated into planning after the state's establishment, including the settlement blocks in the northern Negev, the settlement of the center of the country, and the idea of conveying water from the north to the south. This finding reinforces Reichman's contention on the adjustment from partition preparations to recognition of postwar realities. Mainly, this entailed an enlargement of the areas in the possession of the State of Israel, the presence of about four hundred deserted Arab settlements, and roughly 4.2 million dunams of arable land that had been owned by Arabs. These circumstances necessitated a new policy, which took shape gradually, as well as the formulation of legal and administrative mechanisms to deal with the enormous amount of property that suddenly constituted an unplanned potential for redrawing the map of the land.

While Benny Morris had devoted considerable space to geographic aspects such as demographic changes, rural abandonment, and urban destruction, the subject still required geographical elaboration.<sup>42</sup> Geographer Arnon Golan was the first to examine in detail the process whereby the State of Israel took over former Arab property and the means devised to utilize it. He devoted a wide-ranging doctoral thesis (later updated in a book) and a series of articles in Israeli and overseas journals to a systematic account and analysis of the transfer of Arab property to state control and the uses the latter made of it for the purpose of developing settlement: villages, towns, neighborhoods, highways, farmland, forests, and other infrastructures.<sup>43</sup>

Golan's historical geographic, positivist inductive approach considered each region in detail. He showed that Arab property served as an available, convenient tool to achieve various goals: political (boundary demarcation), economic (hundreds of food-producing agricultural settlements), and social (immigrant absorption and housing for state inhabitants). In addition, he also traced the development of the legal instruments for, and political processes behind, the exploitation of the new space and its accompanying assets. His studies provide an exhaustive survey of different territorial zones, town and country, and in fine detail he sketched the drastic landscape changes that occurred in so short a time. The knowledge he provided is both historical and geographic.

His attempt to reconstruct, as closely as possible, the daily, practical conditions of historical reality contributes to the historiographic discourse. Beyond the discussion of political/historical and military processes, which

were chiefly the domain of historians, Golan presents the war's effects on the ground step by step until they changed the realities. So different was the new situation that it, in turn, influenced political positions and processes. A mere two or three years after the war, the question of the refugees and their possessions was already a theoretical, political, and diplomatic issue. Whether or not it was desired, the terrain and landscape had so altered as to make it impossible to revert to the former situation even minimally.

The geographic importance of Golan's research on the war and its aftermath stems from his thesis as to the close correspondence between Israel's settlement landscape of the 1950s and 1960s and the space left behind by the Palestinian population. Both the urban array (new neighborhoods, towns, and metropolises) and the rural array (hundreds of moshavim and kibbutzim) reflected the filling of the great void left by the Arab departure. Golan thus offers a complex perspective on the first decades of statehood. The settlement landscape was redesigned using the abandoned Palestinian space. But the use made of it was not a strictly Israeli-directed process; it had begun in the Mandate period and intensified after it.<sup>44</sup>

Other geographically oriented investigations, though not by geographers, demonstrate the value of the discipline in the research of the War of Independence and its results. Such is the historian Tamir Goren's comprehensive study on the events in Haifa in 1948 and its transition from a mixed Arab-Jewish city to a Jewish city with an Arab minority.<sup>45</sup>

Goren analyzed historical processes such as the decline of Haifa's Arab population prior to the battles of April 1948, the treatment of the remaining minority, and the negotiations on the Arab surrender and continued presence in the city. His study, however, goes beyond the local or historiographic and brings to the fore geographic aspects of the process: the evacuation of neighborhoods, the destruction of Haifa's Old City, the changes in the Arab landscape, and the absorption of the Jewish immigrants who for several years took over the Arab space. The case of this mixed city is frequently cited to substantiate the Israeli claim that the Arab departure was voluntary and spontaneous rather than guided from above, politically or otherwise. The Israeli version of events took pains to highlight the call of Haifa's Jewish mayor, Shabtai Levy, for the Arabs to remain and continue living together with their Jewish neighbors. The Palestinian side made much of the Haifa case as clear evidence of British-Zionist collusion, blaming the fate of the Arab population on the handing over of the city by British commanders to the Jews.<sup>46</sup> Goren

largely adopts the Israeli version, but it is obviously difficult to extrapolate from the Haifa case to the country as a whole.

Another mainly geographic study, conducted with purely historical tools, is Osnat Shiran's examination of the wartime agricultural settlements. Shiran shows the adaptation of the sector, numbering some ninety new settlements, to the progression of the war and the growing needs of immigrant absorption, setting political targets, on the one hand, and supplying food on the other.<sup>47</sup>

Geography's contribution to the research on the War of Independence and its immediate aftermath is thus both diverse and considerable, though not always duly acknowledged. Apart from the lively discourse on political-historical and military issues, a multifaceted historical geographic research has developed, making for original and fresh insights. The mapping of the war, the understanding of its effect on the landscape, and the reconstruction of history's physical reality are the proper province of geography, hence its distinctive contribution to the historiography of the period and the grasp of the processes that followed in the wake of the war.

##### 5. Immigration, Absorption, and Settlement (up to 1967)

The massive change in the country's landscape in the first two decades of statehood marked the emergence of an entirely new geography. But geography was not only the setting and framework for historical processes; it was also an instrument used to reach important state targets deriving largely from the new geographic data, the framework of new borders, and the available resources. Israel's cardinal problems were geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geosocial, and they called for the following actions:

Establishing the new borders as a geographic fact

Filling the large, sparsely populated internal spaces in the Negev, the Galilee, and the center of the country

Absorbing the masses of immigrants who streamed in at a dizzying pace by meeting the concomitant needs for housing, employment, food, education, and social and cultural assimilation

Producing food and basic goods for the entire population

In addition, hovering over all of these for at least ten years were such existential issues as international recognition of the State of Israel, continuous fear of a second round of war with Arab states, and the Palestinian refugees, which had not been addressed in the armistice agreements.

The young state approached these challenges with the tools at its disposal, taking advantage of the concentration of resources by official bodies and the expertise in physical planning and rural settlement systems gained during the years of preparation for statehood. The response to most of the problems was geographic in nature as available land, capital, and manpower were channeled toward solving these problems (if only partially).

Within three years, some four hundred rural communities were created aimed at “marking the borders” with a chain of settlement and filling in “empty pockets,” including the center of the country and the Jerusalem Corridor. These communities were also meant to step up food production to alleviate shortages and the rationing of agricultural produce. Within ten years, thirty new towns of varying sizes were created as the chief instrument of population distribution and immigrant absorption and to buttress the rural settlement configuration. Abandoned Arab property was utilized to achieve targets of rural settlement and new towns; in large cities, deserted neighborhoods were used. Large development projects undertaken to bolster the new settlement map included draining Lake Hula, developing the Yarkon–Negev water lines and the National Water Carrier, constructing ports at Eilat and Ashdod, and building a network of roads to outlying areas, especially in Galilee, the Negev, the ‘Arava, and the Dead Sea.

Within a few years, the map of the State of Israel had changed beyond all recognition. The new geography was shaped out of political, economic, social, and security needs. It is thus hardly surprising that many geographers wrote about these processes and changes quite soon after they took place, dwelling on descriptions and analyses of the new landscape and all its urban, regional, and village components. Some geographers were actually involved in the planning processes; others wrote as the developments took place or shortly afterward.<sup>48</sup>

Only lately, however, has the period been subjected to critical geographic investigation, in conjunction with the recent historical awakening. Like historians, geographers of the past require distance in order to gain perspective. First and foremost, they need primary sources to be released so that the given processes may be examined historically. The discussions and correspondence of various bodies that worked on designing

a new map, the motives and different considerations involved—all of these are disclosed only after the passage of a generation or more. Consequently, the historical geography of the early statehood period is still in its initial stages. Geographic studies of a historical nature that relate to this period deal primarily with issues of land and Arab property, and the use made of these to reach the state targets, or with rural and urban settlement, including its ideological and social aspects.

Arnon Golan's doctoral dissertation was the basis for his articles on the design of the settlement map between 1949 and 1953. He traced the utilization of Arab villages as core footholds for dozens of kibbutzim and moshavim and the redistribution of Arab agricultural assets among these settlements.<sup>49</sup> In parallel, several of his articles showed Arab urban infrastructures to have been a principal means of absorbing immigrants during and after the War of Independence. Small Arab towns became the main instruments in the new towns policy, which was aimed at absorbing masses of immigrants and enabling population dispersal.<sup>50</sup>

The transformation from an "Arab landscape" to the new Israeli landscape was treated also by Amiram Gonen, in studies on the creation of the new towns and new suburbs in existing cities;<sup>51</sup> while Kark, too, shed light on housing and population policy.<sup>52</sup>

The subject of land continues to exercise geographers, although the focus has changed from land acquisition in the Ottoman and British periods to the legal and social aspects of Israel having become the owner of about 94 percent of the land in the state. Michal Oren dealt with the question in her doctoral thesis, which focused on the formation of land settlement policy from the rise of the state to the creation in 1960 of a central administrative mechanism, the Israel Lands Administration.<sup>53</sup>

This mechanism was necessary to put order into the great miscellany of categories of land, landownership, settlement, and organization and to regulate relations between the two chief landholders, the JNF and the State of Israel. Oren also studies the issue of Arab property, the juridical and legal means devised to manage and register it, and the property of German, Italian, and Russian nationals left over from prestate European activity in Eretz-Israel. Her fresh approach goes beyond a presentation and description of the facts based on primary sources; principally, she points out that the "national ethos" of creating Jewish-owned land in Eretz-Israel, which was formed in the sixty years preceding statehood, was so deeply embedded in the consciousness of state leaders that it took some time for a distinction to emerge between national land (Jewish) and state land (Israeli). State leaders and image makers were prisoners of the



national ethos even after the state machinery was in place. One striking example of this is the “million dunams” deal entered into by the state and the JNF in 1948–50. It was meant to ensure that the state’s land would be transferred to the nation and guarded—but from whom? Ben-Gurion had to break free of this mental petrification to stop the “second million” deal from going ahead. Nevertheless, for many more years the state continued to find it difficult to distinguish between the state and national lands in its possession. In fact, to this day efforts continue all over the country to obtain lands and settle ownership issues for Arab-claimed land. Geremy Forman is currently researching the connection between land settlement in the north of the country in early statehood and later settlement policies aimed at increasing the Jewish proportion of Galilee’s population (“the Judaization of Galilee”).<sup>54</sup>

The connection between landownership, policy, and the creation of the settlement map was examined and enlarged on by Oren Yiftachel, principally from a social critical point of view. His first study, on settlement planning in Galilee, dealt with land policy and Jewish–Arab relations. As early as 1992, he pointed both to the problems caused by confusing the concepts of state and national as regards land resources and to the great diversity of Jewish attitudes toward Arabs.<sup>55</sup> He has since developed the critical approach to encompass land-use policy, which in his opinion has exacerbated the disparities not only between Israel’s Jews and Arabs but also among different Jewish sectors. This has been particularly evident in the relations between the “new” (development) towns and their rural surroundings. Yiftachel has taken the critical approach farther than any other Israeli geographer, to the point of presenting Israel as an ethnocracy. He considers the formative processes of the state’s first decade to have deepened and broadened. An atypical historical geographer, he relies on historical tools in constructing his arguments, using the materials of the time and deriving insights from the historical setting. His work is as relevant to today’s Israel as it has been in advancing the research of the period following the rise of the state, particularly as regards Jewish–Jewish and Jewish–Arab social inequality in Galilee and the Negev.<sup>56</sup>

The contribution of geography to the historiography of the state’s beginnings and first two decades (up to 1967) pertains to those aspects of history in which geographers enjoy a natural advantage: borders, land, settlement (in all its forms), population and population distribution, and the physical planning of space. In all of these, the geographic angle relates not only to the state’s changed physical appearance but also to the social

and political processes connected with spatial aspects: intercommunal and ethnic disparities, failures and successes in immigrant absorption, population dispersal, new urban or rural settlement, and landownership. For all that, geographic research into the history of the state's beginnings is still in its infancy. We may expect doctoral research and new studies to be extended and deepened as relevant primary sources come to light, facilitating fuller and more solid historical geographic research.

## 6. The Historiographic Discourse

In a fascinating (and controversial) article on Israeli geography, Yoram Bar-Gal set out the mighty efforts—and puny successes—of Israeli geographers in attempting to create a critical or new approach within the discipline.<sup>57</sup>

Bar-Gal reviewed the development of the profession at the Hebrew University and its spread to other Israeli universities. He found the field to be fairly homogeneous in perspective and not critical enough—certainly as compared with Israeli sociology and history, which have been in upheaval during the past decade. Bar-Gal makes the point that geography is “a branch of science, which supports the national idea, which strengthens the attachment to the local territory.” His interesting interpretation elaborates on the “imperatives” bequeathed by the founding generation of scholars and their successors at the Hebrew University. In essence, he describes geography as a discipline that plays an important role in crystallizing national identity in Israeli society, nation building, shaping collective memory, and “bonding with the homeland.”

He is ruthless in his “self-criticism” of Israeli geography, attacking its alignment with the establishment and state goals, as well as its provincialism. These, he claims, have prevented it from advancing to a new or critical geography, as history and sociology have done. At the same time, he does remark on the emerging buds of a critical approach, mainly in the works of Yiftachel and David Newman of Ben-Gurion University, who have challenged the Zionist ethos and given voice to the “other.” In response to Bar-Gal, Yehuda Gradus and Avinoam Meir listed a number of current geographers who have adopted a variety of approaches, partly postmodern, in order to understand the geographic present.<sup>58</sup> Nonetheless, it is true that to date few geographers have taken part in the thrust to devise a new or critical geography, or in the historiographic discourse of the past decade, even when the discussion revolved around classic geographic issues such as settlement, borders, and population movement.

Among those who have participated, it is worth mentioning Aaronsohn, Yiftachel, Golan, and Ben-Artzi.

Aaronsohn has compared Jewish settlement in Eretz-Israel with colonialism, which is one of the main criticisms leveled at Zionism by critical historians and sociologists, who have drawn analogies with South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, and so on.<sup>59</sup> Aaronsohn distinguishes between *colonization* and *colonialism*, both of which derive from the word *colony* and, to his mind, have been confused. He analyzes the nature of Jewish settlement in Eretz-Israel in light of the findings of historical geography and submits to scholarly scrutiny various colonial characteristics (exploitation, occupation, taking over the foci of power, etc.). In this manner, he distinguishes Jewish settlement in Eretz-Israel from the model of European colonialism, which was supported by political and economic interests. He argues that historians and sociologists who describe the start of Jewish settlement in Eretz-Israel as colonialism rely on a flawed methodology; using simplistic generalizations, they apply models and theories that are not checked against historical data and accordingly lack systematic or even basic knowledge of the material itself. Most, he believes, are not scholars of the period; they are ignorant of many facts, of the conditions of the times, and above all of the spirit of the age, which is a fundamental criterion of historical work.

Golan has a different view as to the motives of those who have recently criticized Israel's "colonial" past. He believes that such criticism originated with Marxist writers, who were motivated more by their political outlook than by substantial research into the roots of Zionism.<sup>60</sup>

I have argued similarly in articles on the War of Independence. One such article attempts to offer an insight into the current status of the historiography and history of the war by presenting a model of a five-layered historiographic framework.<sup>61</sup>

(1) History written at the time of the events described by participants.

(2) Historiography nourished by the literature comprising memoirs, diaries, official compilations, and articles by contemporary participants.

(3) The output of researchers and historians utilizing materials of the preceding layers, as well as initial syntheses, occasionally accompanied by original material. At this stage a critical or somewhat revisionist approach emerges.

(4) This layer stems from the opening of the archives, which gives rise to historiographic comparisons of the newly revealed material with that of preceding layers. This is professional history: the crystallization of concepts and approaches based on primary information.

(5) This layer emerges only a generation later, when other material is discovered or different interpretations are given to known materials. This, in fact, is the layer of true historiographic revisionism.

I suggest that the New Historians are situated at the fourth historiographic layer, with the research on the War of Independence still in its infancy. Only a few aspects (mostly political and military) of the course and period of the war have been subjected to research based on primary sources and juxtaposition with the historical literature of the preceding layers.

Many other aspects of the war have not yet been properly studied, notably, daily life, civil society, contemporary social facets, landscapes, and so on. All of these await proficient, well-founded investigation and professional histories. The time is not yet ripe for Bar-On's revisionist stage.<sup>62</sup>

Yiftachel takes a different approach to the historiographic discourse on the rise and development of the State of Israel. True, his interest lies in the political configuration that, in his view, the State of Israel designed. He defines this configuration as an "ethnocracy," bolstering his position with topics related to the historiographic discourse on the start of settlement and the beginning of statehood.

He proposes a model of Jewish majority rule that, despite the formal democratic structure, perpetuates itself and restricts the rights of the non-Jewish minority to state resources such as land, economic opportunity, infrastructure development, budgetary allocations, and so on. As a geographer, Yiftachel makes abundant use of geographic data and concepts that enable him to substantiate his approach: physical planning, land seizure, regional inequality, social inequality, "Judaization" of the state and its various regions, and so on.<sup>63</sup>

He lends his arguments depth by going back to the 1950s, when large land assets passed into state hands and, according to him, were exploited in order to install an ethnocracy: allocations restricted to certain sectors, discrimination against and marginalization of immigrants, particularly oriental Jews, the Judaization of Galilee, and so on.

## Summary

I have attempted in this essay to set forth the contribution of Israeli historical geography to the historiography of the establishment and early development of the State of Israel. Many geographers have touched on key questions of the historiographic discourse, offering viewpoints on the settlement landscape, the physical space, and the processes of change undergone by the country as a result of Jewish settlement and the Jewish–Arab conflict. The dozen Israeli geographers who have discussed major historiographic issues belong mostly to the subdiscipline of historical geography and research fields such as planning, urban geography, and political geography.

The points of contact between geographic studies and the historiography of statehood concern population origin, dispersal, and resources; land and Jewish settlement prior to the rise of the state; the War of Independence and its aftermath; borders; immigrant absorption and its spatial significance; and Israel’s historiographic discourse and the “wars of the historians” in the past decade.

In all these fields, geographers have enhanced knowledge by contributing the distinctive approach of their discipline.

A wealth of details arising from research that is inductive and cumulative in nature

The reconstruction of the actual historical and geographic setting

An understanding of the process of change in the settlement and cultural landscape

Spatial insights into distribution, planning, and resource allocation

Mapping and imaging of the past by various means

It has been said that without a geographic background, historians are like people floating on air. Indeed, both world and Israeli geography have progressed from mere props for historical processes to becoming full participants in the historiographic discourse, adding distinct insights and viewpoints and lending depth and richness to historical, military, political, and social analyses.

These reciprocal relations have enriched both disciplines, as borne

out by the examples presented here. After all, the historical processes connected to the rise of the State of Israel, the War of Independence, and its results are clearly reflected in the geographic landscape and features of settlement. Accordingly, the discipline of geography has played an essential role in the recent historical research of the State of Israel.

## NOTES

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## **“Critical” and “Establishment”**

### **Sociology in Israel’s Academic Community**

#### Ideological Clashes or Academic Discourse?

Israel’s academic community in recent years has been riven by sharp polemics between self-styled critical sociologists and those they refer to as establishment sociologists, with the controversy reverberating among students of Israeli society abroad. A similar debate has been taking place among historians, but here the distinction has been between New and Old Historians. In the early stages, it was possible not to take the sociologists’ debate too seriously. It could be attributed to intergenerational rivalry within the academic community or a passing fad imported from abroad, primarily from the United States. Today it can no longer be ignored. Its very existence and substance threaten the foundations of Israeli social science and historiography. The dominance of one side or another is likely to have a far-reaching impact on teaching and research in Israeli departments of sociology, anthropology, and political science.

The debate is being conducted on several levels, which may be variously described depending on the viewpoint of the advocate. For example, the discussion might be defined as revolving around the “scientificity” of the social sciences. In this case, the question is less whether the field’s “science” can be consolidated than whether such intellectual effort is even worthwhile given that it is inevitably doomed to failure. From another perspective, the crux of the matter is the ideological identity of establishment sociology or the Old Historiography. In this case, the debate is between scholars who consider establishment academia to be tainted by the virus of Zionism and those who believe a Zionist identity is irrelevant to their research.

In a different formulation, the debate takes place on two interrelated levels that differ analytically. One is essentially methodological and theoretical; the other is based on substance and content—that is, the interpretation of the historical events and the political, economic, social, and cultural tendencies of the past century. The invocation of multiple

theoretical paradigms, all seeking to interpret the same events differently, is in itself praiseworthy; there is much to be gained from the introduction of complementary or rival models that can redress one or another's shortcomings. But the controversy in recent years has not promoted this desirable state of affairs. Rather (at least some of) the paradigms of critical sociology have tended to totally invalidate the paradigms of establishment sociology on ideological grounds. Ironically, the same detractors regard ideological tendentiousness as intrinsic to contemporary scientific thought. Clearly, this approach undermines the basis for any constructive discussion among the exponents of the different paradigms. Such a situation, it may be said without exaggeration, could cause the social sciences to regress by decades—back to the beginning of the twentieth century if not earlier.

The bulk of what follows addresses the dispute within the sociological-anthropological and political science communities, though the argument among historians is implicit. A comprehensive treatment of historiographical issues would demand a systematic analysis of the methodology, terminology, and semantics of historians, which, as is well known, differ significantly from those of social scientists. Such an analysis is beyond the scope of this essay. In addition, this essay is limited almost exclusively to the Yishuv period (the prestate Jewish community in Palestine, 1882–1948). Although the polemic extends beyond this time frame, it began within the context of the Yishuv. Again, discussion of the statehood period would warrant a separate study.

Yet another limitation stems from the fact that self-professed critical (or, to a lesser degree, establishment) sociologists do not constitute a homogeneous group. Thus, the assessment of one critical scholar on a given issue does not necessarily hold true for another. But, again, a separate discussion of each would greatly exceed the limits of this essay and be too detailed. I have thus attempted to find a golden mean by relating chiefly to the common denominator of critical sociologists.

### **The Parameters of Sociological and Historical Study of Israeli Society**

The main and most vigorous criticism leveled against establishment sociologists and historians is, of course, that they are steeped in Zionism, the implication being that they are one-sided, that their interpretation of events is misleading and distorted, and that they idealize what they

consider suitable and ignore the unpleasant. More specifically, it is argued (by at least some in the critical school) that establishment sociology and historiography function within a “Jewish bubble”—as regards both the Yishuv in the Land of Israel and the diaspora. Establishment scholars allegedly ignore the Jewish–Arab conflict in general, and Palestinian society in particular, as well as the interrelations between Jewish and Palestinian societies. From the establishment viewpoint—so argues the critical school—the borders of the collective and the parameters of research are confined exclusively to that selfsame Jewish bubble.<sup>1</sup>

In the eyes of critical scholars, the use of explicitly Jewish-Israeli terminology regarding the Zionist movement and the Yishuv supplies further evidence of the Zionism of establishment sociology and historiography. Critical scholars take particular exception to such terms as *the Land of Israel*, *Aliya*, and *the meora’ot* (literally, “events,” a term commonly used to describe the Arab riots and revolt of the 1920s and 1930s); some even object to the use of *Holocaust* (*Shoah*). All these, in their view, are not neutral or positivist terms but pertain to the collective memory of the Jewish people. Moreover, they see even the periodization used by the establishment school as nearly exclusively Jewish-Zionist (e.g., the First Aliya, Second Aliya, pre-Holocaust, post-Holocaust, etc.). According to the critical group, this type of periodization is seriously flawed since it makes it difficult to identify turning points in the historiography of the two peoples. As a result (by critical lights), establishment scholars erroneously stress continuity in the transition from Yishuv to state or overemphasize the changes that took place in the wake of the Six Day War.<sup>2</sup>

If the primary obstacles to bridging the differences between critical and establishment scholars were merely a matter of terminology and periodization, it would be relatively easy to surmount them. One might, for example, use the term *immigration* rather than *aliya*, provided that immigration to Israel could be classified as a special case more or less faithful to the concept of *aliya*.<sup>3</sup> Alternatively, criteria could be set for immigration archetypes ranging from the instrumental to the ideological.

Finding a substitute for the term *Eretz-Israel* is more difficult. Its very use forms the backbone of the Zionist narrative, just as the term *Palestine* lies at the heart of the Palestinian narrative. The phrase, “the Holy Land,” while accepted by the three monotheistic faiths, is not the most felicitous substitute because of its religious connotations; nor, moreover, do the three religions agree on the degree of sanctity conferred on the land.

The term *Holocaust* does seem to have a linguistic counterpart in

*genocide*. But *Holocaust* (or *Shoah*) has become a familiar concept in the world lexicon, particularly in European-American culture. It therefore seems utterly absurd that, of all people, Israeli historians and social scientists should be asked to eliminate it from their vocabulary in favor of a foreign term that can never express the uniqueness of the Jewish Holocaust.

Periodization (and its related terminology) would appear to be a subject for which the different schools might possibly find a common denominator. It is no marginal matter, particularly among historians. Not infrequently, periodization reflects the central thesis of research. The periodization of the history of royal dynasties or priests or presidents or diplomatic history, for example, is not commensurable with that of military or socioeconomic history. In our case, too, there is logic and justification for weaning oneself from a periodization based exclusively on *aliyot* (plural of *aliya* [wave of immigration to Land of Israel]). One must begin with the assumption that the turning points are not identical or parallel in every sphere. Thus, the periodization of the socioeconomic history of the Yishuv is, to a certain extent, different from that of the Jewish-Arab conflict or of diplomatic events.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the various events and turning points undoubtedly have points of intersection.

But all these are secondary issues. The other claims, about the Zionism of Israeli society, require a far more thorough discussion of the parameters involved in the historiography of the Yishuv in the past 100 to 150 years.<sup>5</sup> What I set out in the following pages reflects my personal opinion; nevertheless, it seems to follow quite closely the train of thought of quite a few people within the sociological community.<sup>6</sup>

What, then, are the broad parameters for a discussion of the history of the Yishuv and Israeli society that could provide a working framework for historians, sociologists, political scientists, students of international relations, economists, and others? The parameters presented here are based on the assumption that four factors, albeit in different degrees, influenced both the Yishuv and the Palestinian Arab population, whether directly or indirectly. I will first define and briefly describe these four and then discuss two of them more extensively.

1. *Diaspora Factors and Conditions Impelling Aliya from the End of the Nineteenth Century On.* Among other things, this topic includes the composition of the *aliyot* and the demographic, social, and cultural structure and attributes of the manpower. The discussion, one must bear in mind, concerns an ingathering, a coming together of immigrants, who, by self-definition, had for centuries lived in exile, and who, whether because

of ideological impulses, economic and political pressures, or physical threat, sought to rebuild their political and cultural center in a territory that they regarded as their historic homeland. As a settlement movement, as we shall see, this pattern distinguished it from other settlement (colonialist) movements. Its uniqueness, however, need not cause us to reject out of hand any serious comparative discussion of worldwide colonial phenomena alongside Zionism as a settlement movement.

2. *Confrontation with the Arab World.* The second factor that shaped the Yishuv and Israeli society, and certainly also the image of Palestinian society, was and is the confrontation with the Arab world. The consequences of the ongoing conflict cannot be measured only in terms of victory and defeat or numbers of casualties or the making and breaking of economic resources; it must also be appraised in terms of the ethos and myths spawned and expressed in literature and the arts and of the intellectual and philosophical approaches to the advantages and disadvantages of the use of violence in ethnic-national group relations.

3. *Development under the Mandatory Government.* A third factor is the role played by the mandatory authorities, as the representatives of the government of Great Britain, in creating the infrastructure (limited as it may have been) for the development of the Palestinian Arab community, on the one hand, and the Jewish community, on the other, and the interrelationship between the two.

4. *Periods of Transition.* A fourth important factor is the changing position of the Jewish community before 1948, and thereafter, of the state, in the array of global power from Ottoman times to the present.

While there may quite naturally be disagreement over the relative weight of each of these factors in various periods, it seems difficult to deny their importance. This approach reflects neither a Zionist nor an anti-Zionist ideology. Nevertheless, scholars who do not subscribe to the postmodern view about the absolute relativity of different narratives are more likely to achieve a balanced evaluation of the cumulative effect of the four factors on the history of the Yishuv and Israeli society. There is certainly no room here for absolute evaluations, particularly when it comes to short-term processes.

The large number of factors involved indicates intersecting influences on the Yishuv and the Palestinian-Arab population. To put it more graphically, one might say that the two communities lived not in a single, sealed circle but in a number of concentric circles, not all of which were shared by both. The rules of the game characterizing activity in each circle varied during different periods and for different sec-

tors of the population, and, moreover, the possibility of movement from one circle to another was limited. All of these factors affected the definition of the “boundaries of the collective,” which were far more complex than various researchers have attempted to depict them.<sup>7</sup> Thus, for example, nearly all of the organized Yishuv lived almost exclusively within the innermost circle—the Jewish bubble. The national institutions (the Jewish Agency, Jewish National Fund, etc.), the ideological movements, and the political parties provided a significant portion of the services (education, culture, health, employment, housing, etc.). One left the inner circle only for certain British Mandate government services: the courts, police, taxation and postal services, specific health resources, and (to a far lesser extent) employment. These services were shared with the Arab population.

The Yishuv’s political leadership, of course, maintained ongoing working relations with the mandatory government, which was headed by the high commissioner. Contact with the Arab population took place primarily in the labor and employment market, as well as in the economic exchange market (the purchase of agricultural produce and land). These interrelationships and exchanges progressively diminished over the years, whether due to political and security pressures or to the desire of a large part of the Jewish population to sever itself from the limited labor market it shared with the Arab population. All of this, however, was primarily true of the “organized Yishuv.” Those not included in this category, such as the ultra-Orthodox (*haredi*) Yishuv and some of the oriental Jews, evidently enjoyed far more extensive contact with the mandatory government and the Arab population. Their relationship with the national institutions varied from total alienation, as in the case of the *haredim*, to unorganized, sporadic interaction, as in the case of the oriental communities.

The various components of the Jewish population all maintained contact with the Jewish diaspora. The most intensive contacts—though totally different in nature—were, on the one hand, those of the ultra-Orthodox community and, on the other, those of the political movements, the backbone of the organized Yishuv. The *haredi* connections were effected via *kollelim* (communities of religious scholars), which constituted the key socioeconomic units of the Ashkenazi community,<sup>8</sup> whereas the political movements and parties of the organized Yishuv had strong links with the institutions of the Zionist movement, as well as with other parties and movements, predominately in Eastern Europe.

This structure, described here rather schematically, shaped the



parameters of the particular, collective identity of the various sectors composing the Jewish community. Members of the organized Yishuv considered themselves first and foremost citizens of the political system dominated by Knesset Yisrael (the elected assembly of Yishuv Jews) and the Zionist movement.<sup>9</sup> Formally, they were also citizens of the mandatory state. And this citizenship of the Mandate had practical implications such as receipt of services. Jews who did not belong to the organized Yishuv saw themselves primarily as citizens of their particular ethnic communities; to them, the mandatory framework was evidently more significant, and the sense of citizenship in the sector dominated by the national institutions, more curbed, intermittent, and elusive. This reservation does not apply to the ultra-Orthodox (or “Old” Ashkenazi Yishuv), who automatically rejected any contact with the institutions of the Yishuv and the Zionist movement.

The Palestinian Arab population lived even more exclusively within its own inner circle. In terms of the composition of its secondary units, this circle differed markedly from the inner Jewish one since, instead of modern political parties with ideological substance, it consisted of ascribed units based on extended families (*hamulot*), villages, and so on. To a great extent, the pseudo-political organizations overlapped with these particularistic frameworks. Palestinian contacts with other circles occurred in the job market, but these were one-directional since in practice Jews did not work in the Arab labor market. Arab contacts with the mandatory government were more intense, at least among the urban sectors, because for various reasons they did not create a strong autonomous center of their own. Hence, they had need of a wider range of government services. In this respect, their mandatory citizenship was broader, though no deeper if we define depth of citizenship as the degree of loyalty to the ruling government. There was thus substantial similarity between the Jewish and Arab populations in this regard, neither of which, to understate the case, demonstrated much loyalty to the mandatory government. As for the Arab population’s internal loyalty toward its own political elite, the issue was more complex than among the Jewish population. The basic allegiance of the Palestinians was above all to the family groups and village frameworks in which they lived. Even identification with a nonelected, nondemocratic national elite largely reflected this root loyalty.

The political elite within the Jewish sector was chosen by democratic process and enjoyed steadily growing allegiance, even if not from the entire Jewish population. Some of the Jews (the ultra-Orthodox) did

not join Knesset Yisrael. Others (Sephardim, farmers) sometimes sat on the fence. While still others may not have actually left Knesset Yisrael, they did not accept the authority of the Yishuv's national institutions or the Zionist movement's leadership (e.g., the so-called separatists at the time, organizations such as IZL and LHI).

Thus the 1939 White Paper essentially depicts mandatory Palestine as a state without a nation within which there were two nations without a state.<sup>10</sup> In other words, mandatory Palestine was unlike the ideal nation-state in nearly every possible respect. First of all, it was governed by the direct rule of a foreign power without local representation. Second, it was a binational unit in which one of the constituent communities—the Jewish—maintained a system of semiautonomous, legally recognized institutions. Third, both communities had connections with national-ethnic, religious, and linguistic units beyond their own demarcation lines. Each of these deviations from the model of an integral nation-state was problematic in terms of the identity and definition of the boundaries of the collective or citizenship.<sup>11</sup> Palestinian nationality was, in the language of the Peel Commission, “a legal formula devoid of moral meaning.”<sup>12</sup> The true loyalty of both Jews and Arabs was, as mentioned earlier, to their respective communal collectives. In the case of the Yishuv, there was the added problem of the nature of diaspora Jewry's involvement in the building of a national home legally rooted in the Mandatory Charter of the League of Nations.<sup>13</sup> In the Arab community, the problem of identity was perceived in terms of *kawmiya* as opposed to *watania* (a pan-Arab understanding of nationality versus the particularist nationhood of various distinct Arab groups). In the case of Palestinian Arabs, the *kawmiya* was Arab and the *watania* was Palestinian. These components of Arab identity were variously emphasized by different groups.

In view of this, it was not hard not to see why the questions of the boundaries of the collective, or what I would prefer to describe as the boundaries of citizenship, was highly complex. Scholars seeking to shift the boundaries by adding or removing a sector cannot ignore this complexity. This schematic picture of course applies only to the Yishuv period. After 1948, the definition of the boundaries of citizenship changed, but this topic is beyond the chronological limits of this essay.

The involvement of diaspora Jewry in the building of the Yishuv and the story of the *aliyot* to the country is at the heart of what critical sociologists call the Zionist narrative. This term, it must be said, is always uttered as a sweeping generalization, oblivious of its manifold hues and shades. Several points thus should be clarified about this narrative, which

has been so condemned and distorted by critical scholars. Zionism, as Amos Oz once said, was only a generic name for a wide variety of forms, positions, outlooks, worldviews, and understandings of Jewish history in the past and looking to the future. In other words, from the very beginning the ideological framework was quite unclear in several respects.

Different ideological streams adhered to different definitions of Jewishness, social justice, and democracy. The vagueness surrounding *Judaism* pertains to the characteristics of Jewish identity. Is or was the definition of Jewish nationhood secular or religious-traditional or is or was there perhaps a difference between the definition of Jewish nationality in the diaspora—which is or was essentially religious—and that of Jewish nationality in the Yishuv in the Land of Israel and therefore in the State of Israel? This vagueness was also manifested in the Zionist concept of “negating the *golah*” (literally, “exile,” i.e., everywhere outside of the Land of Israel). Did the Jewish people’s autoemancipation require an end to Jewish exile or was the Land of Israel in the future to serve exclusively as a center of inspiration for a dispersed Jewish nation? No less vague was the concept of social justice, one of the explicit pillars of the nascent Jewish society in the Land of Israel. Did it apply only to the basic freedoms accepted by liberal ideological streams or also to ideas of equality and cooperation advocated by socialist ideological streams? Finally, as regards democracy, did this refer only to formal institutions or also to general, democratic civic rights such as freedom of expression and organization and equality before the law?

Potentially, if not actually, certain contradictions were inherent in the components of the Zionist ideological structure. The most striking was the inconsistency between particularistic Jewish values, reflected in the longing for a national state, and universal humanist values. This became clear as soon as it emerged that Zionism was not about “a land without a people for a people without a land” but rather about the creation of a new society in an ancient, Arab-populated land.<sup>14</sup> The tradition of Jewish particularism is connected with the problem of Jewish separatism, which made the Jews a community apart within a state. The realization of Jewish autonomy, on the other hand, led to the creation of a state like any other, not all of whose inhabitants were Jews. Would its non-Jewish residents be considered equal citizens in every respect, including the right under law to alter the arrangements that reflected the Jewish character of the state?

Yet another of Zionism’s internal contradictions involved the idea of a mission versus the idea of normalization. While Zionism’s ideolog-

ical framework called for the building of a unique society, “a light unto the nations,” it strove also to remold the Jewish people into a nation like all others. Should the Yishuv have given (indeed, should Israel today give) preference to the gradual building of a society of quality to be realized by degrees and based on selective *aliya*? Or did Jewish and/or Judaism’s redemption require mass *aliya*, even if this impaired the social fabric of Jewish society in the Land of Israel?

The vagueness, contradictions, and disagreements regarding the relationship between means and ends paved the way for changing definitions of the boundaries of Zionist consensus. There were, for instance, sharp differences of opinion concerning the encounter with the Arab national movement and the Palestinian population, which posed ideological and political dilemmas for the Zionist movement and the Yishuv. The response to these dilemmas reflected both fundamental positions and operative, strategic, or practical considerations.<sup>15</sup>

To some extent, the issues emanated from deeply rooted beliefs in Jewish tradition, namely, about Jews being a “chosen people” and “a people that dwells alone.” But they also reflected ideological differences between two approaches to nationalism, a confrontation that left its mark on the history of the twentieth century: an understanding of nationalism that recognizes the universal right to self-determination of all peoples as against a nationalism that emphasizes an ethnocentric national egoism.<sup>16</sup>

The third controversy relates to the second: is the legitimization of Jewish nationalism, and hence its relationship with the Land of Israel, religious or secular? Prior to the state’s establishment, this was the central focus of the polemic between the religious and secular branches of Zionism. Following the state’s establishment, the focus shifted more to the question of whether the State of Israel was to be imbued with the religious significance of “the start of redemption” or was it a secular entity requiring no transcendental legitimization. In the latter case, the theological debate on this subject was conducted mainly between religious Zionism and the non-Zionist ultra-Orthodox (*haredi*) population, the *haredim* sharing the views of the secular camp, though for different reasons.

From this it follows that any talk about the Zionist narrative, as the one and only, is shallow, simplistic, and inconsistent with the facts. Second, one must bear in mind that the majority of these narratives originated in the Jewish diaspora or crystallized in the Yishuv, which, among its other qualities, was both a new and old society, as well as an immigrant society, as we shall see.

## **The Impact of the Aliyot on Yishuv Society**

The Yishuv was a new society in terms of both population and institutions. But it was not a *tabula rasa*; it had social and cultural institutions that continued to influence the behavioral patterns and value attitudes of various population groups. What made Yishuv (and Israeli) society unique was that these traditions were not simply an outgrowth of the evolving society but, in part at least, had been imported from the lands of emigration. This forces us to take a serious look at the claim of a Jewish civilization.<sup>17</sup> What distinguished the Yishuv as a society of immigrants is that it concerned a migration movement from a scattered diaspora to an evolving national center. This simultaneous existence of a center and a diaspora was not the result of migration from the center to the diaspora but rather the reverse. The relationship between the Land of Israel and the diaspora had various aspects to it—immigration, importation of wealth, mutual values, and political commitment.

The heritage of Jewish civilization, which assumed different colorations in different diaspora communities, the Yishuv, and the State of Israel, largely explains some of the social divisions that characterize Israel's society today. I refer particularly to three rifts: religious-secular; ethnic-class; and ideological,<sup>18</sup> which, in part at least, has always been connected to the struggle for a solution to the Jewish-Arab conflict. These cleavages have impeded social cohesion in both the past and the present and, moreover, have created a society under excessive stress "due to intersecting challenges and pressures, and unclear definitions of boundaries."<sup>19</sup>

There is only partial truth to the contention that the very existence of these cleavages, particularly the ideological, endowed the political center in the Yishuv and the state with great power.<sup>20</sup> Its limitation lies in the implicit assumption that the greater the divisiveness the more power accrues to the political center. Formulated thus, the axiom is clearly unfounded. Any discussion of the issue must define the potential breaking point of the center's holding power vis-à-vis the centrifugal force of ideological and other splits. Nor does the argument bear any relation to the historical circumstances and the political and ideological profile of the ruling elite, which was confronted by deep fissures and a sharply divided society. Moreover, in terms of success and talent, obviously not every elite is equally able to deal with this sort of situation.

The implications of all this for the functioning of both Yishuv and Israeli society, particularly as regards the political and socioeconomic systems, and an understanding of national security, have been studied ex-

tensively. But it has not been studied, one might mention, by most of the critical sociologists, who have dealt very little with the subject. Insofar as they have done so, their interpretations of these processes—apart from some rather trite and tired truths—indicate an incorrect reading of the events, whether deliberate or otherwise. Their main concern, as we shall see, was with the impact of the Jewish-Arab conflict on Jewish society and its interrelations with the Arab population.

### **The Jewish-Arab Conflict and Its Influence on Yishuv Society**

There is some truth to the claim that a number of establishment sociologists failed to incorporate the Arab population in their paradigms.<sup>21</sup> The critical school, by contrast, made the conflict the backbone of its paradigm. Be that as it may, the question remains—to what degree is the conflict relevant in explaining the birth and growth of Yishuv (and Israeli) society since the late nineteenth century? In other words, what is the relative weight of this factor vis-à-vis other factors, and what is its marginal value as an explanation? I obviously consider these questions relevant or I would not pose them. In fact, Dan Horowitz and I begin our book with the sentence “Palestine is a state without a nation within which two nations without a state struggle.”<sup>22</sup> This is the point of departure for our analysis. There is thus no basis for the accusation that we have ignored the subject.<sup>23</sup>

As proof of the conflict’s supposedly far-reaching impact on Yishuv society since its inception, critical sociologists posit a colonial situation since Ottoman times or, to be more exact, a specific type of colonial situation since European colonialism was clearly not all of a piece. According to this argument, the colonial situation found expression both in the nature of the markets (land, manpower, and wealth) and in the construction of various institutional frameworks, including economic bodies (e.g., Keren Kayemeth le-Yisrael [the Jewish National Fund] and Keren HaYesod [the Foundation Fund]) and security structures (e.g., the Haganah) aimed at consolidating the colonial situation.

The use of the term *colonialism* is, of course, no accident. There is an explicit intent to engage in ethical condemnation, as if to say that the Zionist movement and the State of Israel were born in sin. Nevertheless, any attempt to compare Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel, or any other phenomenon of Yishuv history, with so-called similar phenomena

is praiseworthy. The comparative study of institutions and phenomena is one of the cornerstones of sociological research. It is precisely such comparison that shows that even if, in the structural respect, several “colonial symptoms” did manifest themselves during the period under discussion, they never developed into an actual colonial situation. Two principal reasons were responsible for this. First, in general, the motivations behind *aliya*/immigration to the country were distinct from the impulses behind any other settlement movement. Second, the socioeconomic and ideological policy, particularly that of the labor movement, warded off colonial symptoms.

The perspectives and reasons presented by critical sociologists to support their definition of the Jewish settlement movement as colonialist are not consistent. The most extreme critics—those who adhere to a priori ideological positions—are more reluctant to acknowledge the specific nature of the settlement movement in Israel, even though they, too, cannot overlook several of its unique characteristics.<sup>24</sup> Others appear to be more reserved in their conclusions, while still others, as noted earlier, to one degree or another reject the very comparison to any kind of colonialism.

The entire conceptualization of Zionist colonialism by critical sociologists is marred by a number of weak points beyond the implicit irony in their method of analysis and deduction, which is explicitly functionalist and positivist in character. This approach may be unavoidable since it both was, and likely will remain, one of the high roads of historical and sociological research. Their main weakness, however, is that they virtually ignore the fact that since the First Aliya Jewish settlement constituted the most comprehensive expression of the Jewish people’s modern national movement. This struggle, like those of other ethnic-national groups, aimed to create a political entity, and this entity was to rise in a territory defined by all segments of the Jewish people as their historical territory.

One substantial difference between the Zionist and other national movements was that the creation of a national state required the population’s migration from one territory to another. This is a unique case, unmatched by any other settlement movement. The creation of a national state also implied a “return to history,” that is, an end to the passive role played by Jews in regional and global politics and their assumption of an active, influential role. Several other national liberation movements, in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, may also have been marked by a return to history, though less forcefully and extensively since the time they

spent “outside of history” was not as protracted and the consequences were less far-reaching. At the beginning of the period in question, the Palestinian Arabs, too, were outside of history; it was the very encounter with Jewish settlement that restored them to the historical realm.

The need to deal with the “Arab problem” gave rise to a variety of suggestions and solutions. Some of these, indeed, may have been of a colonial character, such as the expedients adopted by the *moshavot*. These features could well have become the dominant structure of Jewish settlement except that the labor movement, which gradually became the predominant force, opted for a different path—first in the ideological realm, rejecting the colonial approach, and thereafter also in the political sphere. It chose to cut itself off almost totally from the Arab sector and build a wholly autonomous system, an economic, political, and cultural structure that would not be dependent on the Arab population and would not exploit it.

The only significant external frame of reference for the Zionist colonizers was the Jewish diaspora. This holds true even though the champions of a just social and political order were influenced also by instrumental considerations (such as economic hardship due to failure to compete with the Arabs in the sector of the labor market common to both populations—planting and construction).<sup>25</sup> It is also true that at a rather crucial stage the Yishuv was helped by the British government, which lent it legal sanction to build its institutions and, at least during the period of the Third Aliya, also provided employment. Without this, the Third Aliya might have suffered even greater attrition than did the fourth—assuming that there would have been a fourth had the third failed. British assistance contributed to the construction of a central political, socioeconomic, and cultural framework that facilitated the establishment of Jewish autonomy in the Land of Israel. By these (not inconsiderable) means, various hallmarks of a coloniallike structure were neutralized.

The Yishuv’s choice of an autonomous course was a strategic decision of the highest order since in principle it had several courses open to it. Some of these remained theoretical until 1967, at which time they all moved into the realm of the actual. The various options may be formulated thus: the first was a policy of “X on Y,” that is, complete control of the Arab population while denying it political rights. This option was not realistic in the Yishuv period, although certain groups on the extreme political Right did dream of it.<sup>26</sup> Another theoretical option was a policy of “X instead of Y,” that is, expulsion of the Arabs. Some such limited process did take place during the War of Independence; there are,



in fact, numerous versions regarding the number of people expelled and the existence or otherwise of an emergency plan to implement expulsion.<sup>27</sup> Yet another option was a policy of “X together with Y,” that is, the creation of a binational state. This option, as is known, found support on the eve of the War of Independence primarily from the Marxist HaShomer HaTza‘ir Party.<sup>28</sup> The final option was a policy of “X alongside Y,” the separation of the two populations and the division of the country into two distinct political entities. There was talk of this possibility in 1937: the idea was to transfer both the Jewish and Arab populations to their own states to allow for the establishment of two relatively homogeneous nation-states. This last option, which was explicitly anti-colonialist, was the one always favored by the central stream in the labor movement. Yet we are asked to believe that it was the labor movement, as the standard-bearer of settlement, that was, so to speak, the spearhead of Zionist colonialism.

The idea of X alongside Y was nourished by an ideology that sought to build not only a democratic and egalitarian society but also a framework that would “reverse the occupational pyramid” of the Jewish people. In the new pyramid, Jews were to occupy all rungs of the employment ladder, particularly those involving physical labor, and thereby be restored to “productivity.” To attain this goal, it was necessary to build an autonomous socioeconomic structure alongside that of the Arab population to allow for a controlled exchange of goods, wealth, and manpower between the two distinct economic-political systems without either side unduly exploiting the other. The strategy of the Labor movement entailed creating the infrastructure for this sort of symmetry. Accordingly, notwithstanding certain similarities between Jewish settlement and diverse forms of colonialism, the parallels were purely structural and did not affect the unique character of the Zionist movement one way or another. This, more or less, was the picture until 1967. In 1967, there was a radical change in outlook. But, again, that discussion is beyond the scope of this essay.

Another serious flaw in the argument put forth by critical sociologists and political scientists as to the colonialist character of Zionist settlement is the great emphasis they place on the competition in the land and labor markets. They misunderstand the real extent of the competition between Jews and Arabs in the labor market. This subject has been dealt with by economic historians,<sup>29</sup> and I will take a brief look at their main findings. During the Yishuv period, Jewish-Arab friction in the labor market revolved mostly around unskilled and semiskilled physical

labor and mostly in the spheres of agriculture (plantations), construction, public works, and agricultural marketing.<sup>30</sup> In these market sectors, the friction progressively decreased along with the number of Jews engaged in these activities, both in absolute terms and in direct proportion to the growth of the number of Jews engaged in the professions, white-collar jobs, services, and trade.<sup>31</sup> In the latter sectors, there was effectively no competition between Jews and Arabs mainly because the great majority of the Arab labor force was composed of peasants (*fellahin*) and blue-collar workers (in agriculture and construction). The turning point in the Yishuv's internal division of occupations evidently occurred in the 1930s with the arrival of the Fifth Aliya.

Mandatory Palestine's divided economic market did not emanate solely from the slogan “Hebrew labor,” which sought to instate Jews in the place of Arabs working for Jewish employers. Over the years, the role of the structural differences between Jewish and Arab labor became increasingly pronounced, greatly curbing the extent, if not the intensity, of the friction between the two groups. Jewish-Arab labor rivalry was further mitigated by the fact that the overriding majority of Arab laborers, particularly in agriculture, had an economic base in their villages and relied on employment in the Jewish sector only to supplement this livelihood and raise their standard of living. In addition, political and security events in the latter 1930s (the period of the Arab Revolt) drastically reduced contact between Jews and Arabs, even in that sector of the labor market in which they vied with one another: plantations and construction. This curtailment, one may recall, was due, first, to the general strike called by the Arab Higher Committee and, second, to the increasingly dangerous security situation.

The level of friction dropped even more upon the outbreak of World War II and especially from 1941 on, when the mandatory economy as a whole began to prosper from British military commissions and both national sectors enjoyed full employment.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, while the labor market was divided along national lines, any resemblance between it and the types of markets that characterized colonial societies is weak and coincidental. In any event, the concept of a split market in the mandatory period requires serious revision. The ineluctable conclusion is that even in the economic realm, where interaction between the two populations was at its most extensive, the divided market lost its importance over the years as a factor in the structure of the Jewish economy; that is, the economic connections between the two national sectors gradually became insignificant for Jewish economic

development—so much so that the thesis of Jewish settlement having been patterned after a form of European colonialism cannot be sustained. The question of the split market economy under military administration in the 1950s and 1960s, and military rule in the West Bank after 1967, is a separate issue that must be left for a separate essay.

To minimize the significance of economic competition between Jews and Arabs in the formation of Yishuv society is not to say that the Yishuv was unaffected by the existence of two ethnic-national groups that slid into protracted, violent conflict. On the contrary. To this subject, however, critical sociologists have nothing new to add. Two examples will suffice to illustrate their excessive and totally unnecessary zeal. One concerns the realm of ideas, culture, and education, the other the question of security. Regarding the first, in recent years, two comprehensive works have been published by Yosef Gorny<sup>33</sup> and Anita Shapira,<sup>34</sup> respectively, neither of whom are considered New Historians. Both provide extensive evidence, albeit from different viewpoints, of the Jewish population's preoccupation with the conflict and the unflinching attempts made to seek political and military solutions. More importantly, they address the effect of the conflict on the major transition from a defensive to an offensive ethos.<sup>35</sup> As for the question of security, it, too, was explicitly dealt with prior to the rise of critical sociology. The ongoing conflict, particularly at its height during the Arab Revolt of 1936–39, contributed, directly or otherwise, to the strengthening of the Jewish political center. The armed conflict greatly boosted the ability of each sovereign or semisovereign community to enlist two types of key resources: martial forces (the Haganah) and financial resources in the form of taxation (*kofer haYishuv*).<sup>36</sup> The combination of an offensive ethos and a military arm certainly enhanced the modernization of the Yishuv as it prepared for the struggle against the Arab population and the Arab states. It also helped build the social and political structure of both the Yishuv before 1948 and the state once it became sovereign. This is the banal truth that was eagerly seized on by some critical sociologists, including Uri Ben-Eliezer, to prove that Israeli society was already militaristic prior to 1948 and only became more so upon attaining statehood.<sup>37</sup>

Insofar as it concerns the Palmah strike force, the claim is false ab initio. Even though its commanders championed an “offensive ethic” in all that pertained to the resolution of the Jewish-Arab conflict, the Palmah was not in the slightest marked by militarism in the true sense of the word—that is, a lifestyle and ideology that cultivate power, hierarchy, and symbols of death and heroism on the battlefield. These qual-

ities were far more prevalent among radical right-wing groups in Eretz-Israel such as the revisionist movement. To attribute these traits to the Palmah of all groups is to misunderstand them. Ben-Eliezer’s profound failure to correctly assess the Palmah mind-set is perhaps the most extreme example thus far of the failings, bordering on intellectual anarchy, of an a priori approach in the social sciences.

### **Where Is Critical or Reductionist Sociology Liable to Lead Us? By Way of a Summary**

In this essay, I have attempted to respond to some of the charges leveled in recent years by professed critical sociologists and political scientists against so-called establishment sociologists. The designations attached by critical scholars to themselves and others are symptomatic of an unrelenting attempt to discredit professional colleagues. The debate, as noted, is being conducted on two major planes (with various offshoots), the theoretical-methodological and the thematic-empirical.

From an examination of the writings of the critical sociologists, we find that, despite the pretensions of at least some, not only do they fail to propose an alternative sociological theory, whether on the level of meta- or middle-range theory, but they hardly address the issue at all and certainly not systematically. They relate to various theoretical paradigms from the viewpoint of the philosophy of methodology. This may be seen in the repeated attacks on positivist-functional method, primarily on its ability to conduct impartial, objective research divorced from ideology or a specific worldview. Ironically, at least some of the critical scholars present functional, systemic explanations that are not particularly sophisticated. In practice, they commit the very sin of which they accuse establishment scholars. Moreover, establishment scholars never did, nor do they today, accept the critical school’s crude interpretation of functionalism, having long since acknowledged updated interpretations consistent with the theoretical paradigms developed since the 1950s.

The attack on the methodological approaches of establishment figures is meant to convey an unambiguous message, namely, that one cannot achieve objectivity in the social sciences. Nor, the argument continues, is objectivity even desirable since, on the one hand, any writing is completely subservient to the scholar’s personal biography and beliefs and, on the other hand, social science should be practiced by engaged scholars committed to a certain idea. True, not all members of the critical

school swear by this model, but this is the “hegemonic message,” to borrow their language. It is a public admission aimed essentially at denouncing establishment scholars as responsible for the introduction of engaged Zionist scholarship into Israel’s academic arena.

The sin of establishment scholars is twofold: they both refuse to admit their guilt and they serve a false idea/narrative—the Zionist idea. The great merit of the critical school, as its adherents see it, lies in their telling the truth and attacking the Zionist narrative. This essay has attempted to refute these charges and to point to the great danger inherent in such talk for the very existence of research and teaching of these subjects at Israeli universities.

Establishment sociology has never pretended to absolute confidence or omnipotence in all that pertains to explaining social or other tendencies and processes in Israel. The approach, whether written or spoken, was always fairly hesitant, in contrast to the fashion of absolutism in place today. If anyone epitomizes a supposed omniscience, it is the critical scholars. I am afraid, however, that the ultimate result will be a considerable impotence as regards social research in Israeli academia. I say this not because I suspect establishment scholars of fearing either criticism or alternative paradigms, or of misunderstanding the inherent limitations of objective analysis, but because of the potentially dangerous consequences of ruthless attempts to delegitimize rivals.

Everyone understands the need for continual deconstruction and ongoing criticism of various paradigms. Moreover, from time to time new variables must be incorporated into basic paradigms or new weight given to old variables. But there is no reason to do so by force or to make this a goal in its own right. Thus, for example, no one disputes the fact that all researchers will have to adjust their paradigms for the transition period from the Zionist to the post-Zionist era should such a transition take place.

Nevertheless, there is no guarantee that the post-Zionist era will be marked by the de-Judaization of the State of Israel—that is, the building of a secular-democratic society based on the national equality of all its citizens—as several critical researchers seem to hope. The classical Zionist situation (i.e., Jewish communities in distress comprising potential reserves of immigrants) may, for example, disappear, but it could be accompanied by a simultaneous surge in the ethnic-nationalist moods in Israel or an extreme religious-national ethos diametrically opposed to all the varieties of classical Zionism. Under such circumstances, Israel’s present position as the center of the Jewish people may rapidly deteriorate.

I have not chosen this example by chance, for the second controversial plane is the Zionism of establishment sociology and historiography and the relative importance of different factors in shaping Yishuv (and Israeli) society. These questions relate to Israel's common denominator with other societies that were created as a result of immigration and the installation of a colonial regime in their formative years.

We opened our discussion by saying that the debate both within and without the academic community on the methodological and theoretical path of Israeli sociology needs to be taken seriously because of the troubling developments and tendencies that have arisen in the discipline. In part, at least, these are connected with the growth of critical-reductionist sociology. The first is the process of excessive subdivision and specialization in Israel's relatively small sociological and political science community. Today researchers deal with a wide range of subjects such as the sociology of the family, the sociology of religion, the sociology of musical culture, sociological aspects of forms of mass communication, the sociology of organizations, the sociology of labor, and the sociology of radical ideological groups. These divisions are characteristic of all social science research and study centers throughout the world. But they are felt more strongly here because of the smallness of Israel's academic community. Overspecialization is one of the greatest stumbling blocks in the formation and grounding of a metatheory or overall paradigm. Under conditions of fragmentation, it is easy for each researcher or small group of researchers to adopt a private paradigm, albeit one that is generally supported by similar, narrow paradigms of colleagues abroad—and there is nothing wrong with this. Such division, however, prevents the formation of a critical mass of researchers who, by means of their joint efforts in a given field of research, could become a sociological school in every sense of the word.

A second, even more troubling, development, closely connected to the emergence of critical sociology, is the flight from certain subjects that in the past were the bread and butter of Israeli sociology. Thus, for example, very few members of academic faculties today deal with such topics as the absorption of Russian immigrants, the sociology of parties and political culture, or the study of the elite and social history. The tendency toward microsociology has had an adverse effect on the research and teaching of the macrosociology of Israeli society, particularly on the need to trace the latent and overt connections between phenomena in various institutional spheres. This has been the dominant pattern, although there are a number of exceptions.<sup>38</sup>

Postmodernism's relativist, reflexive approach attracts researchers more to such areas as social psychology, collective memory, symbolic anthropology, and the like. All of these are important fields of study and research, and they certainly do not require anyone's stamp of approval. Nevertheless, the very tendency to detach research and teaching from the key questions in Israeli society and politics is undesirable and likely to bring sociology faculties to the point of crisis within a very short period. The reasons for this are twofold. First, sociologists are apt to become more and more cut off as researchers (though not as citizens) from the dramatic events shaping Israeli society today, ending up as a marginal group unable to contribute to an understanding of the historical processes and trends unfolding before their eyes. Second, while the present generation of students may show an interest in somewhat more piquant and esoteric subjects, it would be a mistake to assume that this will always be the case. Students interested in the broader topics of sociology and political science will seek inspiration in other departments. Israeli sociology's severance from "weightier" or broader concerns has left these topics open for other disciplines, which have already spread into its classical realms. Striking examples are to be found in geography, economics, and political science. This might have been a positive development had the central participants remained sociologists.

Moreover, the contempt shown for the desire to achieve a reasonable objectivity, and the attempt to lump together all social scientists and historians under monolithic banners—Zionism, anti-Zionism or non-Zionism—and to label each as modernist or antimodernist, destroys all possibility of professional discourse.

By rights, the various streams of social scientists and historians should not set themselves exaggerated or utopian goals. It is enough to assure maximal autonomy of the academic framework, to strive to uncover the truth by means of various paradigms, and to draw unbiased conclusions. The alternative is to become embroiled in exhausting pseudo-ideological rivalries. Furthermore, there is the danger that, at one stage or another, the argument will be joined by external political-ideological elements interested in compromising the intellectual independence of academe. Signs of these dangerous trends can already be detected.

I would like to conclude with a brief remark on the subject of Zionist narrative, the pet topic of critical-reductionist sociologists. Establishment sociologists, they say, are captive to the Zionist dream spun by the founding fathers.<sup>39</sup> There may indeed be researchers captive to this dream, but there are also researchers captive to dreams alien to Israeli so-

ciety. Which is preferable? In any event, it is far better that researchers be aware of the need to analyze the gap between dream and reality. I am not at all sure that a comparative study of such gaps would reveal this one—on the Yishuv through the War of Independence—to be the greatest gap in modern history.

## NOTES

1. B. Kimmerling, “Ha-vikuah ‘al ha-historiografia ha-Tziyonit” [The Dispute over Zionist Historiography], working paper presented to the CSZ, n.d., 2–3.
2. Y. Levi, and Y. Peled, “Ha-shever she-lo-haya: Ha-sotziologiya ha-Yisre’elit be-re’i milhemet sheshet ha-yamim” [The Break That Never Was: Israeli Sociology Reflected through the Six Day War], TuV 3 (winter 1993).
3. One might perhaps designate this phenomenon ideological migration.
4. On a suggestion for new periodization, see N. Gross, “He’ara la-‘inyan halukatan le-tekufot shel toldot ha-yishuv be-tekufat ha-mandat” [A Note on the Periodization of Yishuv History during the Mandatory Period] *Cathedra* 18 (winter 1981): 174–77.
5. The cutoff date is arbitrary and is connected here with the periodization.
6. In this context, one should note in particular my friend, colleague, and collaborator on many papers, the late Dan Horowitz.
7. See, for example, B. Kimmerling, “Boundaries and Frontiers of the Israeli Control System: Analytical Conclusions,” in *The Israeli State and Society: Boundaries and Frontiers*, ed. B. Kimmerling, (Albany, 1989).
8. M. Friedman, *Hevra ve-Dat: Ha-Ortodoxia ha-lo Tziyonit be-Eretz Yisrael, 5678–5696* [Society and Religion: Non-Zionist Orthodoxy in Eretz-Israel, 1918–1936] (Jerusalem, 1978).
9. See the extensive discussion on this point in D. Horowitz and M. Lissak, *Mi-Yishuv li-Medina: Yehudei Eretz Yisrael bi-Tekufat ha-Mandat ha-Briti ke-Kehila Politit* [Origins of the Israeli Polity: Palestine under the Mandate] (Tel Aviv, 1977), chaps. 3 and 7.
10. *Ibid.*, 11.
11. D. Horowitz, “Ha-Yishuv ve-ha-hevra ha-Yisre’elit—hemshekhiut ve-shinui: Ha-Yishuv ke-kehila politit be-ma’arekhet du-kehilatit” [The Yishuv and Israeli Society—Continuity and Change: The Yishuv as a Political Community in a Bi-communal System], *Medina Mimshal ve-Yahasim Bein-Leumiim* 21 (spring 1983): 36–38.
12. *Palestine Royal Commission Report*, July 1937, Cmd. 5479, chs. 14 and 15.
13. *Ibid.*, 35. The partial authority of the Jewish Agency was rooted in clause 4 of the Palestine Mandatory Charter.
14. The phrase was uttered by Israel Zangwill and cited in A. Elon, *Ha-Yisre’elim: Meyasdim u-Vanim* (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 1972), 149–50; English: *The Israelis: Founders and Sons* (London 1972), 154.
15. Y. Gorny, *Ha-She’ela ha-‘Aravit ve-ha-Be’aya ha-Yehudit* [The Arab Question and the Jewish Problem] (Tel Aviv, 1985).



16. A. Smith, *Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford, 1979), chap. 4.
17. S. N. Eisenstadt, *Ha-Hevra ha-Yisre'elit be-Tmuroteiha* [The Transformation of Israeli Society] (Jerusalem, 1989), chap. 1.
18. For an extensive discussion of these rifts, see D. Horowitz and M. Lissak, *Met-zukot be-Utopia: Yisrael Hevra be-Omess Yeter* [Trouble in Utopia: The Overburdened Polity of Israel] (Tel Aviv, 1992), chap. 3.
19. *Ibid.*, 28–29.
20. B. Kimmerling, “Yahasei medina-hevra be-Yisrael” [State-Society Relations in Israel], in *Ha-Hevra ha-Yisre'elit: Hebeitim Bikortium* [Israeli Society: Critical Perspectives], ed. U. Ram (Tel Aviv, 1993), 344.
21. The critical sociologists frequently address this charge to, for example, S. N. Eisenstadt, most of whose analyses deal with the Jewish sector.
22. See Horowitz and Lissak, *Origins*, 11.
23. On the importance that we have attributed to this factor in principle, see *ibid.*, chap. 2. Moreover, (Old) Historians have written extensive works on issues concerning Jewish-Arab relations in mandatory Palestine. See, for example, Gorny, *Arab Question*; and Anita Shapira, *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force, 1881–1948* (Oxford, 1992).
24. G. Shafir, “Kark’a, ‘avoda ve-okhlesia ba-kolonizatzia ha-tzionit: Hebeitim klalim ve-yihudim” [Land, Labor, and Population in Zionist Colonization: General and Specific Aspects], in Ram, *Israeli Society*, 105.
25. On the failure of the Jewish workers in their competition with Arab workers in the same sector of the labor market, see Anita Shapira, *Ha-Maavak ha-Nikhzav: ‘Avoda ‘Ivrit, 1924–1939* [The Futile Struggle: The Jewish Labor Controversy, 1924–1939] (Tel Aviv, 1979).
26. One example is Brit ha-Biryonim, the radical branch of the revisionist movement headed by Abba Ahimeir. See Y. Ahimeir and S. Shatzki, *Hinenu Sikrikim: ‘Eiduyot u-Mismahim ‘al Brit Ha-Biryonim* [We Are Sicarii: Testimony and Documents on Brit ha-Biryonim] (Tel Aviv, 1978).
27. B. Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949* (Cambridge, 1988).
28. S. Dothan, “Ha-ma’arekhet ha-politit be-Yishuv ha-Yehudi, 1936–1948” [The Political System of the Jewish Community, 1936–1948], in *Toldot ha-Yishuv ha-Yehudi be-Eretz Yisrael mei-az ha-‘Aliya ha-Rishona: Tekufat ha-Mandat ha-Briti* [The History of the Jewish Community in Eretz-Israel since 1882: The Period of the British Mandate], ed. M. Lissak (Jerusalem, 1994), pt. 2, 481–82.
29. R. Szerzewski, *Mivne ha-Meshek ha-Yisre’eli be-Eretz Yisrael u-ve-Yisrael* [The Structure of the Jewish Economy in Palestine and Israel] (Jerusalem, 1968), chart 1; Y. Metzger, “Le’umiyut kalkalit ve-sektoralit ba-meshek ha-Yisre’eli be-tekfufat ha-mandat” [Economic Structure and National Goals: The Jewish National Home], *Rivo’n LeKalkala* 98 (September 1978): 221–31.
30. Metzger, “Economic Structure.”
31. N. Halevi, *Ha-Hitpathut ha-Kalkalit shel ha-Yishuv ha-Yehudi be-Eretz Yisrael, 1917–1947* [The Economic Development of the Jewish Yishuv in Palestine, 1917–1947] (Jerusalem, 1979), 36–42; M. Lissak, “Mivne taasukati ve-simlei status be-Yishuv ha-Yehudi ha-hadash, 1918–1949” [Occupational Structure, Occupational Mobility, and Status Symbols in the New Yishuv, 1918–1949], *IbTY* 4 (1994): 345–77.

32. Halevi, *Economic Development*, chap. 4.
33. Gorny, *Arab Question*.
34. Shapira, *Land and Power*.
35. Ibid.
36. See the extensive discussion on this issue in Horowitz and Lissak, *Origins*, chap. 7.
37. Uri Ben-Eliezer, *Derekh ha-Kavenet: Hivatzruto shel ha-Militarism ha-Yisre'eli, 1936–1956* [The Emergence of Israeli Militarism, 1936–1956] (Tel Aviv, 1995), 13–34, 280–308.
38. One of the exceptions is Michael Shalev's attempt to connect social and economic processes. See his *Labour and the Political Economy in Israel* (Oxford, 1992).
39. This is after the title of Nurit Gertz's book, *Shevuya be-Haloma: Mithosim ba-Tarbut ha-Yisre'elit* [Captive of a Dream: National Myths in Israeli Culture] (Tel Aviv, 1995).

*Uri Ram*

## **The Future of the Past in Israel** A Sociology of Knowledge Approach

### **New Historians or New Histories? A Sociological Perspective**

Israel's historical scene has been in turmoil since the late 1980s. Relatively placid in the nation-building period, it has become a stormy arena in the postnational era. Historians passionately disagree on both matters of substance and matters of practice. Some contest, while others defend, accepted truisms about Israel's past. Some champion suppressed narratives, others archival findings, while still others pledge allegiance to a hallowed national history. Since 1988, the debate has been galvanized by the buzzwords *Old Historians* and *New Historians*.<sup>1</sup> In the 1990s, it was fanned by the peace process, which, it was widely believed, signaled a new stage in Israeli history and was thus an appropriate moment to review earlier periods in a new light. But at the same time the diminution of the national ethos and drive toward universal normalization had its opponents, who strove to rejuvenate old myths. The historians' debate soon spilled over from scholarly journals and academic conferences into the public sphere (though some may argue that it was the other way around), radiating onto anything that smacked of history (and what in Israel, after all, does not?). In 1998, the twenty-five part TV documentary series on Israel's history from 1942 until the 1990s, *Tekumah* (Rebirth), which was prepared for Israel's fiftieth anniversary, furnished a platform for broad debate and came under attack for denigrating the nation. Frequent changes of government and education ministers opened up also school curricula to historical controversies, especially as regards textbooks and commemoration ceremonies. The decline of the peace process, the downslide into violence, and the resurgence of the ultranationalist coalition saw, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the emergence of a neonationalist, intellectual backlash (albeit more ideological than scholarly). By this time, however, a genera-

tion of critical intellectuals had already become established in the corridors of academe, as well as in the media (most notably, at the *HaAretz* daily). Israel's current cultural and historiographical landscape is thus marked by a three-way controversy: nationalist, postnationalist, and neonationalist.

On the plain, textual level, the historians' debate appears to be a scholarly dispute; nevertheless, it is a major thesis of this study that on a more profound, contextual level its undercurrents are much deeper and broader. This examination deals with the implicit, present sociological significance of the debate rather than with the explicit, contentious historical events around which it revolves. That knowledge is socially embedded is not news, yet the parameters of that embedment, and its effects, remain a moot issue. The present analysis of collective historical consciousness and its scholarly expression in Israel relies on two axes of controversy from the sociology of knowledge: internalist versus externalist and historical versus ethnographic.<sup>2</sup>

The first controversy is between the Columbia School, led by Robert Merton and others, and the Edinburgh School (known also as the Strong Program), led by David Bloor, Barry Barnes, and others. According to the former, though a social context may determine the conditions for the existence or absence of an autonomous scientific community, once such conditions do prevail and a scientific community exercises autonomy, its discoveries are "objective," that is, open to universal, empirical verification or invalidation. Thus, in this view only the circumstances of "discovery"—not the actual substance of science—are subject to social influences. In other words, science has an internal kernel sealed off from external social influences and governed by the rules of evidence (the demarcation of science issue). The other school, in contrast, maintains that social conditions affect also the modes of justification and the very substance itself. In this view, there is a link between social conditions and the reception of an opinion—scientific or otherwise, true or false (the symmetry argument)—and it is the sociologist's role to explain these conditions (the causality argument). In Thomas Kuhn's terms, the Columbia School takes normal science as the common state of science, whereas the Edinburgh School focuses on the enveloping paradigm and its historicity.

In the second controversy, between the historical and ethnographic approaches, the lines, broadly speaking, are drawn between the old schools in the sociology of knowledge, including in this case Columbia and Edinburgh, and the new schools (since the 1970s). The old schools

sought to understand the embedment of ideas (scientific and otherwise) in society's macro-trends, whether these are called existential conditions, as in Karl Mannheim's classic studies, or social-structural conditions, as in later formulations. That is, ideas and knowledge are said to be associated with large collectivities and their historical dynamics, whether nations, classes, communities, or even social movements. In the new schools, the explanation for ideas and knowledge is sought behind the scenes of the internal practices of knowledge communities (in laboratories, disciplines, etc.) and in the microinteractions of their members. A leading scholar in this school, Knorr-Cetina, has endowed science studies with ethnographic methods and more recently with the term *epistemic communities*.<sup>3</sup> Current post-structuralist and post-colonialist approaches to knowledge alternate between the old schools from which they have inherited the macro-historical view, and the new schools from which they have inherited the micro-societal emphasis (this alternation is reflected by Foucault's move from the "archaeology" to the "genealogies" of knowledge).<sup>4</sup>

On both questions, the external/internal (or circumstantial/substantive) debate and the historical/ethnographic (or macro/micro) debate, the position taken here is that of the Edinburgh School. In the following examination, therefore, elements of the Strong Program in the sociology of knowledge are applied to the analysis of Israel's historians controversy. To put it differently, the internal historical substances implicated in the controversy are viewed as disciplinary articulations of external societal contexts, and I will relate to these contexts in terms of Israeli society's macrohistorical dynamics, the relations between its various groups, and the transformations in its political culture.

Morris's watershed article, which coined the term *New Historians*, declared the Old Historiography a simplistic and one-sided account of the Israeli-Arab conflict, a quasi-official, apologetic, state history, evading issues that might show Israel in a bad light. The New History that emerged in the 1980s was characterized by Morris as skeptical in attitude and objective in method. The Old Historians had taken part in the events they later researched. They were unable in their academic work to distance themselves from their youthful experiences in the saga of national liberation. The New Historians grew up in the self-assured, questioning atmosphere of the 1960s and 1970s (and many of them were educated at Western universities, which remain their frame of reference). Moreover, the Old History is largely based on the memoirs and testimonies of

(Jewish) protagonists, whereas the New History is well grounded in newly disclosed archival material.

Despite Morris's historiographical breakthrough, his own thesis seems timid and falls short of capturing the dramatic development that it so lucidly phrased. This limited Columbia perception of the debate is characteristic of many of the historians involved, who keep scuffling over past "facts" without being aware of the present facts that frame their practice. In contrast, according to the Edinburgh point of view on the historical debate, the transformation in Israel's historiographical landscape is situated within a larger picture of social and cultural changes. Morris presents and represents the Columbia trend when he relates to the historians' debate as an internal scholarly affair. He considered the generational change in academe to be the major cause behind it. He considered the opening of state archives on the 1948 war to be an essential condition for it. And he dealt with only a specific aspect of it—the Arab-Israeli conflict. But, apart from incidental allusions, he is oblivious to the vast social and cultural changes that underpin the appearance of the New Historians. In all four respects, his thesis calls for serious modification. In the conceptualization offered here, Morris's position represents a Columbia School approach to historical knowledge, and what is called for, therefore, is a Strong Program corrective to it.

First, although generational change may have been instrumental in the introduction of paradigmatic historiographical adjustments, Israel's current historiographical setup was instigated chiefly by a change in its sense of collective identity, which occurred against the backdrop of global, local, and cultural processes; the new generation was a carrier—not the cause—of the spirit of the age. History is not merely the province of academe; it is a dimension of collective culture and, more specifically, of national cultures. When nationhood changes, so, too, must history. Historical revisions and debates, in Israel as elsewhere, are underpinned by unfolding breakdowns, or at least serious modifications, in the meaning of nationality. To understand the historians' debate, therefore, one needs to analyze the transformations in nationhood, which are not given consideration in the Columbia perspective.

Second, while the Columbia perspective sees archival research as the groundwork for the New Historiography and its revelations, and, indeed, this may have been helpful and even necessary, it, in itself, does not explain the generation's paradigmatic historiographical shift: Israel's

current historiographical zeal was sparked not only by a change in the sense of identity but by a profound change in the definition of historical knowledge. Actually, the facts disclosed by the New Historians had never been secret (albeit not to the degree of detail, precision, or verification of the recent research); on the whole, they had been available to readers in every relevant language. Similarly, these facts could have been discovered by historians long ago by a variety of methods (e.g., systematic interviews or in-depth analyses of available sources) had they only taken the trouble to look for them. The newness of the New History thus does not consist of the exposure of unknown data but rather of the new narrative(s) it conveys. A historical narrative is not an inventory of data or a timetable but rather the rendering of the past in a manner meaningful to the present. Morris's thesis is deaf to the intense discussions on the nature of knowledge in general, and on historical knowledge in particular, that have occupied the discipline of history in the past two decades or so.

Third, from a Columbia perspective, the new history is delimited by a topic, most commonly the Israeli-Arab conflict. Although historians of the conflict are certainly the spearhead of the New History, it is no particular topic as such that is at stake here but something more fundamental and less obvious: a complete political, cultural ethos or a national identity. The historians' debate thus becomes increasingly comprehensive; it encompasses the history of the conflict but also Jewish history, the history of Zionism, and the history of the region, as well as social and cultural history. History should be understood in its broadest sense as collective memory rather than in its strict academic sense. Morris's thesis does not recognize the social functions of historiography (apart from considering social influences as external obstructions to scientific research in the spirit of the Columbia School) or, for that matter, the close association between collective memory and historical research.

Fourth and last, given this discussion, from a Columbia perspective the New Historians are akin to a Unicorn: this model takes no note even of the fierce disputes that have characterized the neighboring sociological discipline since the late 1970s. The sociological debate preceded that of the historians, though with a different focus—on structural processes rather than events and in a different style—theoretical rather than ideographic formulations. But this is not all; wide-ranging debate of identity issues has, in fact, invaded academic disciplines (such as archaeology) and

the arts—literature, theater, cinema, plastic arts, and more—showing the phenomenon to be much broader than just a historical debate.

All in all, while Morris is credited with heralding a historiographical breakthrough, his thesis is too narrow for the larger occurrences. Several interrelated sets of issues that are absent from the Columbia thesis need to be elaborated from the point of view of the Strong Program of the sociology of knowledge: the issue of national identity, the politics of knowledge, and finally the connection between historiography and collective memory.

From the point of view of the Strong Program, the historians' debate in Israel is considered a political-cultural development in its own right. The crucial question is not what it is *about* (i.e., rival versions of the past) but what it is *for* (i.e., what it signifies in the present). In other words, the object of inquiry is the present politics of Israeli historiography rather than the history of the Israeli polity. This cannot be overstated: the historians' debate manifests a general sociocultural contest over Israeli collective identity. Far from being just an internal academic affair, related to distinct scholarly controversies, it is seen here as a rostrum on which Israel's national ethos, namely, Zionism, is taken to task. Its crux is the core narrative of Jewish national revival, integration, and independence.

Specifically, this essay argues that the debate exhibits the waning of the national Zionist ethos in Israel and the emergence of two mutually antagonistic alternatives: a universalistic post-Zionist ethos and a particularistic neo-Zionist ethos. In addition, the debate's eruption in Israel in the 1990s is to be understood against the background of both local social changes and global political ones, as well as the recent endorsement in some Israeli academic circles of postmodern sensibilities and poststructuralist methodologies. A combination of local, global, and cultural influences thus account for the new postpositivist scholarly critique and the new politics of difference with regard to Israel's collective identity in general and to Israel's historiographical narrative in particular, as well as to both positivist and nationalist backlashes (not necessarily in overlap). It is thus proposed that the sociology of knowledge perspectives on the historical debate be changed from the Columbia to the Edinburgh School, and the term *New Historians* be replaced with the term *New Histories*. For we are dealing with new narratives of social groups, not merely with novel discoveries of individual New Historians.

The following summarizes the two sociology of knowledge approaches to the histories debate.



### **The sociology of knowledge perspective**

Columbia School: the New Historians model

Edinburgh School (the Strong Program): the New Histories model

### **Causes of the historical debates**

The debate is perceived as affecting the context of discovery but not the content discovered (see next column). In addition, the debate is related to the microsocial level: generational change, opening of archives, studies abroad, etc.

The debate is conceived as affecting the very substance of the historical account, not just its discovery (see next column). In addition, the debate is related to the macrosocietal level: the transformation of Israeli political culture and the split into national, neonational, and postnational identities.

### **The essence of the New History**

The New History is perceived as scientific. It offers more objective and accurate accounts of Israel's past compared with the more ideological view of the older generation.

The novelty of the New History is in the narrative. It offers new narratives of nondominant and marginalized groups whose experiences and perspectives were unrecognized in the hegemonic narrative.

## **The Three Arenas of Debate: Israelis/Palestinians, Israelis/Jews, Israelis/Israelis**

An outline of the histories debate is now in order. For the sake of brevity, the multiple issues raised in the debate are condensed into three major arenas representing the encounters between the major identity groups: Israeli/Arab, Israeli/Jewish (homeland/diaspora), and Israeli/Israeli (East/West). Each of the arenas provides a sketch of the three major historical perspectives or, in a wider sense, narratives: the national Zionist, postnational (post-Zionist), and neonational (neo-Zionist). It must be stressed, however, that, unlike the first two, the neo-Zionist narrative has not yet matured into an academic approach and in general finds expression in ideological essays and pamphlets.<sup>5</sup>

*The Israeli/Arab Arena.* The national conflict is the specialization

of the core group of New Historians. These historians have challenged the conventional view of Israel's foreign and security policy, especially (so far) as regards the 1940s (particularly the 1948 war) and 1950s (particularly, the Suez war, 1956), though some works have already raised questions about later wars. They have argued, among other things, that the State of Israel spurned opportunities to negotiate with Arab states and, on the other hand, concluded an unwritten pact with the Jordanian kingdom to divide Palestine between the two of them, thus preventing the establishment of a Palestinian state. This view contradicts Israel's widely held self-image as a peace-loving nation drawn reluctantly into the agony of war only as a last resort and in an enforced situation of "no choice."

Furthermore, these historians argue that Israel bears a large (in certain versions, a major) responsibility for "the birth of the Palestinian refugee problem," which is the title of Morris's definitive book on the topic.<sup>6</sup> They contend that during Israel's 1948 War of Independence, senior military commanders, with implicit encouragement from Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, evicted and expelled hundreds of thousands of Palestinian villagers and townspeople. An even stronger thesis holds that a policy of population transfer had been forged by Zionist leaders years before the 1948 war. The question of massacres perpetrated by Israeli soldiers resurfaced recently with regard to the Tantura case.<sup>7</sup> On top of everything else, Israel exercised (and still does) a tough policy of "no return" toward the refugees. Until these revelations scandalized academe and public opinion, professional historians simply glossed over the unpleasant aspects of the war, while popular histories and school textbooks made brief reference to an Arab mass flight, sometimes airing the theory that it was at the behest of Arab leaders.

Critical sociologists who have researched the early stages of Jewish settlement in Palestine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries applied analogous analyses, though in more structural terms. They depicted Zionist settlement as a colonial project, entailing land acquisition, the closure of labor markets, and displacement of native Arab peasants. This new sociology contrasts with mainstream Israeli sociology, which presented a dualistic concept of Israeli-Arab relations whereby the two societies developed side by side, each according to its own inherent modernizing thrust. Critical sociologists also determined that a military culture emerged in Israeli society, contributing significantly to the prolongation of the national conflict. These accounts tarnish the glittering perception most Israelis have of their society as civic and benevolent.

The classic Zionist narrative attempted to square the circle of Israeli-Arab relations. In this spirit, the militarization of Israeli society was interpreted as a defensive measure (the Israeli army is called the Israel Defense Forces), and the constitutional discourse of the 1990s adopted the concept of a “Jewish and democratic state.” According to the neo-Zionists, secular Zionism, especially the labor version, has tended to be weak on nationalism. It never understood the impossibility of Jews and gentiles living together in peace. The Arab attitude to Israel is an extension of a long anti-Semitic history, as evinced by Arab support of Nazism during World War II (special allusion is made to the mufti’s relations with the Nazis). Zionist illusions of living in harmony with the Arabs have always led to an ultradovish position of wholesale compromise, which the other side interpreted as weakness and exploited. The only way to achieve peace is by deterrence and retaliation—an idea not new to classic right-wing ideology, namely, Ze’ev Jabotinsky’s Iron Wall.<sup>8</sup> The Arabs in Israel are a fifth column and pose a demographic threat. They can be tolerated only as a foreign minority, although “transfer by agreement” is seen as the preferred solution.

*The Israeli/Jewish Arena.* The line of dispute here is drawn between homeland—territorial or native—Zionists, on the one hand, and diaspora Jewry, on the other, with Zionist-Hebrew culture being the main area of confrontation. A key concept in this connection is the “new person” that Zionism strove to create, not unlike other modernist movements, especially nationalism and socialism (but also fascism). This new, positive identity in Eretz-Israel was offset by a contrived negative identity of diaspora Jewry, and the new Hebrew creed demanded the “negation of the diaspora.” The pioneers who settled Palestine and their sabra (native-born) descendants were depicted as physical, daring, biblical peasant-warriors, the antithesis of diaspora Jewry, which was the non-Zionist other. The Jewish past was condensed into a single, linear metanarrative—“from dispersal to redemption”—in which Zionism emerged as the telos of all Jewish history. Another, not unrelated argument concerns the ratio of nationalism and socialism within the labor movement, alleging that the latter served as mere camouflage for the former.

This question is highlighted in the Holocaust disputes in Israeli historiography. It has been charged that the cultural hiatus between Zionist settlers and diaspora Jewry was responsible for the scant efforts of Yishuv leaders during the Holocaust to rescue Jews from Nazism. This charge is rejected by mainstream historians, who point to the par-

alyzing weakness, helplessness, and shock of the leaders in the (still) inconceivable events of that time. It is also argued that, regardless of what was or might have been done to rescue Jews, the memory of the Holocaust has been nationalized in Israel and used for political purposes, while universal lessons have been ignored and basic sympathy withheld from the survivors.

In the neo-Zionist view, the inherent weakness of Israeli nationalism derives from its alienation from Jewish sources and culture. Secular Zionism, especially its labor version, had made a futile attempt to deny the traditional, religious-Jewish core of Jewish identity. This self-estrangement had made labor Zionism unable to empathize with the victims of the Holocaust, resulting in the grave moral default of its leaders in the face of Jewish disaster. The Six Day War (1967) united Israel with the heart of the Jewish Holy Land, the home of its ancestors, and the War of Atonement (Yom Kippur, 1973) symbolized the deep religious roots of the Israeli-Arab wars. Zionism's spiritual crisis leads it to yearn for normalization or Americanization. Only a new national-religious and orthodox coalition can cure Zionism of this moral bankruptcy.

*The Israeli/Israeli Arena.* This arena, the encounter in Israel of Ashkenazim (Jews of European descent) and Mizrahim (Jews from Muslim lands), is sometimes described as "the ethnic problem" or the "social gap." It revolves around the social policies of the Israeli elite, especially as manifested by the labor movement, which was dominant in Israeli society from the 1930s to the 1970s. Mainstream sociology and history depicted the movement's founders as idealistic pioneers and admired their particular blend of national development and social(ist) construction, encapsulated by the phrase "socialist constructivism" or "utopian realism." In sharp distinction, today it is argued that the Jewish labor movement was conspicuously nationalist, modeled after the most integrative (ethnic) contemporary Eastern European nationalism, that its egalitarian ideology was no more than a mobilization ruse, and that nothing was farther from its mind than the building of a model socialist society.

Since the 1970s, numerous critical sociologists have expressed coinciding views. They underscore the power-driven, organizational manipulation of the labor elite; they expose the discriminatory policies of labor and its governments toward Israel's Arab citizens in such spheres as housing, education, employment, and welfare; and they disclose the methods of domination and control that, de facto, make Arabs second-class citizens in an ethnically ruled democratic system.

With respect to Jewish immigrants from Muslim countries, the pattern of integration of the 1950s and early 1960s has come in for particularly harsh criticism. This immigration wave almost doubled the young state's population and radically transformed its ethnic complexion. Mainstream sociology had analyzed the issue in terms of absorption and nation building, a process in which newcomers were desocialized of former traditional identities and resocialized into modern Israeli culture. Critical sociology, again in contradistinction, analyzed the same process in terms of a class system and a capitalist division of labor. It argued that the labor movement, and more specifically the leading party, Mapai, had initiated labor-intensive industrialization, channeled the immigrants to dependent, peripheral locations, and relegated them to proletarian, marginal positions.

A new, emerging critical sociology school presents a different frame of reference for the "ethnic problem." This school argues that the dominant culture essentializes identity categories, that it sees Mizrahim, women, and Arabs, for example, as fixed, objectified categories formed and positioned through the establishment prism and the dominant cultural hierarchies. The postcolonial discourse posits alternative options of multiple voices and fluid identities, which transcend the traditional boundaries between men and women, Jews and Arabs, religious and secular, Israelis and Palestinians, rich and poor, and also Mizrahim and Ashkenazim. Mizrahiyut, or Mizrahi identity, is thus seen as a consequence of the differentiation between Jews and Arabs into two distinct, dichotomous, and hierarchical categories. Such distinction is a modern project that constructs the "appropriate" Jewish identity as essentially Western so that to be included in the Zionist project Mizrahi Jews have to deny their Arabic culture.

In parenthesis, one may note the emergence of yet another critical historical perspective—a bourgeois-liberal account of Israeli history. This version depreciates the role of the labor movement in the nation-building process and celebrates the role of the private sector. The entrepreneurial class is presented as the true builder of the Jewish community's economic infrastructure and collectivist ideology as a hindrance. Thus, the first and fourth waves of Jewish immigrants, petit-bourgeois farmers and urban merchants, take their place in a narrative that had hitherto considered them a failure, a narrative that crowned the second and third waves of Jewish immigration, those who formulated the collectivist ethos and established the labor movement's collectivist institutions.

Interestingly, while neo-Zionists reject the idea of a consumer society, they nevertheless adopt the entrepreneurial business ethos, imagining a culture that is both more Orthodox and more capitalist. This is especially true of the new Right's American branch in Israel, as exemplified by the politics of Benjamin Netanyahu and the group centered on the *Azure* journal. As regards the ethnic problem, because the neo-Zionist perspective takes its cue from ethno-nationalist Jewish identity, focusing on Jewish-Arab hostility, it lacks an articulate position on the Ashkenazi-Mizrahi issue. If anything, it endorses the narrative of integration, of all Jews being a single, indivisible entity.

Table 1 summarizes the major controversial issues and narratives in the historical debate. In every respect, whether on the issue of Palestinian Arabs, European Jewry, or Mizrahi immigrants, the conventional Zionist "story" has come under attack, its "truths" severely challenged by both left-wing post-Zionism and right-wing neo-Zionism. Mainstream Zionist maxims, such as "a land without a people for a people without a land" (in reference to the early Jewish settlement in Palestine), "there is no one to talk to" (in reference to the absence of Arab peace partners), or "all Jews are responsible for one another" (in reference to a saying on Jewish solidarity), have been rebuffed, questioned, or, alternatively, defended. Beyond the specifics, the post-Zionist critique thwarts the Zionist aspiration to be seen as the exclusive, genuine representative of Jewish interests at all times and in all places and of Jewish culture in all its varieties, as well as the necessary culmination of the entire continuum of Jewish history. Neo-Zionists, on the other hand, revive and reinvigorate precisely these views (though cleansed of mainstream Zionism's universalistic, liberal, and socialist components). More generally, claims such as those made by New Historians and critical sociologists deconstruct the Zionist national metanarrative, exposing its contradictions, weaknesses, omissions, and the marginalization and repression of others, while the claims of Zionism's new defenders reassert the unity and unanimity of the Jewish nation-cum-religion identity.

By now, our argument should be patently clear: the histories debate in Israel is not to be seen as an internal, academic dispute but as a milestone in Israel's political-cultural history. The new, postnational history and critical sociology challenge Israel's most cherished myths and fundamental ethos, one by one, while the new, neo-Zionist cultural discourse bolsters them by ridding them of modern, foreign influences.

**TABLE I. Major Controversial Issues and Narratives in the Historical Debate**

<b>Major Controversial Issues</b>	<b>The Zionist Narrative</b>	<b>The Post-Zionist Narrative</b>	<b>The Neo-Zionist Narrative</b>
<p>Israeli/Arab: Is Israel a settler-colonial society? Which side is responsible for the wars and the refugee problem?</p>	<p>Israel is the state of the Jewish nation that returned to its homeland after being expelled from it two millennia ago. In the War of Independence, the Palestinians fled, assuming that they would soon return after Israel lost the war. Israel constantly seeks peace, but the Arab states refuse to recognize it. They periodically launch aggression and wars against it, and it must defend itself. Regarding the areas occupied in 1967, Israel would be ready to negotiate a territorial compromise should it have a responsible, non-terrorist Palestinian partner. As for Israel's Arab citizens, they have been granted full citizenship rights and equality.</p>	<p>Israel is a settler-colonial society on a par with other white European societies such as Australia or South Africa. Whether or not the expulsion of Palestinians in 1948 was premeditated (the transfer issue), or an unintentional consequence of the war, Israel is largely responsible for the refugee problem. The conquest of land and labor was an avowed principle of labor Zionism, and its logical derivative is dislocation of, and discrimination against, Palestinians. Israel often rejected Arab initiatives for peace negotiations and developed a militaristic culture. Israel must change from the state of the Jews to a state of all its citizens.</p>	<p>Secular Zionism, especially in its labor version, has tended to be weak on nationalism. It never understood the impossibility of Jews and gentiles living together in peace. The Arab attitude toward Israel is the extension of a long anti-Semitic history. Zionist illusions of living in harmony with the Arabs have always led to an ultradovish position of wholesale compromise, which the other side interpreted as weakness and exploited. The only way to achieve peace is by deterrence and retaliation. The Arabs in Israel are a fifth column and can be tolerated only as a foreign minority.</p>
<p>Israeli/Jewish (homeland/diaspora): Does Israeli identity reject Jewish diaspora culture? Was/is the Holocaust memory abused?</p>	<p>A new, secular Jewish identity was crafted in Israel, transforming Jewish identity from religious to national while preserving and adjusting ancient symbols to modern realities. The biblical culture of ancient Jewry, including the Hebrew language, was revived. Zionism is the obvious response to the Holocaust, and Israeli memory cherishes the Jewish victims and the heroes who could</p>	<p>Zionists and Israelis internalized some anti-Semitic images. They despise Jewish culture and history, deeming them pathetic. Against this background, the Yishuv leadership during the Holocaust gave priority to the national cause over rescuing Jews from Nazi persecution. After the Holocaust, its memory was nationalized and used as a pretext in the confrontation with the Arabs.</p>	<p>Israeli nationalism is essentially weak due to its alienation from Jewish cultural sources. Secular Zionism, especially in its labor version, made a futile attempt to deny the traditional, religious-Jewish core of Jewish identity. This alienation is also at the root of the Yishuv leaders' mishandling of the Holocaust. The Six Day War (1967) united Israel with the heart of the Jewish Holy Land, the</p>

Major Controversial Issues	The Zionist Narrative	The Post-Zionist Narrative	The Neo-Zionist Narrative
Israeli/Israeli (Ashkenazi/Mizrahi): Was/is there discrimination against Mizrahi immigrants, resulting in their occupying inferior social and cultural positions?	not be saved by the prestate community.  Jews from all seats of exile gathered in Israel to create a new Jewish-Israeli identity. Newcomers, especially those from traditional backgrounds, shed their diasporic identities (desocialization) and were reintegrated (resocialization) into a melting pot. The Mizrahim were latecomers of a non-modern background; their egalitarian integration required special fostering and time. Since the late 1970s, this view has been supplemented with a "salad bowl" concept, a plurality of ethnic cultures on the symbolic level.	There are two versions here. 1. The earlier Marxist version: The Ashkenazi/Mizrahi encounter was not a clash between modernism and traditionalism but between a state-made bourgeoisie and a state-made proletariat. The ethnic problem is not about unequal distribution but unequal production (i.e., class relations). 2. The later postcolonialist version: The issue is not (only) socioeconomic but involves the marginalization of Mizrahi identity in Israel, deriving from an orientalist attitude toward the East in combination with an anti-Arab identity.	home of its biblical ancestors, and the War of Atonement (1973) symbolized the deep religious roots of the Israeli-Arab wars. The new national-religious and orthodox coalition will heal Zionism.  Taking its cue from the primacy of ethno-nationalist Jewish identity, and focusing on the hostility between Jews and Arabs, this perspective does not have an articulate position on the Ashkenazi/Mizrahi issue.

### The Knowledge of History: After Objectivism

Two interrelated issues are involved in the histories debate in Israel: the status of academic research and the makeup of collective memory. By and large, academics in Israel, as elsewhere, tend to treat the two as utterly separate (once more in the spirit of the Columbia School). They surmise that research is a scientific endeavor abiding by objective procedures and



careful documentation while memory belongs to the popular realm and is susceptible to whim and bias. Historical research, accordingly, gradually approximates history as it really was, while historical memory usually produces distorted images of the past.

Interestingly enough, Benny Morris, who heralded the New History, subscribes contentiously to the positivist approach in historiography. He frequently declares that “there is truth,” that “objectivity is possible,” and that “the historian of the Israeli-Arab conflict should make an effort to write about the conflict as if he were writing about the war between Carthage and Rome, or had just landed from Mars and is observing the situation without any connections or commitments.” He appeals to the Leopold von Ranke ethos, maintaining that “the task of the historian is to try to get to historical ‘truth,’” to study and report “what really happened.”<sup>9</sup> In terms of the rhetoric of history, this view is termed *archivist*: “the tendency of the historian to think that the most important relation is not with the readers, the times or the questions, but with the archives—with what the historian misleadingly calls ‘the sources’ of history.”<sup>10</sup> Morris’s most acrimonious antagonist, Efraim Karsh, also declares allegiance to the “bare facts” and thus rejects the distinction between the Old and New history in the name of the only appropriate distinction—that between proper and improper scientific research.<sup>11</sup> His critique scrutinizes the footnotes of the New Historians, whom he accuses of simply falsifying their archival sources, and he dubs the New Historiography “*falsiography*.”<sup>12</sup> Although he abhors the overall perspective offered by the New Historians, he—just like his opponent—speaks the language of unbiased science.

The many reservations about objectivism may be amalgamated under the banner of *relativism*.<sup>13</sup> Historical objectivists consider written history to be a textual retrieval of historical reality. Relativists maintain that the same piece of historical reality can be rendered in more than one way. Objectivists consider written history to be a report of past events; relativists consider written history to be a narration of past events. The language of report is ostensibly analytical; the language of narrative is literary. Objectivists aim at an ideal of ultimate history; relativists expose the horizonlike elusiveness of this ideal. For objectivists, a historical text is either true or false; for relativists, a historical text must always have a context. Objectivists regard the “logic of discovery” as an unfortunate hindrance to be pared down as much as possible; relativists regard it as an unavoidable constituent of the “logic of explanation.” In a word, objectivists wish to separate history and memory; relativists argue that the two are inseparable.

The objectivist-relativist dispute is as old as the concept of truth.

For our purposes, however, what is of interest is the upheaval that has taken place in the social sciences and humanities in the past two decades. From the 1930s to the late 1960s, academe was dominated by the objectivist view—though not objectivist practice. In the philosophy of science, it was known as the “received view,”<sup>14</sup> appearing under such rubrics as empiricism, operationalism, logical positivism, or nomothetic deductivism. The Columbia School provided the sociological version.

The relativist view gained currency in academe in the last quarter of a century or so. In the philosophy of science, there has been growing consensus about the inadequacy of the received view.<sup>15</sup> Its presumed givenness, the accessibility of observational facts, and their determination of scientific concepts and theories have all come in for a good deal of criticism. As Frederick Suppe put it, “theoretical terms must be constructed as being antecedently meaningful”; their meaning “may incorporate, or be modified by recourse to, analogies and iconic models,”<sup>16</sup> and “the last vestiges of positivistic philosophy of science are disappearing from the philosophical landscape.”<sup>17</sup> The new, postpositivist view is animated by a number of interrelated trends.

The first trend is the sociological and historical approach to science summarized earlier under the Edinburgh School. It originated mainly in Britain and the United States, reviving a legacy from Marx to Mannheim. It maintains that the substance of knowledge cannot be divorced from the social and cultural conditions of its production, transmission, and reception. It found support in a line of philosophers from (the older) Ludwig Wittgenstein to Richard Rorty, each of whom, in his own way, strongly criticized the dogma of positivism and the notion that cognition is a kind of “mirror of nature.”<sup>18</sup> The most effective formulation of this conviction is found in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, especially in the “scientific paradigm” of “conventional science.”<sup>19</sup>

A second trend contributing to the upheaval in the concept of knowledge stems from Europe and offers a more radical-skeptical, post-structuralist critique of the culture of modernity. It deconstructs fundamental binaries such as subject-object, knowledge-power, culture-politics, signifier-signified, true-false, self-other and so forth. Particularly influential are Michel Foucault’s studies of “regimes of truth” and his notions of the archaeology and genealogy of knowledge.<sup>20</sup> The poststructuralist approach in general, and Foucault’s in particular, have helped liberate a new kind of historical study, which aims to redeem the suppressed data and submerged memories of “hostile encounters . . . confined to the margins of knowledge.”<sup>21</sup>

A third critique of the objectivist concept emerged from the multicultural and postcolonialist scholarship that has been institutionalized (and is flourishing) in cultural studies. The major advocates of this view are minority or third-world scholars situated at international crossroads such as Partha Chatterjee, Homi Bhabha, Cornel West, Edward Said, and Stuart Hall, to mention but a few. They have exposed a deep-set corpus of knowledge within power structures and espouse a new cultural politics of location and difference. Said's *Orientalism* has had a great impact in this respect, notably his contention that "the general liberal consensus that 'true' knowledge is fundamentally non-political (and conversely, that overtly political knowledge is not 'true' knowledge) obscures the highly if obscurely organized political circumstances obtaining when knowledge is produced."<sup>22</sup>

A fourth highly influential "minority" voice in social and human studies in recent decades has been that of feminist scholarship; it has invigorated the traditional sociology of science, the poststructuralist critique of culture and multiculturalist education.<sup>23</sup>

Fifth, and finally, in the discipline of history itself the new relativism is expressed in a restored interest in the rhetorical, discursive, and narrative aspects of historical representation.<sup>24</sup> In 1973, Hayden White broached the idea that history is constituted through its literary genre, style, and tropes and that form constitutes content.<sup>25</sup> White goes so far as to say that historical narratives "most manifestly are . . . verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much invented as found and the forms of which have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the sciences." He argues that histories gain part of their explanatory effect "by their success in making stories out of mere chronicles; and stories in turn are made out of chronicles by operation . . . [of] 'emplotment,' [i.e.,] the encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific kinds of plot structures."<sup>26</sup> In a somewhat different vein, Peter Novick has convincingly demonstrated that due to the entry of new groups into academe and the sciences, "the idea of historical objectivity is perceived as problematic more than in any time in the past."<sup>27</sup>

In summary, all these different trends denounce the notion of objectivity and bring out the politics, rhetoric, discourse, and narrativity of science and knowledge and of culture and representation. They demonstrate the working of politics through the social relations of power between classes, nations, races, and genders. F. R. Ankersmith concluded that philosophies of history have to choose today either the old (Carte-

sian) “epistemological” history and becoming “an odd positivist fossil” or “narrativist” history and contributing to a better understanding of the historical craft and its present state.<sup>28</sup>

The more radical New Historians in Israel have absorbed the narrativist philosophy of history, the new sociology of knowledge, the post-structuralist cultural critique, and the multicultural positions described here. These trends have found a major platform for their criticism of mainstream social sciences and humanities in the journal *Theory and Criticism* [TuV], published by the Van Leer Institute and HaKibbutz HaMe’uhad and edited, in turn, by Adi Ophir and Yehuda Shenhav, both outspoken postmodern, postcolonial, and post-Zionist intellectuals. (The journal *Notebooks for Research and Critique*, published by a group of sociologists in Haifa in the late 1970s and early 1980s, was a modest, more Marxist predecessor.) Ilan Pappé, a prominent New Historian, pointedly expressed this fresh perspective on history: “Historians today do not profess objectivity. They display cynicism toward the historical narrative woven by past and present political elites, and endeavour to shed light on all those who were relegated to the shadows by nationalism, religiosity, racism and male chauvinism.”<sup>29</sup> As mentioned, this approach does not represent all the works associated with the New Historians, but it certainly adds a dimension to the controversy.

While most academic historians in Israel reject the idea of relativism with respect to their work, Mordecai Bar-On, a senior scholar, takes a more moderate view of the historians’ debate. He concedes that some measure of relativity in history is unavoidable but distinguishes between deliberate bias, which is exercised instrumentally in the service of ideology, and existential bias, which is inadvertent and the result of unconscious cultural conditioning. To his mind, the national bias of which the Old Historians are accused is existential and unavoidable and at least as legitimate as any of the new perspectives adopted by the New Historians.<sup>30</sup> Anita Shapira, a leading mainstream historian of labor Zionism, also aims for a middle of the road approach between New and Old Historians and between post-Zionist, left-wing historians and neo-Zionist, right-wing historians. She considers the two sides to be mirror images and calls for the crafting of “a more subtle, intricate view of history, with intermediate hues and shadings” and for finding “a middle ground . . . which [embraces] justified criticism from both sides.”<sup>31</sup>

One way or another, the New Historians have radically transformed the historical consciousness and historiographic map in Israel: first, long-term implicit methodological and theoretical assumptions have been

subjected to explicit reflection; second, the long-lasting national historical perspective has split into competing narratives; third, major issues in Israeli history have received fresh attention and been researched anew; fourth, the cohort of veteran historians at core establishment institutions has given way to clusters of younger New Historians; and, fifth, the controversy between Old and New, or Zionist and post-Zionist, Historians has propelled the emergence of historians with a different narrative to relate: the neo-Zionist historians.

Having expounded the thesis that the text of history is to be historically contextualized, let us now look at the context in order to elucidate the shape that the histories debate has taken.

### **The History of Knowledge: After Nationalism**

As stated, history texts have been challenged and changed in Israel within the context of Zionism's decline and the rise of neo-Zionism and post-Zionism. The old historiography drew on the national ideology of Eastern European Zionism from the last quarter of the nineteenth century. As a national movement lacking both a state and a territory, it had naturally adopted the ethnic, or integrative, type of nationalism of the region rather than the territorial, or civic, nationalism associated with Western constitutional states.<sup>32</sup> Since 1948, the State of Israel has retained this character while professing a simultaneous commitment to the liberal equality of its citizenry. This tension since the 1970s has swelled into a culture war, verging, at times, on civil war between neo-Zionism and post-Zionism.

The basic idea behind Israel's establishment was that it was to be a state for the Jews. This was underpinned by the assumption that once the conditions for a Jewish majority were created there would be no contradiction between nationalist and democratic principles. This model, according to a 1980s formulation, was called an ethnic democracy.<sup>33</sup> But in the final decades of the twentieth century the ethos was challenged from both Left and Right. The left spawned the concept of post-Zionism, which promotes a civic national identity based on the commonality of its residents. The Right produced the concept of neo-Zionism, which promotes the reverse—the replacement of the pragmatic concept of a state for the Jews with the fundamentalist concept of a Jewish state, that is, a state committed to ethnic cultural symbols and a historic mission.<sup>34</sup> Gershon Shafir and Yoav Peled thus propose an analytical model whereby the structure of membership in Israeli society is to be defined

by the ethos of three different, partially overlapping regimes: ethno-national, republican-communal, and liberal. The ethno-national ethos regulates the privileges of Jews over Palestinians inside Israel; the republican-communal ethos (referring here to a hierarchy based on service for the common good) regulates the privileges of Ashkenazi Jews over oriental (Mizrahi) Jews, secular over Orthodox Jews, and men over women; and the liberal ethos posits a constitutional individual equality (inside Israel but not within the occupied territories) that partly conceals and partly legitimates the other principles.<sup>35</sup> These principles, accentuated and separated, crystallized in the 1990s into a Zionist ethos at the center (republican), flanked by the post-Zionist ethos (liberal) on one side and the neo-Zionist ethos (ethnic) on the other.

The turbulence in the historical sphere registers and articulates the struggle among these orientations. The Old [Zionist] History was naturally the first historiographic paradigm. The newly established nation imagined itself, invented its tradition, and narrated its historical identity. The social and political project of Jewish immigration to Palestine, the latter's settlement and colonization, and the construction of a Jewish community and state were culturally rendered in terms of national revival, territorial repatriation, and historical redemption.

Historians, along with other intellectuals (writers, poets, journalists, teachers, artists, etc.) and at a later stage social scientists, took an active, even leading, role in composing and propagating the national narrative. Academe, far from being a detached arbiter, has been part and parcel of the national endeavor. Disciplines such as history and sociology were molded under the spell of national ideology. Until quite recently, the dominant historical paradigm was built on premises furnished by the national-revival school, led by Benzion Dinur and others,<sup>36</sup> and the dominant sociological paradigm on premises furnished by the nation-building modernization school led by S. N. Eisenstadt and others.<sup>37</sup> Up until the last twenty years, the history and sociology written in Israel conferred an ostensibly scientific, academic legitimacy on the collective memory and ideology required for the crystallization of a national identity. The kinship between power and knowledge has indeed been close in Israel. It would not be a gross exaggeration to suggest that until recently nationality has been more of a snug cover for historical and sociological studies than a subject of inquiry.

As an ideology, neo-Zionism burst onto the scene in the mid-1970s, in the wake of the 1967 and 1973 wars, creating a new national and historical ethos of "back to one's roots" and worship of "holy places."

Academic support came from Bar Ilan University, even though its historiographical output was to manifest itself only in the 1990s. The Shalem Centre in Jerusalem and its journal, *Azure*, is a hotbed of neo-Zionist studies. Yoram Hazony's recent historical treatise, *The Jewish State*, in which only strict adherence to ethno-nationalistic principles is considered truly Zionist, is to date the pinnacle of this "struggle for Israel's soul."<sup>38</sup>

Neo-Zionism followed the occupation of the West Bank and other territories in the 1967 war, which reanimated the old (predominantly right-wing) creed of Greater Israel; this rightward turn was facilitated by the trauma of the 1973 October War, in which Israel was on the brink of destruction. The latter circumstance resulted in the ousting of Labor from power in 1977—for the first time since the 1920s. A new social stratum of national-religious Yeshiva graduates, hitherto marginalized and since mobilized by the Bloc of the Faithful (Gush Emunim), seized the opportunity to appropriate and renew the pioneering ethos of the early twentieth century and "create facts on the ground."

The Jewish Orthodox community is another actor in the rise of neo-Zionism. Throughout the nation-building era, Orthodox Judaism had been quite insignificant on Israel's political-cultural map, a marginal minority tolerated by the secular Zionist majority. But in the past three decades both the political status and the allegiances of Orthodox Jews have been radically transformed. They gained enormous political weight due to the decline of the national ethos, their rate of natural increase, their internal cohesiveness and discipline, and the fact that they became the parliamentary fulcrum between Left and Right. The strong appeal of neo-Zionist rhetoric, wherein Jewish identity was explicitly anchored in religion, drew them to the Right. As they became more nationalistic, their national-religious counterparts became more Orthodox, resulting in a union that earned the appellation of *hardal*, the acronym of *haredim-le'umiim* (national ultra-Orthodox).

In the mid-1980s, the Orthodox split into Ashkenazi and Mizrahi sectors. The Mizrahi sector coalesced in the Shas movement to create the third-largest political party in Israel. A seemingly nonhawkish, traditional Jewish-ethnic (Mizrahi) movement, Shas's underlying ethos reinforces the neo-Zionist creed and its focus on Israel's Jewish identity.<sup>39</sup> In the 1990s, neo-Zionist nationalism found fresh support in Jewish immigrants from the former Soviet Union. This brand of neo-Zionism is staunchly secular, largely anti-Arab, and pro-occupation. In fact, the much touted clash between religious Mizrahi and secular Russian Jews simply led the

two sides to concentrate on what they considered their only common denominator—ethnic-Jewish nationalism.

The rise of neo-Zionism since the mid-1970s was paralleled by the rise of post-Zionism, especially since the 1980s. The historians' debate erupted in public as the intellectual, even spiritual, response to the post-Zionist spirit. This spirit facilitated the decline of the unifying collectivist ethos, the unraveling of national myths, and the emergence of conflicting narratives of marginalized new groups: Mizrahi Jews, Palestinian Arabs, women, the business class, and even the repressed memories of Eastern European diaspora Jewry. The catalysts were three different wars: the Lebanon War of 1982; the first Palestinian Intifada, which broke out in 1987; and the Gulf War of 1991. The first two brought home to Israelis the "Vietnam effect," and, just as in that instance, television played a significant role. Both wars were considered by many to be unjustifiable and involve an amoral engagement against civilians. With respect to both, a civil protest movement sprang up composed of a kernel of draft objectors and many other supporters who accorded precedence to human dignity and human rights over collective historical myths. The Gulf War demonstrated the vulnerability of Israel's home front to ballistic missiles and hence the futility of territorial occupation.<sup>40</sup>

The effects of the wars of the 1980s and 1990s were accompanied by a revamping of the Israeli ethos as a result of extensive socioeconomic changes. The Likud-led coalition that emerged in 1977 contained, in addition to national-religious partners, a liberal component. Though its initial attempts at economic liberalization failed, and brought the country in the early 1980s to its worst economic crisis, Israel has been moving toward intensive neoliberalism ever since the stabilization program of 1985. The new economic orientation was to become the accepted wisdom of the large political parties. Israel witnessed its first bourgeois revolution, so to speak: the collective institutions founded by the labor movement collapsed like a house of cards and were replaced by the privatization ethos led by a now robust bourgeois class. This process peaked symbolically in 1994, when the labor movement lost its historic control over the Histadrut, the national federation of labor unions. Hi-tech became the leading sector in Israel's economic growth and exports and turned Israel into a premier global society. These cultural and social changes underlay the peace process led by the Rabin-Peres government from 1992 to 1995. Peace and privatization complemented each other in the vision of a new Middle East.<sup>41</sup> The peace process itself made possible a fresh look—and,



more significant, general acceptance of such a look—at Arab-Israeli, as well as Israeli/Jewish and Israeli/Israeli relations.

The clash between neo-Zionism and post-Zionism reached a climax in 1995, when Yitzhak Rabin, the leader of the peace process, was assassinated by a Mizrahi national-religious terrorist. The remainder of the 1990s saw the deterioration of the peace process and the return to the “old Middle East” and more bloodshed. Whereas the 1990s began with the rise of post-Zionism and a New History, the 2000s have begun with a return to neo-Zionism; the Old History is being revived in the more extreme, more overtly ethno-nationalist, fundamentalist garb of neo-Zionism.

From a broader perspective, the decline of classic nationalism in Israel and the rise of the two antagonistic, alternative agendas of neo-Zionism and post-Zionism mark the Israeli version of a worldwide phenomenon: the ascendancy of globalization and with it the emergence of a market society and liberal culture, on the one hand, and a local backlash on the other. Since the 1990s, Israel has witnessed what Barber termed “Jihad vs. McWorld” and Huntington called the “clash of civilizations.” The real arena of the historians’ debate is the clash between a globalized, individualized, hi-tech worldview and a localized, fundamentalist approach to holy places with a moderate nationalist tendency in the middle; this is where the future of Israel’s past will be determined.<sup>42</sup>

The ground is rumbling beneath the dominant nationalist ideology, Zionism, and this is what sustains the historical revision and debate in Israel. The fissures in the national metanarrative have given rise to alternative narratives: supranarratives (post-Zionist cosmopolitanism), subnarratives (empowered marginalized or excluded groups), backlash narratives (neo-Zionist ethnicity), and subsidiary narratives (bourgeois-liberal). Diverse social categories whose voices have not been heard in the past have now staked a claim in the public arena, where they report on their own historical experiences and articulate their own versions of history. Their truths naturally, or rather historically, diverge from the old hegemonic truth. Just as the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century saw Zionism inventing a tradition and composing a narrative for itself, so today, in the global-local era, post-Zionism and neo-Zionism are busy deconstructing that particular account of history and constructing their own historical versions.

Contemporary historical revisions and debates should be interpreted, then, against the backdrop of specific crises in national identities and as an indication of crisis in national identity in the global era. When

this happens, the past is transformed from a unifying fold into contested terrain in which new social and cultural agendas gain a voice and launch a struggle to have their own narratives accepted, thereby achieving legitimacy and status in society. Historians, sometimes consciously, sometimes inadvertently, serve as carriers of such historical narratives. The science of history cannot escape the history of science.

### **Concluding Remarks**

We have argued here that there are two basic perspectives in the sociology of knowledge from which to understand Israel's historians' debate: the Columbia School and the Edinburgh School. According to the former, once academic research is free of old biases it can proceed along objective lines to ascertain what really happened in the past. This perspective is endorsed by most mainstream historians, as well as by some (leading) New Historians. But the idea that historians who profess objectivity also practice it is foreign to the Edinburgh School. According to it, the sociology of knowledge addresses the social conditions of the emergence and circulation of scientific truths. These conditions are the macrohistorical relations of social groups.

Impinging on the specifics of the Israeli case are general tendencies of globalization and localization. The historical revisions and debates express the relative decline of the Zionist nation-state ethos and the emergence of two diametrically opposed alternatives: an ethno-national neo-Zionism and a civic-liberal post-Zionism. The three leading schools writing Israeli history reflect and articulate these political-cultural divisions. Traditional mainstream history is national, mostly the labor movement version. On its fringes, a critical school of history emerged in the 1980s associated with post-Zionism (even if some of its protagonists identify as Zionists). Finally, in the 1990s efforts have been made to create a counterschool of neo-Zionist history (which has not yet moved much beyond a propagandist stance).<sup>43</sup>

The future of the past in Israel thus depends on the future of its politics. An eventual return to the peace process and settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict will release Israeli political culture from its nationalist commitments and result in a more open, pluralistic, and critical historical discourse. The other option, Israel's ongoing refusal to grant the Palestinians independence, and the recurrent resort to violent hostilities, will result in a more closed, consensual, and nationalistic historical discourse.

History writing was, and will continue to be, a servant of history making. And it is history makers, not history writers, who in the future will craft Israel's past.

### **SUPPLEMENT: CONCISE BIBLIOGRAPHICAL GUIDE TO THE HISTORIES DEBATE IN ISRAEL**

*Historiography and sociography.* An early critical account of the metanarrative of Zionist historiography and a post-Zionist alternative can be found in Evron 1988. On Jewish-Zionist historiography and nationalism see Barnai 1995 and Frankel 1994. Silberstein 1999 provides an overview of the post-Zionist debate; for a post-Zionist discussion see Kimmerling 1995; for a Zionist discussion see Gutwein 1997 and Shapira 1997. For a collection of post-Zionist papers and a left-inspired critique see Nimni 2003. There are two comprehensive collections about the debates: Weitz 1997 (*From Vision to Revision*) and Ginossar and Bareli 1996. For the neo-Zionist perspective see Hazony 1996 and Hazony 1997. For Zionist critiques see Myers 2001. An archeological debate was begun by Herzog 2001; on the debate see Levine and Mazar 2001; Finkelstein and Silberman 2001; and Lissak, Rosenthal, Schwartz, and Yassif 2001. On parallel debates in sociology see Kimmerling 1992 and Ram 1993. Ram 1995 ("Zionist Historiography and the Invention of Modern Jewish Nationhood") gives a post-Zionist perspective and Lissak 1996 a Zionist response, answered by Shalev 1996 and Shafir 1996.

*Journals.* Special issues of several scholarly journals are dedicated to the debate: *History and Memory* 7, no. 1 (1995); *TuV* 8 (1996); and *Journal of Israeli History* 20, nos. 2–3 (2001) (edited by Anita Shapira and Derek Penslar). Numerous resources may be found in Ophir 1999. *Cathedra*, no. 100, gives an overview. *TuV* (published by Hakibutz Hameuhad and Van Leer) is at the post-Zionist end of the spectrum and *Tkhelet* (published by Merkaz Shalem in Jerusalem) at the neo-Zionist end. *Alpayim* (published by Am Oved) is a national-mainstream journal. *Mikarov* (published by Am Oved) presents the national social-democratic perspective; so does *Mifne: Forum for Social Issues* (published by the research centers of Yad Yaary and Yad Tabenkin). Conservative mainstream Zionism finds a voice in *Kivunim Hadashim: Journal of Zionism and Judaism* (published by the World Zionist Organization) and *Gesher: Journal of Jewish Affairs* (published by the Institute of the World Jewish Congress). The neo-Zionist perspective can be found in *Ha'umma (Nation)* (published by Misdar Jabotinsky), *Nativ: A Journal of Politics and the Arts* (published by the Ariel Centre for Policy Research), and *Nekuda* (a weekly bulletin of the Jewish settlers). *Sefarim*, the literary supplement of *Haaretz*, is an important source for the debates. A very rich resource on the historical, sociological, and cultural debates is the English language journal *Israel Studies* (sponsored by the Ben Gurion Research Centre and the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Judaic Studies).

*Social and political context.* A wide-ranging sociographical perspective on the political-cultural conditions underpinning the histories debate is to be found in

Barzilai 1996; Horowitz and Lissak 1989; Levi-Faur, Shaffer, and Vogel 1999; Lissak 1996; Shafir and Peled 2000; Shafir and Peled 2002; and Kimmerling 2002 and in a special issue of the journal *Constellations* edited by Uri Ram: 6, no. 3 (1999). A useful source on changes in Israeli politics and political culture is the series of books on the elections in Israel edited by Asher Arian, various years.

*Identity, collective memory and nationalism.* Discussions of aspects of Israeli national identity and collective memory that form the background of the historiographical changes are to be found in Ben Ari and Bilu 1997; Bar-Gal 1999; Ben Rafael 2002; Ben-Yehuda 1995; Calderon 2000; Gertz 1995; Gorny 1994; Grinberg 2000; Handelman 1990; Liebman and Don-Yehiva 1983; Liebman and Katz 1997; Lustick 1980; Ohana and Wistrich 1996; Ophir 1999, 2001; Katriel 1997; Reinhartz 1996; Rosental 2002; Shapira 2000; Slyomovics 1998; and Zerubavel 1995. For the debates on the television series *Tekuma* see Fisher 2000.

*Arts and literature.* Azoulay 1993 gives a post-Zionist perspective on the arts, as does Chinski 1993, 2002. For a neo-Zionist perspective see Dor-Shav 1998 and Levitt 1998. In literature, for the Zionist perspective see Shaked 2000; for post-Zionist perspectives see Balaban 1995; Hever 1999; and Schwartz 1994, 1995; for the neo-Zionist perspective see Weiss 1992. On cinematographic aspects see Gertz, Lubin, and Neeman 1998.

*Curricula and textbooks.* On school curricula and history textbooks see Firer 1985, 1989; Hoffman and Shnell 2002; Keren 1998; Naveh and Yogev 2002; Podeh 2000; and Raz-Krakotzkin 2001.

*The Israelis/Palestinians arena.* For Zionist interpretations of Israeli/Arab relations see Gorny, 1987 and Shapira 1992. An early challenge to official Israeli historiography of the conflict was presented by Flapan (1987). Morris's inauguration of the "New Historians" is in Morris (*Tikkun*) 1988; Morris 1994 ("The New Historiography" in *1948 and After*) gives an updated overview of the debate. The major figures enumerated by Benny Morris as New Historians are himself, Avi Shlaim, and Ilan Pappé. A partial list of their books includes Morris 1987, 1993, 1994 (*1948 and After*); Shlaim 1988; and Pappé 1992, 1999. See also Bar-On 2001 (*The Beginning of Israeli Historiography of the 1948 War*); Golani 2002; and Kimmerling 1997. On the recent Tantura case see Pappé 2001 ("The Tantura Case in Israel"). For critical sociological accounts of Israeli/Palestinian relations and the militaristic dimension see Ben-Eliezer 1995; Levy 1997; Rosenhak 1995; Kimmerling (TuV) 1993; Yiftachel 1995, 2000; and Shapira 1992; also see Peri 1996. A particular controversy within the Israeli/Palestinian arena is about the colonialist characteristics of Israel. For the post-Zionist perspective see Ram 1993 and Pappé 1997 ("Zionism as Colonialism" in *From Vision to Revision*); for a Zionist perspective see Aaronsohn 1996 and Bareli 2001. See also Penslar 2001.

*Reading documents.* One dimension of the historical debate was a controversy over the correct reading of historical documents. Morris published an article arguing that major Zionist documents, mostly regarding the "transfer" (of Palestinians) issue,

were “laundered.” His reading was attacked by Moshe Tzahar, Efraim Karsh, and Shabtai Tevet. See: Morris 1996, 1997; Tzahar 1996; Karsh 1996; and Teveth 1996 (“Clean Hands and Reconstructing Documents”).

*Israelis/Jews (Israel/diaspora) arena.* Debates about the Holocaust, the policy of the Yishuv toward it, its memory in Israel, and its historiography abound. For the Zionist perspective see Gutman and Greif 1987; Eshkoli-Wagman 1994; Gorny, 1998; Gutwein 1998; Michman 1997 (*Post-Zionism and the Holocaust*), 1998; Porat 1986, 1990 (“Israeli Historiography of the Yishuv in View of the Holocaust”); and Teveth 1996. For the post-Zionist perspective see Grodzinsky 1998, 2000; Segev 1993; Peled 2002; Raz-Krakotzkin 1994; Zertal 2002; and Zukerman 1993. For a neo-Zionist perspective see Beit Zvi 1977; Don-Yehiya 1993; and Fisch 1978. Anita Shapira takes a middle-of-the-road position (Shapira 1999 [“History of Mythology”]); responses to her: Don-Yehiya 2000; Grodzinsky 2000; and Teveth 2000.

*Israelis/Israelis (Ashkenazim/Mizrahim) arena.* For a Zionist perspective on Jewish integration see Eisenstadt 1967; Bar Yosef 1980; and Lissak 1999. For the Marxist narrative on Mizrahim in Israel see Bernstein and Swirski 1982; Bernstein 1984; and Swirski 1981, 1990, 1995. See also Sternhell 1995, 1996. For a mainstream Zionist response to Sternhell see Gorny 1996 and Shapira 1997. For the post-Zionist/post-colonialist narrative on Mizrahim and Mizrahiyut in Israel see Alcalay 1993; Hever, Shenhav, and Motzafi-Haller 2002; Ratzabi 1998; Piterberg 1996; Shohat 1989, 2001 (*Forbidden Reminiscences*); and Khazzoom 1999. For an analysis of Shas as an expression of class/culture divisions see Peled 1998.

## NOTES

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1. Benny Morris, “The New Historiography: Israel Confronts Its Past,” *Tikkun* (November–December 1988).

2. For an overview of these perspectives and references see David J. Hess, *Science Studies: An Advanced Introduction* (New York, 1997).

3. Karin D. Knorr-Cetina and Michael Mulkay (eds.), *Science Observed: New Perspectives on the Social Study of Science* (Beverly Hills, 1983). Karin D. Knorr-Cetina, *Epistemic Cultures: How the Sciences Make Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA, 1999).

4. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York, 1970); *Archeology of Knowledge* (New York, 1972).

5. In lieu of references to specific works a supplement to this essay gives a short bibliographic guide.

6. Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949* (Cambridge, 1988).

7. In 1998, Israeli student Teddy Katz submitted a master’s thesis (University of Haifa) alleging that there had been a massacre by Israeli troops in the Arab village

of Tantura in 1948. Veterans of the unit involved took him to court, where in the end he recanted. He has since withdrawn his recantation, and there is an ongoing controversy about what happened in Tantura.

8. Jabotinsky, the founder of the revisionist (Likud) right-wing Zionist movement, published articles in the 1920s saying that the Zionist movement could advance toward statehood only behind an "iron wall," by which he meant superior British or Zionist military force.

9. Benny Morris, "Historiya Obyektivit" [Objective History], *HaAretz* supplement, 1 July 1994.

10. J. Nelson, A. Megill, and D. McCloskey, *The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences: Language and Argument in Scholarship and Public Affairs* (Madison, 1987).

11. Efraim Karsh, *Fabricating Israeli History: The "New Historians"* (London, [1997] 1998), 31.

12. *Ibid.*, 28.

13. The philosopher Richard Bernstein posits the essential contrast between the two as follows: "By 'objectivism' I mean the basic conviction that there is or must be some permanent, ahistorical matrix or framework to which we can ultimately appeal in determining the nature of rationality, knowledge, truth, reality. . . . [R]elativism is the basic conviction that . . . in the final analysis all such concepts must be understood as relative to a specific conceptual scheme, theoretical framework, paradigm, form of life, society, or culture. . . . For the relativist, there is no substantive overarching framework or single metalanguage by which we can rationally adjudicate or unequivocally evaluate competing claims of alternative paradigms." Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia, 1983), 8.

14. Frederick Suppe, *The Structure of Scientific Theories* (Urbana, 1977), 6–56.

15. *Ibid.*, 115.

16. *Ibid.*, 117; cf. 57–118.

17. *Ibid.*, 619.

18. See Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, 1979).

19. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, 1962).

20. Foucault, *The Order; Archeology*.

21. Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writing*, ed. C. Gordon, 78–108 (New York, 1980).

22. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London, 1978), 10.

23. For example, Sandra Harding, *Is Science Multicultural? Postcolonialism, Feminism, and Epistemologies* (Bloomington, 1998).

24. Donald Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences* (Albany, 1988).

25. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination of Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, 1973).

26. *Ibid.*, 82, 83.

27. Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity" Question and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge, 1988), 17.

28. F. R. Ankersmith, *History and Topology* (Berkeley, 1993), 27.

29. Ilan Pappé, "Hashpa'at ha-Idiologiya ha-Ziyonit 'al ha-Historiographia ha-Israelit" [The Impact of Zionist Ideology on Israeli Historiography], *Davar*, 15 May 1994.

30. Mordechai Bar On, "Lo larutz el ha-Katze ha-Sheni" [Not to Rush to the Other Extreme], *Haaretz*, 6 January 1995.
31. Anita Shapira, "The Strategies of Historical Revisionism," *Journal of Israeli History* 20 (2001).
32. Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, MA, 1992).
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## **Israeli Historiography and the Ethnic Problem**

Israel's Jewish ethnic problem—like the national conflict with the Arabs and the secular-religious Jewish cultural divide—poses one of its greatest challenges. While Israeli researchers may dispute its causes, they all nevertheless agree that in religious and national terms it is an internal, Jewish problem involving two ethnic groups from different parts of the world: broadly speaking, Europe on the one hand and Asia and Africa on the other.

Toward the close of the nineteenth century, just before the Zionist movement got off the ground, the vast majority of Jews lived in Europe, particularly in Eastern Europe. The Jewish minorities in Asia and Africa comprised about 6 percent of world Jewry, a ratio that rose to about 10 to 12 percent after the destruction of European Jewry in the Holocaust. In the course of the nineteenth century, ties between the various Jewish communities around the world were strengthened just as European Jewry's demographic dominance vis-à-vis the Afro-Asian Jewish communities took on other aspects of Western hegemony. For example, the French Jewish organization Alliance Israélite Universelle was largely responsible for the cultural modernization of Jewry in Islamic countries, providing Jewish youth in the Middle East and North Africa with an elementary-school French education. To understand the development of this organization, one must look to the West's colonial, imperialistic penetration of the East.<sup>1</sup> A different sort of example was the Yishuv, or the Jewish community in the Holy Land, where indigenous Sephardi Jews had traditionally enjoyed political and demographic hegemony; during the nineteenth century, even before the start of Zionist immigration, the scales already began to tip toward European Jewry, the great majority of Jewish immigrants to Palestine hailing from Eastern Europe.

That pre-Zionist Old Yishuv spawned the designations for the two Jewish groups that were later to be ranged on different sides of the ethnic divide: Sephardi and Ashkenazi. Originally, Sephardi referred to Jews



expelled from the Iberian Peninsula (Spain is *Sepharad* in Hebrew), who had settled mainly in the heart of the Ottoman Empire, with a small segment making their way from there to the Land of Israel. Ashkenazi initially referred to Jews from Germany (*Ashkenaz*), who had settled in Eastern Europe and spoke Yiddish. Each of these two nuclei in time fanned out to incorporate Jews of other origins, who, at bottom, identified or were identified with one or the other group. In principle, the mostly Arabic-speaking emigrants from Islamic countries (i.e., from the Jewish minorities of Asia and North Africa) were annexed to the Sephardim of the central Ottoman Empire, whereas those of European origin, and later from the Americas, were annexed to the Ashkenazim (the *im* denotes the Hebrew plural form). Sephardim who had settled in Western Europe and the Balkans did not fit neatly into this schematic classification, but they were few in number and did not affect the overall message of divisiveness that corresponded to the evolving world dichotomy in the colonial era.

The signs of change in the relations of the world's Jewish minorities became more pronounced in the new, mostly Zionist Yishuv after 1882. The vast majority of immigrants to the Land of Israel in the twilight of the Ottoman Empire and through the British Mandate (1917–48) were Ashkenazim. They constituted close to 90 percent of the immigrants during the Mandate. But increased immigration to Palestine from the Islamic countries by the end of the Mandate raised the proportion of the easterners to some 20 percent, which was much greater than their weight in world Jewry. Yet the hierarchical relationships that characterized the colonial era were reflected in the Yishuv as well. As the number of new Jewish settlements grew, and employment opportunities expanded along with educational and political institutions, one basic fact stood out: the immigrants from Asia and Africa, the Sephardim, consistently occupied the lower rungs of the social ladder, while the Ashkenazim increasingly found their place on the middle and upper rungs.

Among the non-Europeans, increased immigration modified the proportion of the veteran Sephardi component in the population, gradually giving way to a more complex ethnic terminology. In the light of the immigration of Jewish minorities from Arab lands, in particular of Yemenite Jewry, the compound designation of Sephardim and Mizrahim (Orientals or easterners) now began to appear alongside the previously uniform category of Sephardim. Later, after the State of Israel was established and Jews from Arab lands made up the greater share of non-Ashkenazim, the term *Mizrahim* began to rival the *Sephardi* denomina-

tion. Since this essay focuses on the period after 1948, it will refer to those hailing from Asia and Africa primarily as Mizrahim.<sup>2</sup>

### **In the Shadow of Sociology (1949–84)**

Although the inequality between the two broad ethnic groups was highly conspicuous before the state's creation, neither sociological studies of the Yishuv nor Zionist historiography ascribed to it much significance until the mass immigration after the birth of the state. The impetus for research into the subject was provided by the first serious outbreak of ethnic problems in 1949. From the onset of the mass immigration, the Ashkenazi elite and wider public had been rather jittery about the Ashkenazi-Sephardi demographic ratio being upset. Not only were the disparities in the Yishuv plainly visible; there was also a clear perception as to which was the preferred group. The perceived threat—that a large wave of immigrants would radically shift the balance in favor of the Mizrahim—gave rise to what may be defined as the first flare-up of the ethnic problem.<sup>3</sup>

The history of relations between the two groups commonly regards the ethnic eruptions as emanating from the Mizrahi side. But this view should not to be endorsed uncritically. The Mizrahim felt oppressed and discriminated against, and they showed this in angry demonstrations that occasionally deteriorated into violence. Their feelings were overtly expressed. The Ashkenazim, on the other hand, felt a loss of control, anxiety, and ultimately almost despair. But their feelings, for the most part, remained beneath the surface. Some of the outbreaks began on the Ashkenazi side (such as that of 1949), some, on the Mizrahi side (the first, about ten years later, involving Haifa's poor neighborhood of Wadi Salib). The preliminary eruption, however, was on the Ashkenazi side because of the anxiety about the demographic balance and its possible repercussions for both the Western character and inner strength of young Israeli society. Since the dominant camp obviously had no need to rebel, signs of the changing anxiety levels must be sought behind the social and public scenes. Few were the voices that expressed it openly. One who did was the journalist Arieh Gelblum, who in April 1949 condemned the North African newcomers and suggested that they be dropped from the immigration plans "lest they absorb us."<sup>4</sup> And he was not alone in this opinion. In fact, not a few of those in power related to the situation with much the same chagrin. As a result, efforts were made to limit Mizrahi

immigration, particularly that of Moroccan Jewry; many of Israel's leaders hoped that the stream of Ashkenazi immigrants, even from areas regarded as less than "choice," would halt the demographic landslide. Though directed at all the Jewish diasporas, the policy of selective immigration is to be understood as the expression of an Ashkenazi anxiety attack. Further study, one may assume, will reveal additional indications of change in the patterns of behavior and attitudes toward Mizrahi immigrants among broad sectors of the public, for example, the demonic stereotyping of "Moroccans," the emergence of a wave of ethnic jokes, and so on.

The anxiety preyed on the elite, whether consciously or otherwise, and gave rise to the first stage of Israel's developing research on the ethnic problem. Both the public and the policymakers found the anxiety itself, and its moral-national significance, deeply disturbing. It was totally inconsistent with the Zionist ethos, which held that all Jews were brothers and equals. What was the meaning of the negative attitude toward the Mizrahim? Was it justified? And, if so, how was the internal problem to be dealt with? Only isolated voices called for the Mizrahim to be left out of the immigration programs because the national ethos and national needs would not countenance this. And so research was summoned to help cope with the emotions, the embarrassment, and the schism.

But it was not history that was called on to introduce the Mizrahim to Israeli society. Historians are not expected to write about the present; at most, they might be expected to illuminate the present from studies of the recent past. However, as far as the history of the Jews in Islamic lands was concerned, there were no studies on the recent past. Consequently, historians received a temporary reprieve from dealing with the ethnic problem.

No such exemption applied to sociologists. Sociology, as the study of society, is meant to supply instant tools to solve any problem that may crop up. While this may put pressure on the profession, it also makes it, a priori, relevant and lends it an immediate impact rarely enjoyed by historiography. Israeli sociology, still in its infancy, rose to the challenge, putting both feet forward to study the ethnic problem. It provided the state with the means to decode the present and, in turn, received state support. Veteran sociologists, educated in the German School, made way during this period for a new generation, the most prominent of whom was S. N. Eisenstadt. Young, energetic, and charismatic, Eisenstadt imposed on the field the functionalist approach that had been developed in the United States—a country of immigrants par excellence. The func-

tionalist school was then gaining ascendancy in the West, and Eisenstadt's own theories of modernization contributed to its development, earning him, as early as the 1950s, an international reputation.

The theory of modernization is clearly germane to the question of ethnic disparities. The general concept of linear development from traditional to modern society shed a bright light on the then young Israel and on the direction of its future evolution. During the mass immigration of the period, Israeli society was comprised of a stratum of immigrants from Europe, who, to one degree or another, had been exposed to modernization in their countries of origin, and another stratum of immigrants from the states of Islam, who, lagging behind in terms of modernization, would nevertheless forge ahead in Israel. Ethnic differences were chiefly the fruit of cultural gaps between the two groups, which explained the place of the Mizrahim in the fledgling Zionist state. Had they been possessed of better cultural attributes from the point of view of modern Western society, they would have occupied better positions. In the future, as the younger immigrants and their children became increasingly exposed to Western education in the Jewish state, the gaps would narrow and eventually vanish altogether.<sup>5</sup>

Here was an obvious balm for the unease felt at the inequality of European and non-European Jews in Israeli society. The theory attributed the disparities to the cultural origins of the different immigrants—not to any malformation of the national idea, special problems of Zionism, or the development of the national society it was establishing. True, the gulf between the two groups—ecological isolationism, a stratified hierarchy, and so on—was worrying and troublesome both morally and publicly socially, but it was not unbridgeable; the exposure of young immigrants from Islamic countries to Western education would create equal opportunities and accelerate the absorption of the Mizrahi by the Ashkenazi component.

Apart from its relevance to the ethnic problem, in general the theory of modernization acted as a tranquilizer for the anxiety attack of 1949, which feared that the “quality” of Mizrahi immigrants did not meet the needs of the economy and society and endangered what Zionism had already accomplished. Eisenstadt's explanation implied that the leaders of the modernization project held the key to “quality control” of the Mizrahi element. If the project were properly handled, this component could be improved fairly quickly, thus removing the lurking threat to the Zionist enterprise as a whole.<sup>6</sup>

But as time passed there appeared to be something wrong with this

analysis. The signs of ecological isolationism, class differences, and so on did not disappear; indeed, they swelled, along with the Mizrahi numbers. Nor could the ethnic arena remain serene in the face of the problem's persistence. In less than a generation, the problem erupted in violence in 1959 and again in 1971. And, unlike the outbreak of 1949, which reflected Ashkenazi anxiety, the latter two outbreaks were characterized by Mizrahi rage. The first began with a demonstration and agitation in a poor quarter of Haifa; the second took place in Jerusalem. And both radiated to disadvantaged neighborhoods in other locations. The time was ripe for a reckoning among the advocates of the cultural school and, even more so, for an onslaught on its basic assumptions by proponents of other sociological schools.

Of the two post-1949 eruptions, that of the "Black Panthers" in 1971 involved, from the start, intellectuals with a professional affiliation with the social sciences. They did not come from the Mizrahi but from the Ashkenazi side. Youngsters from poor Mizrahi neighborhoods, mostly Jerusalemites, had come into contact with Western students studying on Israeli university campuses and had been exposed to their radical social views. The very name chosen for the new organization—Black Panthers—reflected the connection to a Western protest movement. The "pantherization" of the Mizrahi protest lent it not only radical Ashkenazi support but a hitherto missing conceptual framework in which to address the problem and design solutions.<sup>7</sup> Earlier the modernization theory had come under attack, notably by communists and members of the left-wing Mapam Party, but to no avail. The emergence of the Black Panther movement marked a turning point.

The intellectual face of this social protest preceded the change that was to reach the academic world in the 1970s. The usefulness of modernization theory was challenged in the corridors of scholarship as sociological schools rivaling the functionalists gained momentum and prestige in the West. The fiercest assault came from a school that in principle opposed the liberal, harmony-oriented approach of Eisenstadt and his colleagues—stressing instead the dimension of conflict in society or, to be more precise, the economic class struggle. It was basically a neo-Marxist view, which in Israel was pioneered by Shlomo Swirski and Deborah Bernstein. They lashed out at their predecessors for having ignored the possibility that society's ruling class (the Ashkenazi old-timers) would use their strength to acquire more power at the expense of the weaker class (the Mizrahi immigrants), consigning them to the most inferior slots. It was not culture that explained the roots of ethnic unequal-

ity, Swirski argued, for the Mizrahim were not backward; it was the policy and actions of the Israeli establishment that had pushed them to the bottom of the social ladder and made them backward.<sup>8</sup> Bernstein added fuel to the fire by analyzing the role of Israel's sociological establishment in abetting the process.<sup>9</sup>

Another sociological school—the pluralists—entered the academic arena at the time and took both the functionalists and the neo-Marxists to task. It objected to the liberal view that sees society developing as a system in which phenomena and institutions dovetail with one another to function as a single, coordinated organism. In the pluralist perspective, society is an aggregate of groups behaving according to a quasi system of give and take; its dynamic equilibrium varies with the shifting power of its groups, and no one principle is either dominant or deterministic. The pluralist school was introduced into Israel's sociological landscape by Sami Smootha, who represented a flexible, interim stance between the cultural school and the school of conflict. While he attached importance to both the cultural origins of society's components and its power struggles, he did not share the necessarily negative estimation of nonmodern cultures nor did he predict their imminent expiration.<sup>10</sup>

At this stage, former functionalists also began to reexamine modernization theory. They, along with anthropologists who had started studying and writing about Mizrahim in the 1960s and 1970s, developed an approach of their own, tolerant of and empathetic to the immigrants' original cultures and thus, in this sense, close to the pluralist outlook. Prominent among them were the sociologists Shlomo Dshen and Moshe Shokeid, as well as the anthropologist Harvey Goldberg. To these, one might add Yoram Bilu, a psychologist and anthropologist.<sup>11</sup> Their importance was most evident in the growing sensitivity shown in the academic and public discourse toward the dynamics of change and continuity in the popular religious culture of Mizrahi immigrants and the influences of the political and cultural arenas in the evolving State of Israel.<sup>12</sup> Dshen and Goldberg also tried to fill in the gaps in historical knowledge with studies focused on the history of Jews in Islamic countries of origin, in other words, fulfilling the role ostensibly expected of historians.<sup>13</sup> These approaches corresponded to contemporary fashion in the United States and Europe, which heralded the waning of the modernist narrative in the West. They also embodied the trend to break out of old disciplinary frameworks and make possible a fresh look at the ethnic problem from different angles.<sup>14</sup> In addition, Israel's treatment as a pluralistic society encouraged a comparison of Mizrahim with the country's other minority

groups. Smootha compared the Mizrahi position to that of the Arabs, although he also stressed the differences between them. He coined the term *ethnic democracy* to explain the preference for Mizrahim and Orthodox Jewry over Arabs in Israel. Zionism, after all, is predisposed to members of the ethnic group for whom the State of Israel was established.<sup>15</sup>

The ethnic problem nourished Israeli sociology and anthropology from early statehood until the late 1970s and early 1980s, a period of thirty to thirty-five years. More than merely furnishing a large number of studies, it ultimately produced, from within, a variety of analytical schools and different explanations for its causes and history. The process peaked in the mid-1980s with the debut of Shas, the Sephardi religious-Orthodox political party, which produced a new bout of ethnic anxiety among Ashkenazim. The old pattern of 1949 repeated itself—anxiety spurred scholarly interest and a search for desirable solutions. As a result, the various schools had an opportunity to demonstrate their research achievements in a series of publications, some of which became milestones in Israeli sociology's study of the ethnic problem.<sup>16</sup>

### **Historical Research in the First Decades**

In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, while sociology dominated the study of the ethnic problem, historical research appeared to be almost impervious to it. Such inactivity was not altogether surprising since, as said, historiography does not deal with the present. The quiescence, however, was relative, merely as measured against the turbulent sociological arena. In practice, historians could not altogether avoid dealing with the subject, even if indirectly. Both the questions that came up for public discussion, and those that did not, garnered widespread attention because of the national ethos, and they became increasingly acute along with the ethnic problem itself. What caused the disparities to continue? Were they due to deeply embedded racial and cultural differences among different Jewish groups? What could the history of the Mizrahim, prior to their emigration from Islamic lands, tell us about their compatibility or lack thereof with the desirable norms of Zionist society? Historians were called on to speak out on the urgent question of the day, if not on the actual events themselves and interethnic relations in the present, then, at least by providing a portrait of Mizrahi Jewry in both the distant and recent past. But the demand to develop a historiography was not motivated solely by the ethnic problem. History, and thus historiography, play a vital part in na-

tional agendas, particularly in genealogical nationalisms such as Zionism; they furnish essential elements of identity and self-awareness for the national collective as a whole and for its various components.

The development of a Mizrahi historical narrative was severely impeded by the paucity of reliable knowledge on Jewry in the lands of Islam in modern times. This dearth, itself, was a sign of the inequity between the two groups and the hierarchical structure of the ethnic problem. Ashkenazim had a historiography there for the taking; Mizrahim did not. And, whereas sociology could fill the vacuum of knowledge by resting on fixed models of social relations and dispensing with the examination of individual cases, this is not true of historiography.

Even the initial steps toward filling the vacuum followed the ethnic problem's basic outline. At the end of the Ottoman period and the start of the British Mandate, scholarly interest in the history of Mizrahim had been pioneered by Mizrahi autodidacts, the most prominent of whom was Abraham Elmaleh.<sup>17</sup> They were joined by an Ashkenazi autodidact, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, then a leader of the labor movement and in time Israel's second president.<sup>18</sup> But as Ashkenazi immigration increased it brought with it professional scholars who overshadowed and displaced the various autodidacts, especially the Mizrahim. In early statehood, it was the Ashkenazi academics who were esteemed as talented experts. It is they who turned out a generation of historians, including several Mizrahim, and they who devised the first methodological and conceptual frameworks for Israeli historiography on Mizrahi Jewry. The two main figures in the 1950s and 1960s were Shlomo Dov Goitein, who specialized in Yemenite Jewry, and H. Z. Hirschberg, who spearheaded the research on North African Jewry.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, as in sociology, confronting the pioneer historians and their students was the question of the compatibility of their findings with the hegemonic Zionist ethos and the needs, tastes, tendencies, and requirements of Israel's elitist establishment. In early statehood, Israel's elite adopted two opposing stances with regard to the Mizrahim: integrationist and skeptical. Partisans of both believed in European cultural superiority and looked down on Jews who had no or little Western education. But they differed as to the ability of Mizrahim to contribute immediately to the Zionist enterprise and adapt quickly to its demands and national values. The integrationists trusted in Mizrahi adaptability. The others were not convinced. Both groups, of course, sought to corroborate and justify their impressions and opinions: the former in order to underscore the positive qualities of Asian and African Jewry; the latter,



if not to disqualify the immigrants outright, then at least for purposes of adopting a special policy toward them, different from the policy toward European Jewish immigrants.<sup>20</sup> Space does not permit elaboration of the overt and latent nature of the ethnic problem as treated in the works of Goitein and Hirschberg. Suffice it to say that in the classification of integrationists and skeptics, both scholars belonged to the first camp. They were thus interested in associating the objects of their research with the Israeli public, endearing Yemenite and North African Jews to their readers and encouraging the belief that these two groups were a promising element in the building of Israeli society and a national culture. As far as Yemenite Jewry was concerned, Goitein's task posed little hardship; it was in any case consistent with the stereotype of the Yemenite diaspora that had taken root in the Zionist Yishuv. Yemenite Jews were considered the custodians of traditions vital to Zionist rebirth, solid Jews steeped in heritage, hardworking and biddable. The fact that Yemen had remained outside the Western sphere of influence reinforced their inferior status in the emerging social hierarchy of the Jewish state, but it also had certain advantages. Among other things, Yemenite Jews were seen as the guardians of an ancient historical layer that sustained the justification for the return of all Jews to their Asian homeland. In contrast, North African Jewry, especially from Morocco, became the symbol of the ethnic problem. A whole slew of negative traits was imputed to them and virtually no redeeming characteristics. In public opinion, under the impact of the skeptics the Moroccans embodied the latent disaster of the Mizrahi takeover of the young Zionist society; they were to be treated with extreme caution. Hirschberg had his work cut out for him.

The discord over the ethnic problem had need of a historiography of the Jews in Islamic lands in recent generations. But neither Goitein nor Hirschberg found the topic absorbing. Their orientalist training and grounding in the Central European classic school of Jewish studies (*Wissenschaft des Judentums*) very likely predisposed them to the appeal of the distant past. This, however, only partially explains their preferences. There were scant historical sources on contemporary Yemenite Jewry, and Goitein soon abandoned the subject in favor of the far more riveting Cairo Geniza (a documentary repository or archive of Cairene Jewry dating back to the Middle Ages). What's more, for anyone inclined toward a positive view of Mizrahi Jewry, the classic Muslim period was immeasurably more attractive than the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>21</sup> Similar considerations may also have motivated Hirschberg, although he did not turn his back on contemporary history. Literally

combining professional interests with social and Zionist concerns, he rushed off to North Africa shortly before the French pullout, collected manuscripts, and kept a travel journal, which he published soon after his return to Israel. The book, *Mi-Eretz Mevo ha-Shemesh* (Inside the Maghreb: The Jews in North Africa), provided a good deal of information on North African Jewry: social conditions, education, culture, organization, religious life, and so on. While it depicted a social and cultural diversity that in part undermined the rigid negative stereotype, it also described widespread poverty, disease, and deprivation. This picture was inconvenient and unpleasant for an integrationist historian, and he obviously struggled with the question of how to present it.<sup>22</sup> True, poverty, disease, and prostitution had once been the lot of Eastern European Jewry as well. But the image that had developed under the impact of Israel's ethnic problem associated these characteristics with Mizrahi Jewry. Anyone wishing to avoid these unpleasant aspects, so as not to serve the skeptics, would do well to steer clear of the present. Hirschberg, in any case, devoted most of his academic career to the medieval and early modern history of North African Jewry, encouraging his students to follow suit, so much so that his comprehensive work on North African Jewry, the apex of his professional writing, included very little of the rich data collected in his small travel book. Only a few pages were devoted to the most recent generation.<sup>23</sup>

It was symptomatic that professional history shunned the topic of contemporary Mizrahi Jewry; in the light of the ethnic problem, the recent past of the Mizrahim, like other sensitive histories that evolved in early Israel, posed a special problem. It was not simply a question of morals, health, and compatibility with Western culture but extended to the Mizrahi bond with Arabic culture and Muslim society. Zionism's basic concept of the pattern of Jewish relations with a non-Jewish milieu had ripened in Christian Europe. It was convenient for Zionism, the nationalist movement of the whole diaspora, and certainly for the Ashkenazi element in Zionism, to adopt a single model rather than develop an additional, possibly different one based on the experience of Jewish minorities who had lived in another part of the world among Muslims. The European pattern had been molded according to the cumulative experience of the crises of modern Jewry in non-Jewish surroundings, culminating in the Holocaust. The national conflict with the Palestinians and the Arab states, which also represented a crisis within a non-Jewish environment, thus appeared to be a natural progression of the Jewish experience. The regional histories of the Jews of Asia and Africa, however,

if probed, could have undermined the uniformity and integrity of this pattern of relations, a model vital to the national metanarrative. This difficulty, if not overt, certainly lay beneath the surface and may well have deterred scholars from actively investigating contemporary Jewry in the lands of Islam.

As a result, during the developmental stage of Israeli historiography regional histories in modern times were largely unexplored. One subtopic, however, was eminently irreproachable: the history of Zionism in the lands of Islam. Under the impact of stereotyping and prejudice, it was commonly thought that the Jews of Asia and North Africa had played no real part in the modern national awakening and that the history of Zionism had started and ended with Europe. Mizrahi Jewry's nationalist activity and sentiments were subsumed under the rubric of traditional "messianic Zionism." This was part of the overall image perpetuated in Israeli public opinion, textbooks, and so on.<sup>24</sup> And yet, had anyone wished to breach the wall of disinterest in the modern history of Mizrahi Jewry and to allay the subconscious fear of Orientals, this was the very place to do so. At the Jewish state's formative national stage, there could be no opposition to this field of study. On the contrary, even those who doubted that the subject would unearth anything new or interesting encouraged and called for its examination. And so the first area of historical inquiry into contemporary Jewry in Islamic lands was Zionist activity in Asia and North Africa.<sup>25</sup>

On the face of it, the findings of the first study, on the Jews of Iraq, should already have pointed to the need to revise the image of Zionism in Islamic lands.<sup>26</sup> On the whole, however, these studies did not shake up the historiographical arena, did not penetrate public consciousness, and did not have any great effect on the public debate on the ethnic issue. Their importance to the developing research on the ethnic question was otherwise: they heralded the emergence of Mizrahi scholars in the attempt to fill the historiographic void. Following the first generation of Mizrahi autodidacts and Ashkenazi academics who had inaugurated the field, a new, young, largely Mizrahi generation of researchers now appeared. The study of Zionism opened the door to an examination of a sensitive historiographical area and for Mizrahi intellectuals into the professional community.

The big question now was whether the course they were to choose would be new or radically different from that of their forerunners, the Ashkenazi historians. In this connection—the ethnic origins of the researchers—it is worth noting that in sociology the Mizrahi scholar Sami

Smootha had made a name for himself as having introduced an alternative interpretation of the ethnic problem distinct from that of the Ashkenazi heads of the other schools. It is also worth asking whether the path that Smootha chose represented a quasi middle ground between the two other schools, the one painting a rosy (or white) picture of reality, the other painting it black. The one saw no real problem in Ashkenazi-Mizrahi relations, though it legitimized Ashkenazi hegemony and patronage; the other saw no solution to the problem apart from insurgency, rebellion, and withdrawal from the interclass, interethnic conglomerate endorsed by a spurious national ideology.

En route to taking their place in what had been uncharted territory for Mizrahi intellectuals, the key strategy of the new generation of historians was neither self-exclusion nor collective separatism but integration. In contrast to sociology, where professional excellence was synonymous with scholastic innovation and potentially conflictual with the presiding school, as happened in Smootha's case, Israeli historiography at the time was subjected to other conditions and demands. Special departments were opened for Jewish history as distinct from general history, reflecting the dominance of the national agenda and filling in the necessary gaps for the building of Israel's immigrant society. Research and teaching concentrated on the histories of specific populations (the scattered Jewish communities) and on the history of a single land (the Land of Israel), that is, the communities of origin of the immigrants and the land that was the object of their return. The key goal of this professional activity was not an innovative historiography but the rounding out of pictures that were vital to the public and individual identity campaigns then animated by nationalism. The revolution taking place in Western history during this period, led by the French *Annales* school, called on historians to turn away from the political histories of their nations toward more general topics: climate, oceans, forces of nature, the effect of all these on various populations, and so on. To a large extent, the school was born in reaction to European nationalisms that had driven the continent into world wars. But Israel in those years was at a different historical stage entirely subordinate to Zionism. The *Annales* school influenced the general history departments but failed to penetrate the Jewish history departments.

The flag of national historiography was raised by the Jerusalem School, the department of Jewish history at the Hebrew University, the country's oldest academic institution.<sup>27</sup> It trained young historians who later made their way to newly opened departments at other universities,

rarely deviating from the ideological and methodological principles inculcated by their teachers. This held true for most of the first generation of Mizrahi scholars as well. They stood in awe of their Ashkenazi teachers, sharing a profound respect for their achievements and research paths, which rested on the academic tradition of Central Europe, core concepts and scientific methods that were an example to emulate. Socially, this tiny group, like the Mizrahi elite in general, tended toward integration in the Ashkenazi elite. Those at the top of the Mizrahi tree who had not yet been “westernized”—or “Ashkenized,” as it might be termed in Zionist society—were either well advanced in the process or near “graduation.” Furthermore, all generations of the Mizrahi elite were steeped in national sentiment. Thus, the demand that the national narrative correspond to the Zionist ethos was fully consistent with their own inclinations. In addition, their teachers’ clear integrationist stance ultimately countered any motives for intergenerational conflict or rebellion. In sociology as well, most researchers did not revolt against the doyen of the discipline, Eisenstadt, or his research path, although there was a minority position and a quasi-generational clash. This did not happen in historiography. The biography of the first generation of Mizrahi historians who penetrated the corridors of Israeli academe may have shown signs of ethnic awareness or bitterness, but this never translated into a subversive voice against the basic assumptions of Zionist historiography as conceived by its Ashkenazi founding fathers. The peculiar Eastern voice of the generation spoke in terms of a career researching the origins of a specific Mizrahi community in order to weave its history into the overall national fabric.

Accepting the conventions of the ruling school did not add much to the historiographical void. On the contrary, in Israel the field of the history of contemporary Jewry in the lands of Islam remained stunted until the 1970s, with hardly any scholars, whether Ashkenazi or Mizrahi, specializing in it. The handful of trailblazing works in the field were written abroad, and not in Hebrew, by Zionist scholars who were not part of Israel’s historiographic community: André Chouraqui in France, Joseph Schechtman in the United States, and Doris Bensimon Dunat, also in France. Chouraqui, a jurist by training, was Algerian born; Bensimon Dunat, a sociologist, was Moroccan born. Both attempted to amass knowledge on North African Jewry, particularly Moroccan Jewry.<sup>28</sup> Chouraqui immigrated to Israel in the 1960s, and only his book was translated into Hebrew, joining the paltry corpus of overused works available on the subject.<sup>29</sup> The demographer, Schechtman, a Revisionist

who lived in the United States, wrote about immigration to Israel from all the Islamic countries.<sup>30</sup> His book included a revealing chapter on Israel's ethnic problem that was at variance with the soothing view of "harmony" and spoke openly of hierarchy and discrimination.<sup>31</sup> Written in English, it was not translated into Hebrew and was rarely used as a reference work in Israel even though it might have supplied important missing information. The same thing, interestingly enough, happened with another relatively elaborate English work first published in 1953. Also written by an emigrant from Israel, the sociologist Raphael Patai, it, too, focused on the ethnic problem and knocked holes in the common wisdom.<sup>32</sup>

In Israel, attempts to furnish comprehensive data on the contemporary history of Mizrahi Jewry were pioneered by Hayyim J. Cohen. Rather daringly, he switched course from the history of Zionism in Iraq to Middle Eastern Jewry as a whole. His book provides political, demographic, economic, social, educational, and cultural data on the Jews of Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Iran, and Yemen.<sup>33</sup> Soon after its writing, however, he quit the research field and he, too, emigrated to the United States. Cohen, the senior Mizrahi historian of the first generation, perhaps represented the doubts and difficulties that plagued both the generation and the field. The chronic dearth of reliable historical knowledge was oppressive, nor could the gulf be bridged in the space of a few years, especially as the field drew few researchers. Its attraction stood in direct relationship to the ethnic problem: just as the entire Mizrahi wing of Israeli society suffered from a negative image, so, too, did its history—detering scholars. Ashkenazi dominance—with regard to content, methodology, and personnel—was stifling, even when defied. It is telling that Cohen, who was at the Hebrew University until his emigration, never taught in the Jewish History Department, the bastion of the regnant Jerusalem School. A member of the Institute for Contemporary Jewry, his departure from the country was influenced by the frustration of his professional advancement.

Nor were Goitein and Hirschberg, the teachers of the first generation of young scholars, typical members of the Jerusalem School. Goitein did teach at the Hebrew University but not in the Jewish History Department; he, too, soon emigrated to the United States, where, as noted earlier, he developed the field of Geniza studies. His connection to Zionist historiography during his American phase still needs to be studied. Hirschberg was one of the first scholars at the national-religious Bar-Ilan University, and there can be no doubt about his affiliation with

Zionist historiography, although one may wonder whether the course he chose, which was atypical of the Jerusalem School, was dictated by a strong religious orientation. One should note, for example, that he focused on the study of North African Jewry, the most problematic diaspora in terms of the ethnic problem. In the process, he also helped turn Bar-Ilan's Jewish History Department into a hothouse for research into Mizrahi Jewry.

The Jewish History Department at the Hebrew University did not produce a solid core of researchers on the subject. It trained some of the young historians who later became leading figures in the field at other, younger universities. Apart from this, the Ben-Zvi Institute, operating under the auspices of the Hebrew University, occupied a major place in the field. The institute resulted from the happy union of Yitzhak Ben-Zvi's autodidactic interests and his rising political career, which peaked in his presidency. This position enabled him to inaugurate the Institute for the Study of Oriental Jewish Communities in the Middle East (which became the Ben-Zvi Institute), a development that probably would not have come about under different circumstances.<sup>34</sup> The very establishment of the institute and its attachment to the parent institution of Israeli academe lent the subject prestige and over the years gradually advanced the field, even if it made no immediate waves.<sup>35</sup>

### **The Jerusalem School**

As in sociology, so in historiography 1977 marked a turning point. The dramatic political change that for the first time brought a right-wing party to power in Israel was, to a certain extent, understood as a "rebellion" against Ashkenazi hegemony, which had been associated with the ruling socialist Left. In Mizrahi terms, the transition to a right-wing government was seen as "liberating," allowing for different conduct and new voices. Within a few years, the new political establishment began to encourage the study of Mizrahi Jewry and the Centre for Incorporating the Heritage of Sephardi and Mizrahi Jewry was created for that purpose at the Ministry of Education.<sup>36</sup> Unprecedented research funds were made available to encourage the study of Eastern Jewry. The breakthrough, however, was not merely a matter of funds but was contingent on structural changes that attracted researchers, students, and public attention to the field. Conversely, internal changes within the historiographical arena may well have stirred the research pot, may have made

the public debate more relevant, and thereby may have resulted in the attention that till then had been enjoyed exclusively by sociology.

The Hebrew University soon jumped on the bandwagon in order to assure itself of seniority in this new field. Its flagship, the quarterly *Pe'amim*, still published by the Ben-Zvi Institute, provided a platform for a variety of new studies and devoted entire issues to specific topics. Its importance in filling the empty reservoir of knowledge and consequently overcoming the field's major deficiency can hardly be overestimated.

Another significant step was taken by Shmuel Ettinger, the senior figure in the Jerusalem School at the time. At the start of the 1980s, Ettinger initiated an authoritative summation of the then current knowledge of the history of Mizrahi Jewry. Of this three-volume work, one was devoted to recent generations. The undertaking was not dissimilar to that of Hayyim Cohen's a decade earlier. Now, however, it was no longer dependent on a single scholar but involved a number of researchers and extended the scope beyond the Middle East to include an extensive chapter on North African Jewry.<sup>37</sup>

In his prefaces to two of the volumes, Ettinger expounded on the Jerusalem School's conception of the field. These prefaces have played a key role in the historiography of Mizrahi Jewry, including the historiography of Israel's ethnic problem; they reveal in brief the attitude of Zionist historiography toward the subject, as it developed under the emerging threat to the hegemony of the historiographic elite.<sup>38</sup>

Ettinger began by discussing Zionism's basic question as to the unity and continuity of the Jewish people. Both Zionist ideology and the immigrant society that it had established made it crucial to posit Jewish unity and continuity. Cultural and other diversities among the scattered Jewish minorities obviously detracted from such unity, and Ettinger did intimate that Asian and North African immigrants in the State of Israel posed a serious problem. Had divergent historical development "created two separate paths of Jewish history . . . in the lands of Islam and the lands of Christianity?" He listed three factors that, to his mind, had influenced "the Jewish way of life in Islamic lands in modern times, its social arrangements and cultural character" and, in at least one respect, drew a clear distinction between Mizrahi and European Jewry. The economic, social, and cultural conditions in the various lands of Islam in different periods, he claimed, had affected the character of Jewish society there more than had non-Jewish surroundings in several European countries at the start of modern times "because of greater contact and closer sociocultural relations between Jews and non-Jews in the lands of Islam."<sup>39</sup>



This, according to my analysis, was one of the chief causes for the special sensitivity toward the history of Asian and African Jewry, both because the closer ties had been maintained with an environment now considered to be the nation's enemies and because the experience of European Jewry had dictated the Zionist narrative's basic model of relations with a non-Jewish milieu; a different model might have proved incompatible. Ettinger did not refrain from pointing out this important difference.<sup>40</sup> At this stage, it was also difficult to evade other sensitive issues such as the unequal status of Jewry's two branches within the Jewish state. Historiography had to explain the causes of the blatant differences in Israeli society, and Ettinger offered a strategic answer with a nod to the relatively distant past, the golden age of Spanish Jewry, the Spanish Expulsion, and subsequent generations, an era that had favored, if any, the Sephardi-Mizrahi branch. Moreover, even afterward Eastern Jewry had not rested on its laurels, although intellectually, it was made explicit, the twentieth century had fallen short of the past.

Jewish communities in the lands of Islam in modern times clearly have not come near to the diverse creative force in religious and social thought, or the literary accomplishments that marked Jews in the lands of Islam in the Middle Ages. Nevertheless, also in the Sixteenth to Nineteenth centuries, intellectual activity in these communities was highly intensive.<sup>41</sup>

While in general the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries scored high in Ettinger's evaluation, a closer look shows that he was speaking of centuries of dusk and decline—a common conception at the time not only as regards Jews but for the entire Islamic region.

Following the decline of Safad's Kabbalah center in the Sixteenth century, and particularly the failure of the Sabbatean movement, and apparently to no small degree because of it, the Jews of Islamic lands exerted a waning influence on the intellectual and social developments of world Jewry as a whole. The weakening of the Ottoman Empire and the political and economic ascendancy of the states of Europe in these centuries also increased the relative weight and influence of their Jewish populations, even where legally and socially Jews occupied the bottom of the ladder. This was compounded by the rapid demographic development of the Jews in European lands: in the

mid-Seventeenth century they still comprised about half of world Jewry, whereas at the start of World War I, their share had grown to 80%.

As the East declined, the pendulum swung clearly toward European Jewry. Here Ettinger stressed the gap in modernization between the two wings, a gap expressed also in the demographic balance.<sup>42</sup> At this point, the historical picture of the Jerusalem School coalesced with the main interpretation of the ethnic problem by the sociological functionalist school, also headquartered at the Hebrew University. Disparate modernization was the chief factor in the profound diversification of Israel's Jewish social landscape. No special differences, racial or otherwise, underlay this gap, for, after all, in the past oriental Jewry had been the superior branch. Like sociology's dominant school, here, too, the word of science proffered a reassuring message for the present and hope for a solution in the future within the framework of Zionism's own project of modernization.

After pointing out the developmental differences of recent generations, Ettinger bolstered the basic harmony-oriented assumption of national unity, not, however, with its face to the future, as in sociology, but in view of the past. European and Asian Jewry shared a common background in the relatively recent past in a number of important respects: (1) a heritage of internal organization (autonomy), (2) intellectual (religious) creativity, and (3) a constant, unbroken bond to the Land of Israel (national territory).

Had all these led to two separate roads of Jewish history in the development of Jewish communities: that in the lands of Islam, and that in the lands of Christianity? . . . Historical research, which is free of ideological arguments, must answer this question in the negative. . . . [D]espite the great influence of the local conditions and culture of the dwelling lands of Jews on their way of life and livelihood, an influence that only grew stronger in modern times, the weight of the Jewish People's historical heritage, as regards both internal organization and intellectual creativity, was nevertheless considerable. These elements strengthen the connections between the Jewish communities and collectives in different countries; among these, the bond to the Land of Israel as a focus of future hopes was especially strong even during calm periods of messianic aspirations.

The longing for the Holy Land, the support for the Yishuv in the Land of Israel and *Aliya* (immigration) to it are a crucial component of the bond between the Jewish collectives in the various countries and the people's uniform historical development in modern times, especially in the Nineteenth century.<sup>43</sup>

These were the topics slated for special attention in the historiographic endeavor that would yield the school's initial version of Jewish history in the Islamic lands. It was the blueprint for the entire three-volume project.<sup>44</sup>

In the preface to the second volume, which dealt with antecedent generations (from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries), Ettinger clarified some of the cornerstones of the historiographic conception laid out in the general preface and developed further topics. First, he pointed to the nineteenth century, or rather its second half, as a turning point followed by the exposure of Mizrahi Jewry to the influence of modernization. Second, he asserted that "all the changes in Jewish life in the lands of Islam in that period stemmed from the penetration of Western European influences that had reached the area either directly or indirectly." Direct influences were due to the spread of colonialism, which saw a complete takeover of many countries; indirect influences were due to reforms instituted under Western pressure (e.g., in the Ottoman Empire). Third, he depicted the Jews as more susceptible than their Muslim environment to Western influence. Nonetheless, early in the preface he noted: "This does not mean that in the past century and more, the lifestyle of most of the Jews in Islamic lands changed. On the contrary; the hallmark of the Jewish collectives was that most still pursued the social arrangements and way of life that had crystallized over generations."<sup>45</sup> The delay in embarking on modernization and only partial exposure to it subsequently were, as we have seen, the chief elements of the historiographic picture drawn by the head of the Jerusalem School.

Limited as it may have been, the adaptation to a new order increased the friction between Jews and their surroundings, Ettinger stated. It made little difference whether the environment was Muslim, local Christian, or that of new European settlers. In other words, the pattern of modern crisis vis-à-vis the milieu held true not only for European Jewry but also for the Jews of Islam. Its roots lay in the premodern period (in both locations), as well as in developments peculiar to the modern age and Jewish reliance on a colonial or Western regime, that is, on

the foreign conquerors. In addition, the ties between the European Jewish center and the oriental Jewish periphery grew stronger. The former sought to reform their apparently backward, oppressed Mizrahi brethren by means of modern education, and the local elite, including the rabbinic, acknowledged the superiority of European culture. The result was increasing alienation of the Jews from their surroundings.<sup>46</sup>

In depicting Islam's Jews as influenced by modern patterns of crisis vis-à-vis the environment, Ettinger had to restate his earlier basic diagnosis of the vast difference between their integration in the Muslim world and Jewish integration in Christian Europe. He now pinned this on the changes that had taken place in modern Western culture, changes that had not occurred in the Muslim world.

Ostensibly, there should have been a great correspondence between the two [Muslims and Jews], for, as opposed to a large portion of European Jewry, most of the Jews of the East were deeply rooted in the way of life, language, artistic creativity, and even beliefs and opinions of their Muslim neighbors. Among the latter, modern trends emerged, related to the influence of Western culture. The power of theocracy in Muslim society, however, and the stability of conservative elements in family arrangements and lifestyle precluded the possibility of numerous Jews being modernized within Muslim society.<sup>47</sup>

In other words, obstacles intrinsic to Muslim society made integration more difficult than did the barriers in Christian Europe. And thus the balance of integration, easier in premodern times in the Muslim world, now shifted in favor of Europe.

This assessment distinguished between the ability and readiness of Jews, as opposed to Muslims, to absorb Western influences and prepared the ground for two further delicate topics: (1) the part played by Jews in the nationalist movements in the Islamic countries and (2) the development of the Arab-Israeli conflict over Palestine. Ettinger determined that Jews, unlike local Christians, did not play much of a role in the anticolonial national movements due to the special Jewish link to European parties, which, up front, made them suspect in the eyes of the Muslim majority. The appearance of Zionism reinforced this long-term process, which had begun without any connection to the Jewish national movement.<sup>48</sup> This historiographic picture enabled Ettinger to develop his conclusions by stressing the message vital to Zionism: the unity of the

various Jewish minorities and the development of Jewish solidarity in view of external crises in all the diasporas that made it impossible for them to continue living there.

The nature and progression of these changes once more point to the Jewish people's uniform historical development at all the sites of their dispersal, and this was true of the past century as well. Processes that characterized European Jewry at the end of the eighteenth century and the start of the nineteenth began to be felt by Jewry in the lands of Islam in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They, too, began to show rapid numerical increase and accelerated urbanization; among them, too, a modern intelligentsia emerged, along with a broadening economic and business base. A Jewish press and Hebrew literature brought new ideas to the more remote Jewish groupings, even where Western influence was hardly felt. The involvement of European Jewry in endeavors on behalf of Mizrahi Jewry reinforced the sense of Jewish solidarity and of a common fate shared by all Jewish collectivities. . . . [T]he horrors of World War II, which struck at the Jews of Greece and North Africa, reawakened the sense of Jewish solidarity that had weakened among several groups as a result of citizenship and Westernization. The hopes that most of the Muslim-Arab world pinned on a German victory also exacerbated the feelings of hostility toward the Jews in its midst. Added to all these were anti-Jewish riots by the rabble in several Muslim countries (Iraq, Libya). It became more and more clear that Jews had no future in Muslim society and that if the Eastern lands would gain independence the fate of the Jews would be like that of the European settlers and other groups associated with colonial rule.<sup>49</sup>

The historical argument that had opened with a demonstration of nineteenth-century processes common to Jewry as a whole, albeit with profound differences, closed with the accent on a common crisis that impelled Jews to uproot themselves from their respective countries, a necessity that spread also to the lands of Islam in the middle of the twentieth century: "The departure of the Jews from the lands of Islam, borne partially on the wings of traditional messianic faith, was literally a migration of rescue, as the departure of the great majority of Algerian Jewry

will illustrate.” Not by chance did Ettinger mention Algerian Jewry. He wished to counter the implicit claim that it was the Ashkenazi-dominated Zionist movement that lay solely behind the mass emigrations of Jews from the lands of Islam and that, had Zionism not entered the picture, the Jews would have been able to go on living in their countries, integrating into modern Muslim states with no undue friction. The Algerian example supposedly showed that even in the absence of the Zionist hand, mass exodus had still taken place: “The Jewish–Arab conflict in the Land of Israel and the establishment of the State of Israel, as said, only made these trends of anti-Jewish troubles to the point of pogroms more severe.”<sup>50</sup>

In the final three pages, Ettinger took his historical construction one step farther. He did not merely exonerate Zionism in the crisis of Jewish/non-Jewish relations in the lands of Islam but endowed it with the capacity to transform the forced “rescue emigrations” into an enterprise of rehabilitation and rebirth. Apart from externally induced crises, he suggested that the Jewish communities in the lands of Islam suffered also from internal leadership crises.

These processes of Westernization exacerbated social and cultural differentiation among the Jews in Eastern lands, widening the gulf between the economically established echelons—not a few of whom possessed vast wealth and belonged to the westward-looking intelligentsia—and the dwindling popular classes. It was not simply a gulf in lifestyle but in cultural values, beliefs, and opinions. Not only European Jews regarded Mizrahi Jewry as inferior and in urgent need of the rudiments of Western culture; their own Westernized groups related to the bulk of the Jews in these lands in like terms.<sup>51</sup>

Against the background of the sociocultural crisis, Zionism stood out as the modern movement that resonated with the popular classes.

Even when word of the new ideological and political streams, or the Zionist emissaries, reached the Jews of Islamic lands . . . they met with little response among the established, educated class, whereas the masses saw the Zionist ideas as an extension of traditional messianic longings and an expression of the deep bond with the Holy Land and its Jewish community, which had existed for generations.<sup>52</sup>

Here, as elsewhere, Ettinger chose his words carefully, lending historiographic support to one of the harshest claims made by Ashkenazim against the charges of discrimination, namely, that the Mizrahi Jewish elites in the lands of Islam, especially in North Africa, had alienated themselves from and ignored the poorer classes, and when the time had come for mass emigration the elites had headed for the West, primarily France, while packing off the impoverished non-Westernized masses to Israel. The Zionist Ashkenazi elite had thus served as an alternative elite, which, in fact, rescued a flock abandoned by its shepherds. Moreover, with reference to the original, traditional culture of Mizrahi immigrant communities, Ettinger noted the noxious effect of modernization and suggested that Jewish national territory would serve as a haven of rehabilitation and rebirth not just for the immigrant masses themselves but for their traditions and culture, if only in part.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, the historiographic endeavor that could no longer be deferred in the new circumstances spawned a summation that helped to fill the vacuum of knowledge and, equally important, of interpretation, which was not only lean but dim and blurred, partly at least because of the inherent delicacy of the ethnic problem. In these two concise prefaces, Ettinger synopsised the Jerusalem School's chief historiographic approaches to the awkward question.

These prefaces, or at least Ettinger's ideas, served as guidelines for the authors of the various chapters in *Toldot ha-Yehudim be-Artzot ha-Islam*.<sup>54</sup> The extent to which they were read by or influenced researchers, lecturers, students, teachers, and pupils is less clear. There can be no doubt, however, that the ideological leanings, the intellectual and research orientations, and the conclusions presented in the prefaces were shared at all universities by most scholars who were in any way connected with the Jerusalem School, and these ideas came to the fore in their own works.<sup>55</sup> In addition, they filtered into other Israeli cultural arenas, such as education and the media, not merely because of the school's dominance but because the Zionist metanarrative was accepted by virtually everyone concerned with Jewish history in the State of Israel and the root cadre did not sprout any other clearly defined nucleus with a different historiographic perspective.

The Jerusalem School's word on the Jews of Islam was clearly formulated only in the early 1980s, and by Ettinger, in the peculiar circumstances elaborated earlier. Although Ettinger specialized in Eastern European Jewry, he nevertheless presided over the historiographic project and even took the trouble to write the prefaces. He chose not to leave

the job to any of the historians who contributed the various chapters and did specialize in the field, most of whom, incidentally, were of Mizrahi origin. It was apparently important to him to keep utter control of the prickly task that set out the position of the hegemonic school in this highly sensitive area.

### **Historiography in a Period of Crisis**

Signs of crisis were already evident even as members of the Jerusalem School were writing *Toldot Ha-Yehudim be-Artzot ha-Islam*. The old socialist-Zionist intellectual elite, represented by the important, arresting Ettinger, was losing its unconditional supremacy, as was the Zionist ethos in Israeli society. The change was indicated by the debut in 1984 of the Shas political party. For the first time, the Mizrahi Orthodox—senior rabbis and young yeshiva graduates—had sufficient strength to garner wide electoral support for a platform that wedded the old Sephardi religious heritage to the Orthodox Ashkenazi socioeconomic and political model. In the initial stages, Shas, of course, did not develop an alternative historiography to that of secular Zionism, but the power of the new Mizrahi Orthodox elite was not confined to politics. It found expression in the elite's extension to the composers of rabbinic literature and, among other things, in the historically important texts written as offshoots of this literature, which over time could be seen as the cornerstones of a rival historiography.<sup>56</sup> This is certainly not what Ettinger had expected when he spoke of Israel being fertile ground for the restoration of the Mizrahi heritage. Indirectly, however, and contrary to his convictions, both the emergence of Shas and the burgeoning of Mizrahi rabbinic literature bore out his prediction.

Even in advance of Shas's appearance on the political map, other Mizrahi secular voices had begun to take exception to the core assumptions and conventions of Zionist historiography as it had developed till then. These critics, who began to speak out right after the crisis of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, well before the change of the political guard in 1977, were not motivated by anti-Zionism but rather the reverse. They did, however, object to the role that Zionist historiography had allotted to Mizrahi Jewry in general, particularly in the evolution of the new Jewish Yishuv in the Land of Israel. In 1979, a TV documentary series, *'Amud ha-Esh* (Pillar of Fire) brought matters to a head. The series, then in preparation, presented a history of Zionism up to 1948 and hardly



mentioned the role of the Mizrahim, whether in Zionist activity abroad or in the new Yishuv. A handful of Mizrahi intellectuals met with the television authorities, and the initial contacts led to an understanding that there was room to feature the Mizrahim more prominently in the Zionist epic. At a certain point, however, the Mizrahim sensed that the overall framework of the series, dictated by the history of European Ashkenazi Zionism, was not suitable to the history of oriental Jewry and its road to Zionism, and they demanded that the work be halted and the series restructured. The ensuing conflict reached all the way to the Knesset and the Supreme Court.<sup>57</sup>

The importance of the episode, for our purposes, lies in the change and crisis that it demonstrated on a number of levels. First, the intellectuals who had made an issue of it signaled the presence of a new generation in terms of the thinking and writing about Mizrahim. This generation, born more or less simultaneously with the Jewish state, had to contend above all with the fact that historical knowledge on Mizrahi Jewry was still virtually nonexistent by the time they came of age and were at the formative identity stage. They were hard put to furnish the TV writers with reliable, well-rounded studies on Mizrahim for a revision of the scripts. Neutral, professional norms played against them; had the circumstances in this domain been different, had material been available, their cause would have been much easier to defend.

But the management of the affair could not be separated from the balance of forces in the ethnic arena; the European Jewish side had the upper hand and was able to relegate the Mizrahim to the sidelines. In other words, given the inequality, one could well wonder whether a different situation in the historiographical arena would have led to different results or whether the historiographic void itself was not due to ongoing discrimination, serving simultaneously as justification for the inferior Mizrahi status in public opinion. Whereas the former reaction of Mizrahi intellectuals, based as it was on assumptions of professionalism, was not antiestablishment and did not necessarily regard the powers that be as hostile to Mizrahim, the latter considerations had the potential to fuel distrust of the ruling Ashkenazi elite. They might have kindled rebellious action divergent from the integrationist patterns that had thus far characterized Mizrahi members of the secular elite in both the previous and present generations.

This period, at the transition from the 1970s to the 1980s, was propitious for radical change in Mizrahi behavioral and cognitive modes not only because of Israeli society's internal crises, the Yom Kippur War, and

the political upheaval and transformation of 1977 but because of changes outside the Jewish state. The 1980s and 1990s marked a crossroads in the intellectual currents predominant in the West, and new conditions encouraged anti-Ashkenazi, anti-Zionist trends. This pivotal juncture has become synonymous with the materialization in Israel of scholars known as the New Historians. Their writing talent and impressive ability to meet the classic criteria of historical research made it difficult for opponents to dismiss them and obliged detractors to address, and indeed adopt, their factual findings even when they disagreed with their historiographic interpretations. Apart from their professional capabilities, however, the New Historians benefited also from the trends in Western academic discourse, imbued with a postmodernist, postcolonial spirit and, as such, compatible with messages critical of Israel and Zionism. They could thus present an immeasurably strong professional front, with global backing, against the force and power of Israel's academic establishment, which, among other factors, explains their success and durability on the local level as well.

### **Postcolonialism**

Developments in the first areas of interest shown by the New Historians, namely, the Israeli-Arab conflict and the Holocaust, affected (albeit later) the study of Mizrahim and the ethnic problem and resulted in a fresh current with a totally different interpretation from those of the schools that had reigned supreme until the early 1980s.

In 1978, a year after Israel's political revolution, Edward Said's *Orientalism* sent shock waves through the research field on relations between the West and Islam.<sup>58</sup> Chipping away at accepted opinion, he lifted the veil from the Western narrative of the Orient, exposing what he described as a discourse of power, a narrative of control, even on the part of those considered preeminent experts on the region. In his view, Europeans see the Islamic East as the negative "other," embracing sweeping, essentialist generalizations about the nature of Islam and its peoples in order to define themselves in positive terms. Speaking ostensibly in the name of enlightenment and progress, they used the generalizations only to justify their dominance over the peoples of the Middle East. An analysis of their writings, stripped of conventions about European superiority and its enlightened culture, unveils a discourse that is not merely essentialist and Eurocentric but imperialist and racist.

Said, a Palestinian who makes no bones about the personal, political context of his scholarly progression in cultural studies, tags Zionism as a European national movement that made exemplary use of the orientalist discourse. In the world of postmodern ideas, which, in any case, takes a critical view of nationalism as a modern invention, Zionism was seen a priori as illegitimate, lacking valid foundations. Second, while postmodernism attacks the basic assumptions of diverse modernist schools (national and others), Zionism, as a national movement penetrating the Orient and the Muslim world, came under fire also from postcolonialism. It was thus subjected to a double onslaught, as both a national and a colonial movement that had exploited orientalism's oppressive force to the full. Furthermore, the history of the ties between the Jewish national movement of return and the Orient had an internal aspect as well: Ashkenazi-Mizrahi relations. This made room for the possibility that the guiding national ideological axiom—which accorded precedence to internal Jewish solidarity over Jewish relations with Christian and/or Muslim surroundings—would be replaced by a contrary assumption that made the Orient–West dichotomy paramount; both Muslims and Mizrahi Jews were victims of European enlightenment, colonialism, and imperialism, and the underdog status, shared by Mizrahi Jews and Palestinian Arabs, was more significant than the religious or national divide. Indeed, the revolutionary potential of this axiomatic understanding of the ethnic problem has come to fruition.

The antithetical starting points of Zionist historiography and Said's thesis in the analysis of the ethnic problem derive, in part, from their structural similarity as theoretical paradigms. While the former is committed to the unity and kinship demands of ethnic-based nationalisms, and accordingly tends to ignore the built-in hierarchy between European and non-European in the colonial era, the latter overlooks the possibility that the dichotomy, a child of the Enlightenment and European imperialism, might be obliged to deal with conflicting influences of identity that could also be a bridge between Europeans and non-Europeans or a barrier between different "oriental" groups.<sup>59</sup> The first paradigm ultimately stresses unity and kinship, the second the unbridgeable divide, because of the essentialist disqualification of the Orient by the imperialist West. Said makes the very dichotomy principle essentialist, and just as Zionist historians, who may now be termed *orientalists*, omitted many aspects of historical reality because they did not fit into the ideological metanarrative, the same can be said of Said's devotees.

Exactly as the Western sociological schools eventually reached Israel

and profoundly affected the study of the ethnic problem, so, too, did the new school of cultural studies. Ella Shohat described Mizrahim as victims of Zionism and devoted a book to investigating the orientalist discourse in Israeli cinema. Others followed suit.<sup>60</sup> In time, a number of other scholars began to hold sway in the postcolonial school, especially Homi Bhabha, whose intricate thinking helped overcome the limitations of Said's paradigm.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, the binary principle still dominates the postcolonialist view of Zionism, which is depicted as a purely Ashkenazi creation in which Mizrahim played no autonomous part, being used as mere pawns by the Ashkenazi socialist elite, which presided over the mandatory Yishuv and the fledgling state in its formative years. If in the so-called old Israeli research the Mizrahim were presented as the problem, in this new research Ashkenazi Zionism has become the problem.<sup>62</sup>

The postcolonialist strategy on the ethnic problem mirrors that of the previous dominant school, though in the opposite direction. Sociology's functionalists and adherents of the Jerusalem School had adopted a harmony-oriented strategy, masking both the very nature of the ethnic problem as immanent in and basic to the Jewish national project and the project's negative repercussions. Postcolonialists have an obverse agenda: to show up the Jewish national project as flawed from the start and to highlight its faults, including in intraethnic relations. Just as in the past ideological compliance sprang from a clear social background, so, too, does this new development. After more than half a century of Jewish statehood, it is the up-to-date, postcolonial stance, rather than Zionist national commitment, that enjoys prestige both in Israel's academic community and, especially, in the world at large. Now the road to social advancement for Israel's Mizrahi intellectuals does not necessarily pass through the state's hegemonic corridors. On the contrary; the bon ton in Western academic circles encourages—even demands—a denunciation of the Jewish state. In this development, one can find, ironically and paradoxically, confirmation of Said's important insight (following Foucault) into both the power of those who are able to tag the other as inferior and limited in the light of their own cultural, intellectual, and moral "superiority" and the interrelationship between the ascendant modern center in the West and the provinces of the "backward" and "barbaric" in other parts of the globe. As "Semites," European Jews, most of world Jewry, had an a priori suspect standing in the dichotomized worldview of enlightened Christianity,<sup>63</sup> and in recent times Zionism deteriorated (or reverted perhaps) to the oriental side of the picture. In earlier stages of Zionist history, the underlying attitude of the enlightened Christian West toward

Jews promoted recognition of their right to a national territory of their own in their mythological homeland in the Levant. The reasons were complex and contradictory: philo-Semitism, anti-Semitism, imperialist-colonialist motifs (which turned out to be unstable), feelings lodged in guilt over the destruction of European Jewry, and so forth. Now, confronted with the outcomes of the Zionist project, the same underlying attitude of the enlightened Christian West toward Jews facilitates, perhaps, a change of mind and withdrawal of support for the Jews' right to a state of their own in Asia.

Most Israeli postcolonialists have not come to the ethnic problem after years of in-depth investigation of the history of Mizrahim in Israel or their countries of origin in Asia and Africa. Most began their careers in entirely different fields and started to focus on Israel's Mizrahim only in recent years. For the moment, their input on the ongoing problem of Mizrahi studies in recent generations—the vacuum of knowledge—remains modest. Their other influences on the research are similar to those of the schools that preceded them and were committed to a metanarrative. On the one hand, their influence, as I see it, distorts and blurs historical reality; on the other, it is welcome. Postcolonialists of the 1990s extended, expanded, and greatly diversified the voices critical of conceptions that did, and sometimes still do, rule Israeli sociology and historiography. Nourished by a rich, evolving, international, theoretical hinterland, the directions of thinking and research they propose have injected new life into a field suffering from a lack of appreciation and talent. Like their predecessors, they have offered important new insights and shed light on previously dark areas.

### **Historiography in Search of a Conceptual Framework**

The change in establishment policy and the impact of the worldwide ethnic trend on the field in Israel saw the blossoming of Mizrahi historical research in the 1980s. By and large, it was still controlled by the Zionist narrative and the demands of the educational and academic establishment. Thus, for instance, as the Holocaust became a key factor in Israeli Jewish identity and Holocaust studies entered the curricula, there was a growing need to fill this void, too, in the history of Mizrahi Jewry. The orientation was to stress similar rather than different experiences so as not to subvert the message of a common Jewish fate in both Christian

Europe and the lands of Islam. Nevertheless, the end result was a significant addition to the literature on Mizrahi Jews, enabling enhanced discussion from more angles.<sup>64</sup>

After several years of relative flowering—and notwithstanding the constant growth of studies in terms of both quantity and quality—the field as a whole did not attract many new talents. Establishment support is apparently not enough to alter the status of Israeli society's Mizrahi component in the public mind and imagination. The ethnic problem is not an illusion. It is real and ingrained, and though it may don different forms, its basic contours remain firm: the preferential position enjoyed by Europeans over non-European, Mizrahi elements in the immigrant society. Even positive changes in the status of the field are tied to the favored agenda of Western intellectual milieus, as we have just seen.

Accordingly, there has been no deviation from the pattern of alienation from the recent past of the twentieth century—which characterized the previous generation of historians—and only a handful of scholars have chosen to investigate the ethnic problem. Nevertheless, the 1980s addressed the field's greatest problem, the lack of historical data. Israeli archives were opened to researchers and, as happened with the topic of the Israeli-Arab conflict, presented fresh opportunities. Researchers unearthed new details and arrived at new conclusions inconsistent with the basic assumptions of the old historiography and not entirely welcome to the establishment. Notable among these were studies on the Jews of Iraq and Morocco.<sup>65</sup>

Other studies, which did not rely heavily on the fresh material, also began to reveal new horizons. Nissim Kazzaz, for example, showed that key Jewish figures, at least in Iraq, had shared Arab nationalist aspirations and, like dominant elites in the West, had advocated complete integration into local society. Although he also attempted to explain the Iraqi elite's failure with a thesis that fitted neatly into the Zionist narrative, his disclosures warranted a reappraisal of twentieth-century Jewish history in Iraq and other Arab and Muslim states. The question of a local nationalist orientation on the part of Jews in Arab countries now seemed worthy of exploration. It appears that messianic Zionism did not immediately succeed "traditionalism," nor did the pro-Western leadership necessarily play a mere minor role prior to the advent of and "redemption" by Zionist emissaries. In the interim, the Mizrahi Jewish world seems to have been exposed to alternative, modern, ideological and organizational trends.

A whole series of studies aimed (if subconsciously or implicitly) at revamping the image of Mizrahim in Israel uncovered an entire unknown

layer of Hebrew Haskala (Enlightenment) in North Africa that makes it easier to understand the roots of modern Zionist leanings in the region.<sup>66</sup> Finally, significant strides, including those by scholars not necessarily researching Mizrahim, have been made through the study of different waves of immigrants to Israel, their absorption, and the state policies adopted toward Mizrahi immigrants. The picture that emerges differs radically from the harmonious portrait painted by Israel's Old Historiography.<sup>67</sup>

Although the Jerusalem School's historical interpretation has not been completely overturned, a considerable portion of its basic assumptions cannot be easily reconciled with later findings. Chiefly, the harmonious-ideal thesis, which rests on orientalist stereotypes, has lost much of its credibility. Yet none of the historians who have undertaken documented research on Mizrahi Jewry in recent generations has totally rejected the Jerusalem School's basic assumptions and conceptions. Its main premise—that modernization precipitated heightened friction between Jews and Muslims in the Arab countries prior to the advent of the Zionist movement—has not been refuted. On the other hand, the modest role that Ettinger assigned to Zionism as aggravating Jewish relations with the Arab milieu requires revision. Studies show that the rise of Zionism played a key role in the deteriorating relations with the Arab environment. Although the tensions predated Zionism and were due to Western influence, whether or not Jewish attempts to win European patronage or accelerated Jewish Westernization far beyond the acceptable in a Muslim environment, it is difficult to exaggerate Zionism's far-reaching, alienating role in the era of nationalism.<sup>68</sup> Ettinger's other major thesis—that of uneven modernization among the Mizrahi elite and masses—is clearly valid, although most current studies show that the extent and nature of the imbalance could also benefit from serious review.

With regard to the history of Israel's ethnic problem, as a partisan camp in this social development Ettinger and his school could hardly have been detached observers. The latest studies demonstrate that in the formative years of the Yishuv and the state Ashkenazim exploited the very real inequities to consolidate their own status in the nascent society being built of European and non-European Jews. The arguments of sociology's school of conflict are not unfounded; on the contrary, its insights hold the key to understanding the development of a brand new society and the distribution of national resources.<sup>69</sup> But national ideology and sentiments of solidarity also played a role. Thus, historical research has found, among other things, a balance of interests between the Jewish state and Jewish minorities outside, leading to a corresponding

“interplay” so long as there was no existential threat to either side. At times, for instance, Moroccan Jews courted the State of Israel; at other times, the state courted them. Moments of crisis, as mentioned, spawned dependency, bringing the “game” to an end.<sup>70</sup> The many unique features in the lot of Iraqi Jewry leaves considerable room for postcolonial reflections, and it is little wonder that Iraqi intellectuals were among the first to ponder the circumstances of their uprooting to the Jewish state. In any case, their experience as immigrants in Israel also indicates a complex interplay between the East-West dichotomy and national ideology and sentiments. The national ideology and sentiments served to counter tendencies of exploitation, prejudice, and discrimination, equipping Mizrahim with moral and legal resources that under the right circumstances could be translated into real political and economic power.<sup>71</sup>

Historical research, as noted, has of course not really reached as far as recent decades, and once more sociology has been called on to furnish data on and insights into latter-day events in the ethnic realm. While different schools have again come up with different presentations, the most prominent development has been the disappointment in the modernist functionalist camp.<sup>72</sup> As it predicted, the gaps between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim have narrowed and the two groups have drawn closer to one another; nonetheless, in extensive social areas the gulf persists and is even widening.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, inequality helped preserve traditional ethnic elites and cultures; these cultures, after initial suppression, were rehabilitated and transformed under the new national conditions, resulting in a united Mizrahi realignment and a young new leadership that offered an alternative to the dominant Ashkenazi culture in both its secular and Orthodox-religious facets. Ettinger, despite himself, was right when he stated that the preservation of Mizrahi Jewry’s long-standing traditions would find the national soil hospitable. The melting pot policy, aimed at instilling the Western, secular culture preferred by the ruling Ashkenazim, ran into serious contradictions. The rise and stability of the Shas political movement in the past generation obviously reflect this failure.<sup>74</sup> The main trend in sociological research is to view Shas as a primarily Israeli phenomenon, but from the perspective of historical processes the discussion should properly begin back in the countries of origin of Mizrahi Jewry, where the native traditionalist Jewish elites had already been suppressed. On national land, however, after a period of adaptation, they were able to begin to change their situation.

In contrast to other sensitive fields of Israeli historiography in the past generation, which saw a mostly post-Zionist radical periphery



attacking the academic center, the shift in the history of Mizrahi Jewry came from within the universities themselves, seemingly untouched by the clash of generations or schools of thought. Still, the works of the isolated historians who have investigated the ethnic problem harbor considerable explosive material. Yehuda Nini, a veteran historian in this field, devoted a late study to the episode of the Yemenite settlement at Kinneret, on the Sea of Galilee, arriving at conclusions incompatible with his early position on interethnic relations.<sup>75</sup> At the start of the period of crisis, he had defended the core assumptions of the historiography in which he had been bred, refraining from supporting the young intellectuals who would halt the TV production of *'Amud ha-Esh* and attacking, on professional grounds, the trailblazing critics of the official Zionist-Ashkenazi narrative.<sup>76</sup> Now, at any rate, his conclusions correspond to Israeli sociology's critical school, inspiring even postcolonialists.<sup>77</sup> Although Nini refused to see the case he researched as representative of the ethnic relations within Zionism as a whole, his change of orientation is nevertheless telling and points to serious glitches in the old Zionist historiography. Among the younger generation of historians, the later works of Esther Meir and Bat-Zion Klorman-Iraqi also punch holes in this historiography.<sup>78</sup> Finally, my own work suggests analyzing the ethnic problem's development as the product of the encounter between an ethnic-based nationalism and the colonialist dichotomy. This encounter occurs only in Zionist society and is due to the nature of the Jewish dispersion in Europe, Asia, and North Africa.<sup>79</sup> Since pan-Jewish contacts expanded in the modern period prior to the rise of Zionism, intercommunal identity tensions between European and non-European Jews did not first spring up in the Zionist Yishuv or the State of Israel. Rather, they can be traced back to the end of the eighteenth century (under the impact of the Western Enlightenment and imperialism), outside of the Zionist context and the boundaries of the Land of Israel.<sup>80</sup> I therefore suggest that the problem be viewed as a special—internal—case of orientalism in which the orientalist dichotomy must square up to contradictory influences.<sup>81</sup> In this view, Israel's ethnic problem is merely the latest, most intensive form of the basic problem of Jewish dispersion.<sup>82</sup>

During the crisis in the late 1970s and early 1980s, I, too, was conscious of the unsuitability of the general Eurocentric scaffolding that the old Zionist historiography had forced on all the immigrant groups that had gathered in the young State of Israel. The tendency may have been comprehensible prior to 1948, when seen against the global demo-

graphic balance of Jewish minorities and the dominant role of the Eastern European minorities in creating the Zionist Yishuv. But it no longer held water after the state was established and Mizrahim came to comprise half, if not more, of Israeli society. The situation called for conceptual adaptations, and my own generation of researchers, each in her or his own way, displayed evident discomfort in writing the history of Mizrahi Jewry within a framework tailored to Jewish minorities in Christian lands. The same applies to the new postcolonial current, which, because of its paramount anti-Zionist drift, has been equally blinded to the Mizrahim's natural introduction into the behavioral and conceptual theaters common to the nationalist era, as well as to the nationalist tendencies of Jewish minorities in the lands of Islam. Both approaches, the old Ashkenazi-Zionist ideological metahistory and the new postcolonialism, have imposed imported frameworks of meaning on the investigation of Mizrahim and the ethnic problem. The new current may stem from the desire of the Third World's Westernized (or even Western) elite to tell its story, but all the same its basic general assumptions must be modified for specific populations. Such individual modifications are history's natural hunting grounds; unlike the social sciences, it does not lend itself to universal models.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Given the disintegration of the old Zionist hegemony and the changes in the intellectual and academic worlds in the West and Israel, the study of Israel's ethnic problem has advanced greatly under the present generation of researchers. Sociology had already offered a variety of explanations back in the late 1970s and early 1980s; in the past decade, new explications were offered also by other disciplines, by the cultural school under the impact of postcolonialism and by a new critical current in Israeli historiography. The few historians who were attracted to the field, and have stayed, had several avenues open to them to investigate the ethnic problem. First, they could continue along the path marked out by the previous generation prior to the crisis. This was not a particularly promising route both because it looked to the relatively distant past rather than recent decades and because the Old Historiography's basic assumptions aimed at a harmonious, Eurocentric interpretation and rested on, among other things, orientalist preconceptions. A diametrically opposite avenue accepted the basic methodological assumptions of postcolonialism. It, unlike the first,

had the potential to enrich the field considerably; however, apart from a new methodology, it posits strong, ideological, anti-Zionist tendencies that greatly obstruct a neutral view of the national fabric being woven by European/non-European relations. Be that as it may, the new current's core general assumptions obliged history, as a scientific discipline, to reexamine the recent past and make adjustments for specific populations. The attempts to make the necessary adjustments signaled the third avenue.

This, in fact, was the avenue chosen by myself and several of my colleagues, if not deliberately. The choice owed less to the basic assumptions and methods of postcolonialism than to Israel's autonomous historical research under the impact of sociological schools. Nevertheless, apart from a differing approach to nationalism as a generative force that did not necessarily wreak havoc on the Asian and African Jewish minorities, the recent historical research does seem to be drawing closer to the post-colonial outlook. Not only is the research more alert to the colonial influence on European/non-European interaction within the Zionist encounter, but there is greater sensitivity to the multiple facets and identities of Mizrahim as regards topics, methodology, and so on. With respect to Zionism, the historical conclusions on the ethnic problem approach the basic model of sociology's pluralist school: there is heightened awareness of discrimination against Mizrahim, but also of the sway of nationalism, which distinguishes between the Jewish state's Mizrahi and Arab citizens as a forced by-product of Zionism. Diaspora nationalism translated into a Jewish migration and settlement movement from Europe, Asia, and Africa to a mythological homeland that was already occupied by a local population; this movement gave birth to an ostensibly democratic national state but a democracy that preferred Jews to non-Jews. Concomitantly, diaspora nationalism, with its uniform, egalitarian ethos for all conationals, has been unable to escape the colonial influences concurrent with the age of nationalism.<sup>83</sup>

The present generation of scholars investigating the ethnic problem all grew up during the crisis of the old Zionist hegemony and its conceptions. The social, intellectual, and emotional dimensions of the hegemonic period made it very difficult for intellectuals in general to pursue an independent path, and for Mizrahi intellectuals all the more so, because of the essentially hierarchical and oppressive nature of the ethnic problem. The waning of the old Zionist dominance enabled other voices to come to the fore and other intellectuals to choose their own course. Apart from new intellectual currents and options, however, there were also other factors at work, such as personal, family and ethnic back-

grounds, which continue to play a role. The overwhelming majority of scholars inquiring into the ethnic problem in the present generation are themselves Mizrahim or the offspring of Mizrahi-Ashkenazi marriages. There can be little doubt that their ethnic background had a direct bearing on their choice of research. They work from a shared sensitivity to the ethnic question but also under the impact of the divergent histories of separate Jewish minorities and the different biographies of individual families in Israel. Yehuda Shenhav, a key postcolonial scholar, speaks of contradictory influences for and against Zionism within his own family, exhibiting an evident identification with his grandmother, who took an unfavorable view of the mass immigration of Iraqi Jewry and the hand taken by the local Zionist movement in promoting emigration to the Land of Israel.<sup>84</sup> On a similar personal note, my Yemenite grandparents' home, in which I was raised, presented a united front imbued with emotional and conscious gratitude for the national enterprise. The enthusiastic Zionism of my "Ashkenized" grandfather had a lasting effect on me, likely no less potent than the traces left by Shenhav's grandmother on him. Moreover, as said, some of this generation's scholars were born to Mizrahi parents on both sides, while others are typical of the growing trend of interethnic marriages in Israeli Jewish society. A colleague of mine, the historian Esther Meir, who, like myself, is the product of such a "mixed marriage," once commented: "We owe answers to both our parents." The different backgrounds certainly play an important part. As regards individual and collective identity, we all embarked on a voyage of discovery, but our biographies throughout, at both the interim stations and the final destination, depend, too, on what our families placed in our baggage before we set out and on the unanswered questions sown in our minds by the milieu into which we were born.

## NOTES

1. Aron Rodrigue, *Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries in Transition, 1860–1939: The Teachers of Alliance Israélite Universelle* (Seattle, 1993), 12; Yaron Tsur, *Yehudim bein Muslemim: Mavo le-Toldot ha-Yehudim be-Artzot ha-Islam ba-Tkufa ha-Modernit, 1750–1914* [Jews among Muslims: Introduction to the History of the Jews in Islamic Lands in the Modern Period, 1750–1914], provisional ed. (Tel Aviv 2003), units 7–8, "Reformistim ve-Yehudim 'Hadashim' aharei milhemet Krim" [Reformers and "New" Jews after the Crimean War], 142–49.

2. *Mizrahi* (meaning "easterner" or "Oriental") is not to be confused with the Ashkenazi religious Zionist party of the same name. For a discussion of the internal terminology on the easterner side of the ethnic divide, see, for example, Uzi Schmelz,

“Ha-‘aliya ha-hamonit mi-Asia u-mi-Tzfon-Africa: Hebeitim demographiim” [Mass Aliya from Asia and North Africa: Demographic Aspects], *Pe‘amim* 39 (1989): 16–17; and Yaron Tsur, “Ha-be‘aya ha-‘adatit bi-shnot ha-shishim” [The Ethnic Problem in the 1960s], in *He-‘Assor ha-Sheni, 5718–5728* [The Second Decade, 1948–1958], ed. Z. Zameret and H. Yablonka (Jerusalem, 2000), 114.

3. Yaron Tsur, “Carnival Fears—Moroccan Immigrants and the Ethnic Problem in the Young State of Israel,” *Journal of Israeli History* 18, no. 1 (1997): 73–103. *Kehila Kru‘a: Yehudei Marocco ve-ha-Le‘umiyut, 1943–1954* [Torn Community: Moroccan Jewry and Nationalism, 1943–1954] (Tel Aviv, 2001), 264–72.

4. *HaAretz*, 22 April 1949.

5. For Eisenstadt’s key work of the period, see *The Absorption of Immigrants* (London, 1954). It was preceded by a study on Yishuv oriental Jews prior to the large immigration: *Mavo le-Heker ha-Mivne ha-Sotziologi shel ‘Edot ha-Mizrah* [Introduction to the Sociological Structure of Oriental Jewry] (Jerusalem, 1948).

6. Valuable evidence of the scholarly thinking on the ethnic problem in early statehood can be found in a discussion in the sociology journal *Megamot*, 1951–52. It was moderated not by a sociologist but by a well-known psychologist and educator, Carl Frankenstein, and the participants included other important psychologists, philosophers, and sociologists, who did not necessarily share the same basic position on the nature of the problem or the way to deal with it. See Carl Frankenstein, “Li-ve‘ayat ha-hevdelim ha-etniim” [On the Problem of Ethnic Differences], *Megamot*, 2, no. 3 (April 1951): 261–76; E. Simon, “Al mashma‘uto ha-kefula shel ha-musag ‘primitiviyut’” [On the Double Meaning of the Concept of “Primitivity”], *Megamot*, 2, no. 3 (April 1951): 277–84; Nathan Rotenstreich, “‘Amat mida absolutit’ [Ethnic Differences and the Value Problem], *Megamot*, 2, no. 4 (July 1951): 327–38; Carl Frankenstein, “Le-musag ha-primitiviyut” [On the Concept of Primitivity], *Megamot*, 2, no. 4 (July 1951): 339–60; Meshulam Groll, “‘Al kvod ha-adam” [Individual and Society: Dialectical Materialism versus a Psychological Approach], *Megamot*, 3, no. 1 (October 1951): 50–64; Carl Frankenstein, “Ha-gisha ha-psycho-logit li-ve‘ayat ha-hevdelim ha-etniim” [The Psychological Approach to the Problem of Ethnic Differences], *Megamot*, 3, no. 2 (January 1952): 158–70; Yosef Ben-David, “Hevdelim etniim o shinui hevratit?” [Ethnic Differences or Social Change?], *Megamot*, 3, no. 2 (January 1952): 171–83; and “Sikum ha-vikvuh ‘al be‘ayat ha-hevdelim ha-etniim” [On the Problem of Ethnic Differences: Summary of Discussion], *Megamot*, 3, no. 4 (July 1952): 319–29.

The functionalist position was presented not by Eisenstadt but by Yosef Ben-David. Eisenstadt’s “Ha-Mashma‘ut Ha-Hevratit Shel Ha-Hinuch Le-Or Be‘ayot Klitit Ha-‘Aliya” [The Social Significance of Education in Light of the Problem of Immigrant Absorption], *Megamot*, 3, no. 4 (July 1952): 330–41, appeared right after the summary and seemed to introduce what is defined as the “discussion stage of problems of implementation.” For a retrospective look at the *Megamot* discussion, see Moshe Lissak, “Ha-mehkar be-nosseh ha-be‘aya ha-‘adatit: Tmunat matzav” [The Research on the Ethnic Problem: Situation Report], in *Kivunim Hadashim be-Heker ha-Be‘aya ha-‘Adatit* [New Directions in Research on the Ethnic Problem] (Jerusalem, 1984), ed. Naama Cohen and Ora Ahimeir, 13–16.

7. Deborah Bernstein, “Ha-panterim ha-shhorim: Konflikt u-mehaa ba-hevra ha-Yisre‘elit” [Conflict and Protest in Israeli Society: The Case of the Black Panthers], *Megamot*, 25, no. 1 (1979): 65–79.

8. Shlomo Swirski, *Lo Nehshalim ela Menuhshalim: Mizrahim ve-Ashkenazim be-Yisrael—Nituah Sotziologi ve-Sihot 'im Pe' ilim u-Fe'ilot* [Orientals and Ashkenazim in Israel: The Ethnic Division of Labor] (Haifa, 1981).

9. Deborah Bernstein, "Ha-sotziologiya koletet et ha-'aliya" [Sociology Absorbs Immigration], *Mahbarot LeMehkar U'LeVikoret* 1 (October 1978): 5–21.

10. Smootha's main work in this period, *Pluralism and Conflict* (London, 1978), was based on his doctoral dissertation of 1973. Swirsky seems to have been the first to attempt to suggest a schematic distinction between the three approaches (*Oriental*s, 1–11), after which Smootha suggested his own distinctions, in "Shalosh gishot be-sotziologiya shel yahasei 'eidot be-Yisrael" [Three Perspectives in the Sociology of Ethnic Relations in Israel], *Megamot*, 28 (March 1984): 169–206, and they were followed by others. Clearly, the tendencies of the different schools of the authors were reflected in the way in which the different sociological camps were presented. Their brief schematic presentation here does not purport to faithfully or accurately represent the schools as seen by their adherents but to provide a general idea focused on their differences.

11. See Shlomo Deshen, "Ha-anthropologim ve-heker ha-tarbuyot shel 'adot ha-Mizrah" [Anthropologists and Cultural Research of Oriental Communities] *Pe'amim* 1 (1979): 79–84. This development had a positive effect on the subsequent historiography. See Yaron Tsur, "Hirhurim shel hoker zar 'al sifrutam shel Yehudei Tunisia" [Reflections of a Foreign Scholar on the Literature of Tunisian Jewry], *Shorashim BaMizrah* 5 (2002): 222–23.

12. Moshe Shokeid, *The Dual Heritage: Immigrants from the Atlas Mountains in an Israeli Village* (Manchester, 1971); Harvey E. Goldberg, *Cave Dwellers and Citrus Growers: A Jewish Community in Libya and Israel* (Cambridge, 1972); Shlomo Deshen and Moshe Shokeid, *Yehudei ha-Mizrah: 'Iyunim Anthropologiim 'al he-'Avar ve-ha-Hoveh* [Jews of the Middle East: Anthropological Perspectives on the Past and the Present] (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 1984); Yoram Bilu, "Psychiatria masortit be-Yisrael" [Traditional Psychiatry in Israel], PhD diss., HU, 1979; Yoram Bilu, *Lelo Metzarim: Hayav u-Moto shel Rabbi Yaacov Vazana* [Without Bounds: The Life and Death of Rabbi Yaacov Vazana] (Jerusalem, 1993). At the same time, Issachar Ben-Ami, who initially concentrated on folklore, began to publish studies on saints, which are summarized in his *Ha'aratzat ha-Kdoshim bekerev Yehudei Marocco* [Saint Veneration among the Jews in Morocco] (Jerusalem, 1987).

13. Shlomo Deshen, *Tzibur ve-Yehidim be-Marocco: Sidrei Hevra ba-Kehilot ha-Yehudiyot ba-Meot ha-18–19* (Tel Aviv, 1983), English: *The Mellah Society: Jewish Community Life in Sherifan Morocco* (Chicago, 1989); Harvey E. Goldberg, ed., *Higgid Mordekhai: Korot Luv ve-Yehudeha, Yishuweiheim u-Minhageiheim* [Mordekhai's Word: The History of Libya and Its Jews, Their Colonies and Customs] (Jerusalem, 1979); Harvey E. Goldberg, *Jewish Life in Muslim Libya: Rivals and Relatives* (Chicago and London, 1990).

14. See, for example, the influence of Deshen's approach on a prominent representative of the young generation of sociologists studying the ethnic problem in Hanna Herzog, *'Adatiut Politit, Dimui mul Metziut: Nituah Sotziologi-histori shel ha-Reshimot ha-"Adatiyot" le-Asefat ha-Nivharim ve-la-Knesset (1920–1984)* [Political Ethnicity, the Image and the Reality: Socio-historical Analysis of the "Ethnic" Lists to the Delegates Assembly and the Knesset (1920–1984)] (Tel Aviv, 1986), 20.

15. Sami Smooha, "Minority Status in Ethnic Democracy: The Status of the Arab Minority in Israel," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 13 (1990): 389–413.

16. See especially the various articles in *Megamot*, vols. 28 and 29; the studies of the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies; Cohen and Ahimeir, *Directions*; Herzog, *Political Ethnicity*; and Yaacov Nahon, *Dfusei Hitrahavut ha-Haskala u-Mivne Hizdamnuyyot ha-Ta'asuka: Ha-Meimad ha-'Adati* [Patterns of Educational Expansion and the Structure of Occupational Opportunities: The Ethnic Dimension] (Jerusalem, 1987).

17. For a list of Elmaleh's works, see A. R. Malachi, "Be-sdei ha-yetzira: Pirumei ba'al ha-yovel—bibliography" [In the Field of Creation—Publications of the Honored Author—a Bibliography], in *Minha le-Avraham: Sefer ha-Yovel le-Avraham Elmaleh bi-Mlot Lo Shiv'im Shana* [Homage to Avraham: Jubilee Book in Honor of Avraham Elmaleh on His Seventieth Birthday] (Jerusalem, 1959).

18. For a list of Ben-Zvi's works, see Meir Benayahu, ed., "Pirumei Yitzhak Ben-Zvi she-be-t'hum Eretz Yisrael ve-kehilot ha-Mizrah" [Yitzhak Ben-Zvi's Publications on the Land of Israel and Eastern Jewish Communities], in *Sefer ha-Zikaron le-Yitzhak Ben-Zvi* [Yitzhak Ben-Zvi's Memorial Book] (Jerusalem, 1964); see also Yitzhak Bezalel, "Kitvei Yitzhak Ben-Zvi 'al Yahadut ha-Mizrah: Ha-shlavim, ha-t'humim, ha-me'afyeniim" (Yitzhak Ben-Zvi's Writings on Eastern Jewry: Stages, Fields, Characteristics), *Pe'amim* 25 (1985): 123–45.

19. For a list of Goitein's works, see Robert Attal, *Bibliographya shel Kitvei Prof. Shlomo Dov Goitein* [A Bibliography of the Writings of Prof. Shlomo Dov Goitein] (Jerusalem, 2000). See also Miriam Frenkel, "Ktivat ha-historya shel Yehudei artzot ha-Islam bi-yemei ha-beinayim: Tzionei derekh ve-sikuim" [The Historiography of Jews in Muslim Countries in the Middle Ages: Landmarks and Prospects], *Pe'amim* 92 (summer 2002): 23–61. For Hirschberg's writings, see H. Z. Hirschberg "Kitvei H. Z. Hirschberg za'l: Reshima bibliographit" [Professor H. Z. Hirschberg: A Bibliography], in Eliezer Bashan and Robert Attal, eds., *Bar-Ilan: Annual of Bar-Ilan University Studies in Judaica and the Humanities* 14–15 (1977): xv–xxxiii.

20. In certain spheres, such as the desirable immigration quotas and the criteria for individual immigration, there could have been a wide gulf between the integrationists and the skeptics. In other spheres, the differences could be blurred since exacting national demands, such as population dispersal and productivization, for example, could merge unrecognizably with demands that discriminated against certain groups. The egalitarian, uniform national ethos encouraged the integrationist stance. In practice, however, the skeptics wielded wide influence both in the corridors of power and among the general public. For an analysis of the basic attitudes, see Tsur, "Carnival"; for their influence on attitudes toward Moroccan Jewry, potentially the largest reservoir of Jewish immigrants from the Islamic countries, see Tsur, *Torn Community*, chap. 4.

21. For an analysis of the changes in Goitein's position from a broader perspective, see Frenkel, "Historiography," 51–55.

22. H. Z. Hirschberg, *Mi-Eretz Mevo ha-Shemesh: 'Im Yehudei Africa ha-Tzfonit be-Artzoteihem* [Inside Maghreb: The Jews in North Africa] (Jerusalem, 1957).

23. H. Z. Hirschberg, *Toldot ha-Yehudim be-Africa ha-Tzfonit*, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1965). English: *A History of the Jews in North Africa* (Leiden, 1981).

24. Ruth Firer, "Ha-dimui shel 'adot ha-Mizrah: Sifrei ha-limud le-historia shel 'Am Yisrael" [The Image of Oriental Jews in Jewish History Textbooks in Israel],

*Tyunim BeHinukh* 45 (1986): 23–33; Avner Ben-Amos, “An Impossible Pluralism? European Jews and Oriental Jews in the Israeli History Curriculum,” *History of European Ideas* 18, no. 1 (January 1994): 41–51.

25. Michael Abitbol, “Le-heker ha-Tziyonut ve-ha-’aliya mikerev Yehudei ha-Mizrah: Hebeitim metodiiim” [Research on Zionism and the ‘Aliya of Oriental Jewry: Methodological Aspects], *Pe’amim* 39 (1989): 1.

26. Hayyim Cohen, *Ha-Pe’ilut ha-Tziyonit be-Iraq* [Zionist Activity in Iraq], (Jerusalem, 1969).

27. On the Jerusalem School, see David N. Myers, *Re-inventing the Jewish Past: European Jewish Intellectuals and the Zionist Return to History* (Oxford, 1995); and Jacob Barnai, “Yehudei artzot ha-Islam ba-et ha-hadasha ve-ha-askola ha-Yerushalmit” [The Jews of Muslim Countries in Modern Times and the Jerusalem School of History] *Pe’amim* 92 (summer 2002): 83–115.

28. For a list of their many writings, see Robert Attal, *Yahadut Tzfon Africa: Bibliographya* [The Jews of North Africa: A Bibliography], rev. and enlarged ed. (Jerusalem, 1993).

29. André Chouraqui, *Korot ha-Yehudim bi-Tzfon Africa* [The Story of the Jews in North Africa] (Tel Aviv, 1975).

30. Joseph B. Schechtman, *On Wings of Eagles: The Plight, Exodus, and Homecoming of Oriental Jewry* (New York, 1961).

31. *Ibid.*, 337–98.

32. Raphael Patai, *Israel between East and West: A Study in Human Relations* (Philadelphia, 1953).

33. Hayyim Cohen, *Ha-Yehudim be-Artzot ha-Mizrah ha-Tikhon be-Yameinu* [The Jews in the Lands of the Middle East in Our Times] (Tel Aviv, 1973).

34. On the history of the Ben-Zvi Institute, see Shimon Rubinstein, “‘Al yisudo ve-reishito shel ha-makhon le-heker kehilot Yisrael ba-Mizrah” [On the Founding and Start of the Research Institute on Eastern Jewish Communities], *Pe’amim* 23 (1985): 127–44.

35. The history of the institute and its cumulative influence on the field’s development during its incubation period are noteworthy. Hirschberg was connected with it for a number of years, as was the prolific Meir Benayahu. Its international reputation and standing were greatly enhanced by its first librarian, Robert Attal, who painstakingly compiled bibliographic and documentary material that had been waiting to be discovered. In the early 1970s, he published the first volume of his bibliographic work on North African Jewry, *Yahadut Tzfon Africa*.

36. The initiative to establish the center preceded the political change and perhaps presaged the shift in the ethnic balance. See the 1976 decisive Knesset deliberations on the subject described in Barnai, “Jews,” 85–87.

37. Shmuel Ettinger, ed., *Toldot ha-Yehudim be-Artzot ha-Islam* [History of the Jews in the Islamic Countries], 3 vols. (Jerusalem, 1981–86). Shalom Bar-Asher and Michael Abitbol were responsible for the chapters on North Africa (including Egypt), Yaacov Barnai for the Ottoman Empire, and Yosef Tobi for Asia.

38. For other analyses of this basic text, whether concurring or differing, see Gabriel Piterberg, “Ha-uma u-mesapreiha: Historiographya le’umit ve-orientalism” [The Nation and Its Narrators: Orientalism and National Historiography] *TuV* 6 (1995): 99–101; and Barnai, “Jews,” 89–90.



39. Ettinger, *History*, vol. 1: *Ha-'Et ha-Hadasha: 'Ad Emtz'a ha-Me'ah ha-Tesha-'Esrei* [Modern Times: To the Middle of the Nineteenth Century], ix.

40. In the covert and overt historiographic controversy over the status of Jews in Islamic countries, the admission of such a possibility is obvious ammunition in the hands of Zionism's Arab foes. Indeed, as I learned from Barnai's article, this message made so great an impression on the Arab translators of the second volume of Ettinger's historiographic project (Kuwait 1995) that other, less pleasant aspects of Arabs were obscured. In any case, this point especially was elaborated in the introduction to the Arabic edition of the Jerusalem School's endeavor. See Barnai, "Jews," 91–92.

41. Ettinger, *History*, 1: x.

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Ibid.*, xi.

44. *Ibid.*: "A key aspect of each of the sections is the internal Jewish organization, both as an intermediary between the rulers and the Jews on matters of taxation and representation and as an authoritative body that steered and organized all the evident arrangements of Jewish society—synagogues, rabbinical courts, internal discipline, education, charity, liaison with other communities within and without the state, and support for the Jewish community in the land of Israel. Special discussion has been devoted to Jewry's spiritual streams, to Jewish thought and thinkers—Torah scholars, rabbis, and sages—as well as to the influence of Kabbalah and Sabbateanism. This parallel discussion highlights both the common and the unique in the histories of each of the communities," (ix). Ettinger related to other topics as well: "The authors [will describe] the state framework in which Jewish communities lived and acted, the legal status of the Jews, and their economic activity." It is, however, instructive to see how much space he allotted in his preface to internal topics of national significance as opposed to the question of integration within the general environment. I did not compare the degree of correspondence between the substance of the preface and the actual chapters.

45. Ettinger, *History*, vol. 2: *Mi-Emtz'a ha-Me'ah ha-Tesha-'Esrei 'ad Emtz'a ha-Me'ah ha-'Esrin* [From the Middle of the Nineteenth to the Middle of the Twentieth Century], 7

46. *Ibid.*, 8–9.

47. *Ibid.*, 9.

48. *Ibid.*: "The Jewish-Arab [conflict], which stemmed from Zionist political activity and the movement's reliance on support from Britain and the Western powers, only accentuated a trend whose seeds had been sown long before the emergence of political Zionism and before its aspirations became plain to Muslim Arab public opinion."

49. *Ibid.*, 9–10.

50. *Ibid.*, 10.

51. *Ibid.*, 9–11.

52. *Ibid.*, 10.

53. *Ibid.*, 10–11: "In none of the Eastern communities did traditional frameworks fully endure. The abandonment of tradition, along with secularization, more or less left their mark on almost every single one. Their religious creativity lost more and more of its importance and, in some instances, was reduced to keeping various pop-

ular customs, including such that were rooted not in Judaism but in Muslim folk traditions. Most of the Jewish communities in the East, even prior to the establishment of the State of Israel, had already faced the very severe problems of change and adaptation to a new order. New forms of social and religious arrangements had not yet developed, and most had been influenced by streams and organizations active among European Jewry. Only in the State of Israel did sociocultural patterns begin to form whereby Jews from Islamic countries could preserve and restore part of their sociocultural heritage.”

54. On this, see Barnai’s personal testimony in “Jews,” 90–91.

55. This held true for my own treatment several years earlier of the Jews of Islam in the premodern period in part 1 of an introductory course in modern Jewish history at the Open University: Yaron Tsur, *Yehudim be-‘Eidan shel Tmurot* [Jews in Times of Change] (Tel Aviv, 1978), units 1–4. Ettinger lent the course his overall patronage and put me in touch with members of the Hebrew University’s Jewish History Department—Israel Bartal, Yosef Tobi, and Menahem Ben-Sasson—who were a great help to me in writing the course. Nevertheless, the basic unease at the state of Israeli historiography on Jews of Islamic countries is evident in part 2 of the course, which deals with the modern period. I chose not to teach it using existing historical books but rather through literature, namely, Albert Memmi’s *La statue de sel* (The Salt Statue), which was free of the Zionist metanarrative (unit 11). The choice, however, was not motivated by conscious ideology. I fell upon Memmi’s book as if I had found a treasure because its wealth of detail and events compensated for the historiographical dearth and portrayed a vital, deeply interesting world of the type available to readers interested in the history of European Jews at the time. For more on this choice, see Yaron Tsur, “Le rôle de *La statue de sel* dans l’historiographie sur les juifs des pays musulmans” [The Role of *The Salt Statue* in the Historiography of Jews in Islam Lands], in *La Culture francophone en Israël* [Francophone Culture in Israel], ed. David Mendelson (Paris, 2002), 119–32.

56. A fine example is Benjamin Cohen’s *Malkhei Tarshish: Toldot Rabbanei Tunisia ve-Hibureihem me-Yemei ha-Talmud ‘ad Yameinu* [Kings of Tarsus: The History of the Tunisian Rabbis and Their Essays from Talmudic Times to the Present] (Netivot, 1986).

57. The affair’s unfolding is depicted by one of the activists in Nahum Menahem, *Metahim ve-Aflaya ‘Adatit be-Yisrael (He‘arot Sotziohistoryot)* [Ethnic Tensions and Discrimination in Israel (Sociohistorical annotations)] (Haifa, 1983), 123–33. I owe a debt of thanks for information on the episode to Vicki Shiran, who was also a key actor in the affair. In any case, the brief account given here still awaits proper study.

58. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1978).

59. The potential for such contradictory developments relates not only to Jews but to other scattered populations, whose different wings are subdivided hierarchically and who may exploit the oppressive cultural tools created by the modern West. On the Muslims, for example, see Ussama Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” *American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (June 2002): 768–96; at the start of the article, there are references to further literature on the subject.

60. Ella Shohat, “Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims,” *Social Text* 19/20 (fall 1988); Ella Shohat, *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation* (Austin, 1989); Piterberg, “Nation and Narrators”; Amnon

Raz-Krakotzkin, "Orientalism, mada'ei ha-Yahadut ve-ha-hevra ha-Yisre'elit: Mispar he'arot" [A Few Comments on Orientalism, Jewish Studies, and Israeli Society], *Jama'a* 3 (1999).

61. Indeed, Bhabha, who attacks Said's binary approach, was featured prominently in the Israeli journal supportive of this current, which is published by the Van Leer Institute, *Theory and Criticism* (TuV). See Homi Bhabha, "She'eilat ha-aher: Hevdeil, aflaya ve-siah post-colonial" [The "Other" Question: Difference, Discrimination, and Postcolonial Discourse], TuV 5 (autumn 1994): 144–57; and Hanan Hever and Adi Ophir, "Homi Bhabha: Teorya 'al hevel dak" [Homi Bhabha: Theory between the Lines], in the same issue (141–43). The institute group studying Mizrahim, which recently published its findings, seems to show a clear preference for his theories. See Hever et al., eds., *Mizrahim be-Yisrael: 'Iyun Bikorti Mehudash* [Mizrahim in Israel: A Critical Observation into Israel's Ethnicity] (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 2002), 10.

62. See most of the various articles in Hever et al., *Mizrahim*. See also the essays that touch on this question in the special TuV issue published in honor of Israel's fiftieth anniversary: Adi Ophir, ed., *Hamishim le-Arba'im u-Shmoneh: Momentim Bikortim be-Toldot Medinat Yisrael* [Fifty since '48: Critical Moments in the History of the State of Israel] TuV (summer 1999). See also Henriette Dahan-Kalev, "Adatiyut be-Yisrael: Nekudat mabat post-modernit" [Mizrahim in Israel: A Postmodern Point of View], in *Moderniyut, Post-Moderniyut, ve-Hinukh* [Modernity, Postmodernity, and Education], ed. Ilan Gur-Arieh (Tel Aviv, 1999); Ella Shohat, "Rupture and Return: The Shaping of a Mizrahi Epistemology," *Hagar* 2, no. 1 (2001): 61–92. It might not be valid to include Shohat in a discussion of Israeli researchers, however, as she has been teaching in the United States for years.

63. Raz-Krakotzkin, "Orientalism."

64. See, for example, *Pe'amim* 27–29 (1986), which was devoted to the topic; Michael Abitbol, *Yehudei Tzfon Africa be-Milhemet ha-'Olam ha-Shniya* [The Jews of North Africa during World War II] (Jerusalem, 1986); Michael M. Laskier, *Yehudei ha-Maghreb be-Tzel Vichy ve-Tzlav ha-Keres* [Maghreb Jewry in the Shadow of Vichy and the Swastika] (Tel Aviv, 1992); Irit Abramski-Bligh, ed., *Pinkas ha-Kehilot, Luv-Tunisia: Entzyclopedia shel ha-Yishuvim ha-Yehudim lemin Hivasdam ve'ad le'ahar Sho'at Milhemet ha-Olam ha-Shniya* [Community Records, Libya-Tunisia: Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities from Their Foundation to after the Holocaust] (Jerusalem, 1997).

65. Gat Moshe, *Kehila Yehudit be-Mashber: Yetziyat Iraq, 1948–1951* [Jewish Community in Crisis: The Exodus from Iraq, 1948–1951] (Jerusalem, 1989). See also Dafna Zimhoni, "Memshelet Iraq ve-ha-'aliya ha-gdola shel ha-Yehudim le-Yisrael" [The Government of Iraq and the Mass Aliya of Jews to Israel], *Pe'amim* 29 (1989): 64–102; Dafna Zimhoni, "Madu'a 'alu rov Yehudei Iraq le-Yisrael be-mivtza Ezra u-Nehemia" [Why the Majority of the Jews of Iraq Immigrated to Israel in Operation Ezra and Nehemia] *IbTY* (1991): 379–404; Esther Meir, *Ha-Tnu'a ha-Tziyonit vi-Yehudei Iraq* [Zionism and the Jews of Iraq, 1941–1950] (Tel Aviv, 1993); Esther Meir, "From Eastern Europe to the Middle East: The Reversal in Zionist Policy vis-à-vis the Jews of Islamic Countries," *JIH* 20, no. 1 (spring 2001): 24–48; Avi Picard, "Reishita shel ha-'aliya ha-selektivit bi-shnot ha-hamishim" [The Beginning of the Selective Immigration in the 1950s], *IbTY* 9 (1999): 338–94; Tsur, *Torn Community*.

66. Tsur, "Reflections," 223, including the references there to studies by Joseph Chetrit, who played a major role in unearthing this layer. See especially his "Moderniyut le'umit 'Ivrit mul moderniyut Tzarfatit: Ha-Haskalah ha-'Ivrit bi-Zfon Africa ba-me'ah ha-tsha-'esrei" [Hebrew National Modernity versus French Modernity: The Hebrew *Haskalah* in North Africa at the End of the Nineteenth Century] *MiKedem U'MiYam* 3 (1990): 11–66; and works by others, for example, Yosef Tobi, one of the more energetic scholars of the generation, who devoted many studies to the history of his own community of origin, Yemen. For a comprehensive list of his works, see Yehudah Amir ed., *Kitvei Prof. Yosef Tobi: Reshima Bibliographit* [The Works of Prof. Yosef Tobi: Bibliography] (Jerusalem, 2002). In recent years Tobi has extended his interests to other communities, primarily that of Tunisia. In his contribution to the documentation of Yemenite Jewry, Tobi continues the pioneering work of his predecessor, Yehuda Ratzabi.

67. See Tom Segev, 1949: *The First Israelis* (New York, 1986); Dvora Hacohen, 'Olim be-Se'ara: ha-'Aliya ha-Gdola ve-Klitata be-Yisrael, 1948–1953 [Immigrants in Turmoil: The Great Wave of Immigration to Israel and Its Absorption, 1948–1953] (Jerusalem, 1994); Dvora Hacohen, *Ha-Gar'in ve-ha-Reiha'im: Hityashvut ha-'Olim ba-Negev ba-'Assor ha-Rishon la-Medina* [The Grain and the Millstone: The Settlement of Immigrants in the Negev in the First Decade of the State] (Tel Aviv 2000); Zvi Zameret, 'Ale'i Geshet Tzar: Ha-Hinukh be-Yisrael bi-Shnot ha-Medina ha-Rishonot [Across a Narrow Bridge: Shaping the Education System during the Great Aliya] (Sede Boqer, 1997); Picard, "Selective Immigration"; Meir, *Zionist Movement*; Esther Meir, "'Olei Iraq ve-ha-mimsad ha-Yisre'eli be-reishit shnot ha-hamishim: Ha-maavak le-hityashvut" [The Encounter between Iraqi Immigrants and the Israeli Establishment in the Early 1950s], in *Idan ha-Tziyonut* [The Age of Zionism], ed. Anita Shapira, Jehuda Reinharz, and Jay Harris (Jerusalem, 2002); and Tsur, *Torn Community*.

68. This can be seen also in the works of scholars who do not question the basic assumptions of classic Zionist historiography but have done serious work in uncovering the historical facts. See, for example, Shmuel Moreh and Zvi Yehuda, *Sinat Yehudim u-Fra'ot be-Iraq* [Anti-Semitism and Rampages in Iraq] (Or Yehuda, 1992); Michael M. Laskier, *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century* (New York and London, 1994); Michael M. Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt, 1920–1970* (New York and London, 1992); and Haim Saadon, "'Ha-markiv ha-Falastini' be-hitpartzuyot alimot bein Yehudim le-Muslemim be-artzot ha-Islam" [The Palestinian Element in Violent Eruptions between Jews and Muslims in Muslim Countries], *Pe'amim* 63 (spring 1995): 86–131.

69. As mentioned earlier, the recent history of Mizrahim in the Yishuv and the state attracts even fewer historians than do the previous periods of their history. The number of scholars devoting full or even partial energy to the field is thus highly curtailed. The field is also plagued by a "visitors" syndrome—newcomers enter only to depart again for the more distant past. In any case, historians in the field often unveil facts about economic discrimination and generally corroborate the Mizrahi claim of unfair treatment. On this subject, pioneering work was done by researchers of the Yemenites in the Yishuv period. See Nitza Druyan, *Be-Ein Marvad Ksamim: Ha-Hityashvut ha-Teimanit be-Eretz Yisrael, 5642–5674* [Without a Magic Carpet: Yemenite Settlement in Eretz Israel, 1882–1914] (Jerusalem, 1981); Yosef Meir, *Ha-Tnu'a ha-Tziyonit ve-Yehudei Teiman (Shlithuto shel Yavne'eli be-Or Hadash)* [The Zion-

ist Movement and Yemenite Jewry (Yavne'eli's Mission in a New Light)] (Tel Aviv, 1983); and Gershon Shafir, *Land, Labor, and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882–1914* (Cambridge, 1989). Recently they have been joined by scholars of immigrations from Iraq and Morocco.

70. Tsur, *Torn Community*.

71. See especially Esther Meir's rich, detailed studies, which reveal the complex history of Iraqi immigrants in the young State of Israel. Her findings and analyses furnish the historiographical layer missing in previous works in the field. See also Tikva Darvish, *Yehudei Iraq ba-Kalkala terem 'Aliyatam le-Yisrael ve-Ahareha* [The Jews in the Economy of Iraq before and after Their Immigration to Israel] (Ramat Gan, 1987); and Tova Bensky et al., *Yehudei Iraq be-Yisrael: Ba-Hevra u-va-Kalkala* [Iraqi Jews in Israel: Social and Economic Integration] (Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 1991).

72. Moshe Lissak, *Ha-'Aliya ha-Gdola bi-Shnot ha-Hamishim: Kishlono shel Kur ha-Hitukh* [The Mass Immigration of the 1950s: The Failure of the Melting Pot Policy] (Jerusalem, 1999).

73. Interestingly, an important role in measuring these processes and persuading scholars of their truth and significance was played by a team under Eisenstadt in which Yaacov Nahon had a key part. See his publication by the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, *Patterns*. Eisenstadt and his students partially revised their theories over the years. See, for example, Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt, *Ha-Hevra ha-Yisre'elit: Rek'a, Hitpathut, u-Ve'ayot* [Israeli Society: Background, Development, and Problems] (Jerusalem, 1967); and Dan Horowitz and Moshe Lissak, *Metzuket be-Utopia: Yisrael, Hevra be-'Omess Yeter* (Tel Aviv, 1990), English: *Trouble in Utopia: The Overburdened Polity of Israel* (Albany, 1989). Culturalist scholars, not only at Hebrew University, also continued to contribute to the field. See, for example, Eliezer Ben-Raphael, *Language, Identity, and Social Division: The Case of Israel* (Oxford, 1994). Swirski, who was ousted from academe, pursued his research and follow-ups of the indices of social hardship and rifts, lately as head of the Adva Institute. Sami Smootha turned most of his attention to other minorities in Israeli society, particularly the Arabs.

74. For the results of the initial discussion of this question, see, for example, the various articles in Y. Peled, ed., *Shas: Etgar ha-Yisre'eliyut* [Shas: The Challenge of Israeliness] (Tel Aviv, 2001.)

75. Yehuda Nini, *He-Hayit o Halamti Halom: Teimanei Kinneret, Parashat Hityashvutam ve-'Akiratam, 1912–1930* [Kinneret's Yemenites: Their Settlement and Removal from the Land, 1912–1930] (Tel Aviv, 1996).

76. Yehuda Nini, "Ba-derekh mi-Teiman le-Tzion, 5641–5642" [The Road from Yemen to Zion, 1881–1882], *Pe'amim* 10 (1982): 5–20, sharply (and justifiably on the facts alone) attacks Yosef Meir, whose basic stance he adopted years later. Yosef Meir, who immigrated from Iraq, had a complete change of heart from an innocent faith in Zionsim to keen criticism of the attitude of the hegemonic Ashkenazi Zionist elite toward the Jews from Islamic countries. His first book on the subject dealt with Yemenite immigration to Palestine during the second Aliya period at the initiative of the Zionist movement (Meir, *Zionist Movement*). Meir was a critical, peripheral intellectual outside of academe, whose contribution and research have not been duly recognized. See especially his *Hitpathut Hevratit-Tarbutit shel Yehudei Iraq mei 'az 1830 ve'ad Yameinu* [Sociocultural Development of Iraqi Jewry since 1830] (Tel Aviv, 1989). He urged that a distinction be made between the typical modern histories of

Jews in Islamic lands and of European Jewry at the very start of the period of crisis in the late 1970s and early 1980s. His precursors were such personalities as Eliahu Elyashar, chiefly a fascinating political figure. Space does not permit further elaboration, but suffice it to say that such intellectuals quite naturally formed special ties with adherents of the neo-Marxist school, the school most critical of the Ashkenazi establishment, although in overall ideology they were not necessarily of one mind.

77. For a relatively updated anthology on this current, see Uri Ram, ed., *Ha-Hevra ha-Yisre'elit: Hebeitim Bikortiim* [Israeli Society: Critical Perspectives] (Tel Aviv, 1993); and Hever et al., *Mizrahim*, 299.

78. Meir-Glitzstein, "From Eastern Europe," 24–48; Bat-Zion Iraqi-Klorman, "Hityashvut po'alim Teimaniim ve-Ashkenaziim: Mi-Rishon LeZion le-Nahalat Yehuda u-ve-hazara" [Settlement of Yemenite and Ashkenazi Workers: From Rishon LeZion to Nahalat Yehuda and Back], *Cathedra* 84 (1997): 85–106.

79. Tsur, "Carnival."

80. Daniel J. Schroeter, "Orientalism and the Jews of the Mediterranean," *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, 4, no. 2 (1994): 183–96; Tsur, *Jews among Moslems*, units 5–6, "Parashat Damesek be-Mabat mi-Mizrah" [A Look from the East at the Damascus Affair], 119–46.

81. Tsur, "Reformers," 80–87, 148, 168–99. See also pages 142–49 and note 59. For a different, postcolonial binary model of explanation, see 'Aziza Khazzoom, "Tarbut Maaravit, Tiyug Etni Ve-Sgirut Hevratit-Ha-Reka Le-i-Hashivyon Ha-Etni be-Yisrael" [Western Culture, Stigma, and Social Closure: The Origins of Ethnic Inequality among Jews in Israel]. *Israeli Sociology* 1, no. 2 (spring 1999): 385–428.

82. The influence of the specific national environment, as well as the repercussions of the Holocaust on this long-term Jewish problem, are discussed at length in my book on Moroccan Jewry, *Torn Community*.

83. Oren Yiftachel suggests "ethnocracy" as an alternative to Smooha's interpretation of Israel as an ethnic democracy: Oren Yiftachel, "'Ethnocratia,' geographya, ve-demokratia: He-'arot 'al ha-politika shel Yehud ha-aretz ["Ethnocracy," Geography, and Democracy: Observations on the Politics of Judaizing the Land], *Alpayim* 19 (2000): 78–105.

84. See Yehuda Shenhav, "Yehudim yotzei artzot 'Arav be-Yisrael: Ha-zehut ha-mefutzelet shel Mizrahim ba-mehozot ha-zikaron ha-le'umi" [Jews from Arab Lands in Israel: The Split Personality of Mizrahim in the Recesses of National Memory], in Hever et al., *Mizrahim*, 148.

*Yechiam Weitz*

## **Dialectical versus Unequivocal** Israeli Historiography's Treatment of the Yishuv and Zionist Movement Attitudes toward the Holocaust

In November 1994, I helped organize a conference called "Vision and Revision." Its subject was to be "One Hundred Years of Zionist Historiography,"<sup>1</sup> but in fact it focused on the stormy debate between Zionists and post-Zionists or Old and New Historians, a theme that pervaded Israel's public and academic discourse at the time. The discussion revolved around a number of topics and issues, such as the birth of the Arab refugee question in the War of Independence and matters concerning the war itself.

Another key element of the controversy involved the attitude of the Yishuv (the Jewish community in prestate Israel) and the Zionist movement toward the Holocaust. There were several parts to the question: what was the goal of the Yishuv and the Zionist leadership—to save the Jews who were perishing in smoldering Europe or to save Zionism? What was more important to Zionism—to add a new cowshed at Kibbutz 'Ein Harod and purchase another dunam of land in the Negev or Galilee or the desperate attempt to douse the European inferno with a cup of water? What, in those bleak times, motivated the head of the organized Yishuv, David Ben-Gurion: "Palestinocentrism," and perhaps even loathing for diaspora Jewry, or the agonizing considerations of a leader in a period of crisis unprecedented in human history?

These questions were not confined to World War II and the destruction of European Jewry (1939–45) but extended back to the 1930s and forward to the postwar years. Historians now scrutinized the dilemmas with which the Zionist leadership had grappled in the 1930s such as the Zionist position on the "territorial question" posed by the Evian Conference: How should Zionism have responded to the possibility of Jewish immigration to the Dominican Republic rather than Palestine? Or there was the question of "selective *aliya*" at the Nineteenth Zionist Congress in 1935: had the focus been on the plight of German Jewry or on the Yishuv's development in the Land of Israel? This discussion sprang

up in the context of the attitude of German Zionists and the German HeHalutz movement after 1933: had they shown equal consideration for German Jewry as a whole or had the fate of the non-Zionist German Jews left them cold? The publication of Daniel Frankel's doctoral thesis, which dealt with Zionist policy on German Jewry in the early period of the Third Reich, provoked fierce debate on the question.<sup>2</sup>

As regards the postwar years, the scholars focused on such questions as the immigration of uprooted Jews, particularly those in Germany's displaced persons camps, to the Land of Israel: had they genuinely desired to move to Palestine or was this a consequence of Zionist manipulation? How had Israel's leadership related to Holocaust survivors immigrating to the country during the War of Independence: had they viewed them as cannon fodder?

One dramatic, highly charged disagreement, for example, was sparked by the issue of the battle for Latrun, an episode that has largely come to symbolize the condescending, instrumentalist approach of this leadership, especially that of its first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, to Holocaust survivors who participated in the war.<sup>3</sup>

These issues and disputes surfaced in the early 1990s as a clear consequence of the upsurge in historical research on the subject. The first signs of scholarly interest had emerged in the 1970s with the publication of a handful of studies, mostly master's theses. It was in the next decade, however, that the subject became a key research topic, with numerous studies written and published on various aspects of the Yishuv's attitude toward the Holocaust.

The seminal study was Dina Porat's *An Entangled Leadership: The Yishuv and the Holocaust, 1942–1945*,<sup>4</sup> a reworked and expanded version of her Tel Aviv University doctoral thesis under the supervision of Daniel Carpi. The book caused a stir in the media, and some of the reviews were to figure in the polemic that erupted in the 1990s. An extensive essay in *HaAretz's* high-exposure, Rosh HaShana issue in 1986 examined the difference of opinion between Dina Porat and a fellow historian, Yigal Elam.<sup>5</sup> Porat stressed a crucial point: the Yishuv's weakness and consequent sense of overriding helplessness. The Yishuv's conduct and the position of its leadership, she said, "were to be understood" against the vast disparity between German might and the meager resources of a community beleaguered also by the British; this disparity engendered not only feelings of helplessness but, indeed, of despair.

Elam argued that the attitude toward the Holocaust had been "a Zionist fiasco ensuing directly from the 'Palestinocentric' conception,



which even the full-blown extermination in 1943 did not dent.” To demonstrate his point, he quoted a prominent Zionist leader, Yizhak Gruenbaum, who had served as chairman of the Yishuv’s United Rescue Committee, a body concerned with saving Europe’s Jews in World War II: “Zionism comes first. . . . Zionism [means] the precedence of the war of redemption over all other wars [i.e., the interests of Zionism take precedence over everything else].”<sup>6</sup>

The crucial difference between Porat and Elam lay in their perceptions of the Yishuv during the Holocaust. Porat painted a picture of a small Yishuv with scant resources and ties, bewildered and filled with trepidation at the horrific reports emanating from conquered Europe. Elam depicted a totally different image, that of an imperious Yishuv sure in its knowledge of its goal: to defend the interests of Zionism—its own interests in effect.

Toward the end of the 1980s and in the early 1990s, a number of books on the subject appeared, based on PhD theses. These included works by Hava Eshkoli, Dalia Ofer, and myself. Further books—by Tuvia Friling, Raya Cohen, and Shaul Webber—appeared in the latter half of the 1990s.<sup>7</sup> They dealt with major topics, such as the attitude to the Holocaust of key players in the Yishuv—the Jewish Agency leadership and governing Mapai Party and the pioneering youth movements (the “cream of the Yishuv”)—as well as with the place occupied by illegal immigration (*Ha’apala* or *‘Aliya Bet*) in Zionist policy at the time.

In addition to these works, dozens of articles were published in this period, shedding light on a range of subtopics related to these disturbing questions: the return of the Zionist emissaries from Europe in the first year of the war, the attitude of the religious Zionists toward the Holocaust, the Revisionist Movement’s criticism of the Yishuv leadership during the Holocaust, the internal Yishuv disagreements over the absorption of the Teheran Children (refugee children who were brought to Palestine via Teheran in 1943), and so on.<sup>8</sup>

Another significant topic for scholars then—and since—concerns Ben-Gurion’s attitude toward the destruction of European Jewry. In 1987, the third volume of Shabtai Teveth’s biography of Ben-Gurion was published.<sup>9</sup> Entitled *HaKarka HaBo’er* (The Burning Ground), it focused on the years 1931–43, from the Seventeenth Zionist Congress and the start of the Mapai-revisionist battle for hegemony over the Zionist movement until well into the Holocaust. A substantial part of the book deals with the persecution of European Jewry in the 1930s and its extermination in the 1940s.

In his introduction,<sup>10</sup> Teveth remarks on the title's aptness given the deteriorating situation of Europe's Jews. Since January 1934 and his pronouncement that Hitler's government posed a grave danger to the very existence of European Jewry, Ben-Gurion had been aware that time was running out for the Zionist movement. "Ben-Gurion's increasing sense that the ground was on fire became a decisive factor in his policy," Teveth wrote. The author's assertion in the closing chapter that "in disaster lies strength,"<sup>11</sup> remains a bone of contention to this day. Teveth explained:

Thus, as early as October 1941, the pre-Holocaust perception of the dimensions of extermination was, in Ben-Gurion's eyes, a source of strength and momentum, and a powerful catalyst for the realization of Zionism. He had certainly not desired [the Holocaust], but as it was not within his power to prevent it, he wished at least to wrest from it such advantages as would enable him to solve the Jewish problem once and for all.<sup>12</sup>

In the polemics surrounding Ben-Gurion's attitude toward the harrowing situation, the charge was made that this statement embodies the Zionist leadership's cynical, instrumental approach to the Holocaust— notwithstanding Teveth's intention to praise rather than condemn.

In the mid-1990s, Teveth devoted an entire book to the subject, and two other scholars—Dina Porat and myself—wrote about it.<sup>13</sup> Tuvia Friling also published a number of essays on Ben-Gurion and the Holocaust, as well as a book based on his doctoral thesis.<sup>14</sup>

The wide-ranging research created a solid foundation for the controversy that followed and, indeed, was essential to its development. The polemic was further stoked by the publication of *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* by the journalist and historian Tom Segev in 1991.<sup>15</sup> Based on the studies produced during the previous years, a combination of factors made it a sensational success and a source of considerable controversy.

First, it is *the* comprehensive work on the attitude of Israelis toward the Holocaust. Earlier essays and books had examined various facets of the subject; this was the first and only work to consider it as a whole from the Yishuv's attitude to the "yekkes" (immigrants from Central Europe in the 1930s) to Israel's major "Holocaust trials" (the Kastner and Eichmann trials in the 1950s and early 1960s) and the shaping of Israel's collective memory in the 1980s.

Second, Tom Segev is a senior, well-known journalist, he was the editor of the weekly *Koteret Rashit* (Headline), and has a weekly column in *HaAretz*. The book is written in a clear, flowing, engrossing, and provocative style, and the author's extensive media connections helped assure it widespread attention.

Third, it was translated into a number of major European languages (English, French, and German among them), becoming, so to speak, Israeli historiography's "visiting card" on the subject in the international arena.

And, fourth, its tone—pointed, scathing, and emphatic—angered and even enraged the community of Israeli historians. The ensuing friction between Segev and several senior historians, such as Yehuda Bauer, whetted the public's interest in the controversy and the book alike. Tuvia Friling's censure, for example, of both the author and the work,<sup>16</sup> concluded with a warning about the book's inherent dangers: it could well become the spearhead in the battle against Zionism, Friling claimed, for it essentially mounted "a campaign to dehumanize and delegitimize Zionism."<sup>17</sup>

It would be no exaggeration to say that, until the mid-1980s the subject was almost virgin ground, whereas today it is a well-researched field, covering numerous related topics. Only a few academic papers, all of them master's theses, were written in the 1970s: a study on the operations of the delegation of the Jewish Agency in Istanbul by Dalia Ofer, Arie Morgenstern's examination of the United Rescue Committee, and Hava Eshkoli's inquiry into the Yishuv leadership's attempts to save European Jewry.<sup>18</sup>

Eshkoli's study was the basis for her doctoral thesis, written in the 1980s and illustrative of that decade's dissertations: they were the harbingers of a spring that bloomed some years later. At the end of the 1970s and the start of the 1980s, it was possible to charge the academic and political establishments with a "conspiracy of silence"; they appeared to be interested in sweeping provocative questions and grave accusations under the carpet.<sup>19</sup> By the end of the 1980s, however, this was no longer true.

What caused the upsurge in this field of study? Dina Porat addressed the main reasons in an essay published in 1990.<sup>20</sup> Underlying all else, as Porat saw it, was a changing of the guard. The new generation of historians "born during or after the [Second World] War" were "unfettered by the dual burden that had weighed heavily on previous research into the subject"; the "sense of responsibility, memory and helplessness, and constant self-justification of those who had lived in Palestine at the time of

the Holocaust; and the “fervor of party ideology that had characterized the Yishuv and early statehood.” The new generation of historians, according to Porat, had managed to “separate their scientific research from their political leanings.”<sup>21</sup> Another cause closely bound up with the question of generations was the trial of Adolf Eichmann. At the time of the trial, the oldest among the new generation had been at a decisive stage in the consolidation of adult identity, and the proceedings had exerted a powerful influence on them. In Porat’s words: “Most of them acknowledge that the Eichmann trial, held here when they were completing high school or beginning their military service—i.e., the onset of adulthood and the formation of their convictions—is what had lent the whole subject of the Holocaust its initial push and pull.”<sup>22</sup>

This trend was further reinforced by the opening of the archives. The 1980s allowed access to documentation previously inaccessible such as, for example, the minutes of the Jewish Agency Executive—the Yishuv government—at the Central Zionist Archives.

Yet another reason lay in the changing currents of historical research that focused on the history of Zionism and the Yishuv.<sup>23</sup> The 1960s had seen the emergence of a scholarly-academic current in Yishuv historiography. A number of doctoral dissertations were approved, such as Yehuda Bauer’s in 1963,<sup>24</sup> and “academia’s ingress into the history of Zionism diversified research methods and sources and established a new apparatus and praxis. It strengthened the connection with social science disciplines . . . and international (chiefly western) trends . . . then prevalent in the development of historical research.”<sup>25</sup> Impressive strides were made in research after the Six Day War and in the 1970s: “In this period, a variety of sources became available to researchers, filling in gaps in the ideological, diplomatic and internal-political picture.” One prominent and significant development in this connection was the foray of researchers into “two important topics that had been ‘taboo,’ so to speak, in the 1950s and 1960s: Zionism’s attitude toward the plight of European Jewry on the eve of, during, and after the Holocaust and its relations with the Arab world.”<sup>26</sup> The first signs of this trend emerged in the early 1970s.

Previously, the question of the Yishuv’s attitude toward the Holocaust had been dealt with in one of two ways. Either it had been utterly ignored—Yehuda Bauer’s first book devoted only one paragraph to it—or the research adopted the national, heroic arguments of Zionist propaganda, as illustrated in the lecture delivered by historian Yehuda Slutski at Yad VaShem’s first international conference during Passover of 1968.<sup>27</sup> Slutski, the editor of *Sefer Toldot HaHaganah* (The History of the Ha-

ganah, 1968), presented the official positions of the Zionist establishment devoid of all critical perspective.<sup>28</sup> Thus, for example, he noted unequivocally that had a Jewish State been in existence, even only in part of Palestine, when World War II broke out, the position of the Jewish People during the war would have been completely different. The Haganah would immediately have become the Israel Defense Forces, and the instrument by which many tens of thousands of young Jews from all over the world would have been mobilized to fight the Nazis under a Jewish banner. The Jewish refugees would have benefited from the Law of Return and would have found sanctuary in Israel, and even abroad—as citizens of a sovereign state. It is possible that the Nazis, too, would have changed the tempo of extermination.<sup>29</sup>

In other words, the course of the Holocaust would have been significantly changed. In the same lecture, Slutzki referred to the Yishuv parachutists dropped behind the lines in German-occupied Europe. The value of the action, he said, had been more symbolic than real; the parachutists had largely saved Jewish honor “in the flame of their self-sacrifice, which momentarily lit up the darkness of those days.” Since then, a substantial number of essays have described the episode of the parachutists in more complex terms.<sup>30</sup>

The time factor in Israeli historical research has also played a part in the growing attention accorded the subject. In the 1960s and 1970s, Israeli history concentrated primarily on the period before World War II, from the early immigration waves (the first and second Aliyot) up to the Fifth Aliya and the Arab Revolt of 1936–39. This is borne out by the essays featured on a major podium of Zionist research: *Studies in the History of the Zionist Movement and the Jewish Hatziyonut Yishuv in the Land of Israel*,<sup>31</sup> an annual publication put out by the Chaim Weizmann Centre at Tel Aviv University.<sup>32</sup> The first volume appeared in 1970, followed, over the decade, by five more (the sixth came out in 1981). The entire collection comprised some fifty essays, very few of which dealt with the 1940s. The first three volumes had no article on this decade, the fourth had two (out of nine), the fifth had one (out of eight), and the sixth had two (out of seven). None of them, however, discussed the Yishuv attitude toward the Holocaust.

A different picture emerged during the 1980s. Nine volumes appeared, the majority of the essays dealing with the 1940s and 1950s. In volume 13, published in 1988, seven out of thirteen articles dealt with these two decades.<sup>33</sup> In volume 14, published in 1989, the trend was even more pronounced, with twelve out of thirteen entries describing events

of the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>34</sup> The research into the Yishuv's attitude toward the Holocaust thus did not derive from extraneous impulses, such as ideology or politics, but was intrinsic to the focus of Israeli historical research on Zionism and the Land of Israel.<sup>35</sup> A succession of studies on Holocaust-related topics dealt with the attitude toward survivors and their place in Zionist policy and the mass immigration to Israel between 1948 and 1953.<sup>36</sup>

Thus far, we have attempted to present some of the main disputes on the subject. It is now time to ask: what is their common denominator? A central thread connects them to a common base. All the claims and arguments of the Zionist historians derive from a single basic contention—as do all the claims and arguments of the New Historians. The difference lies in the nature of the arguments: the Zionists maintain that the Yishuv's attitude to European Jewry was dialectical whereas the New Historians see it as one-dimensional. This is the root of the controversy.

According to the Zionist historians, the Yishuv and Zionist movement leadership saw displaced Jews and Jewish refugees through a dual prism: as both a means and an end. This affected their view of the chief components of the issue. For example, rescue operations were an end—to save lives—but also a means, part of the Zionist mission to strengthen the Yishuv and establish Jewish sovereignty.

The attitude toward building up the country was itself dialectical. The mission, as the Zionists saw it, was an end in itself. One more settlement, one more dunam of land, one more cowshed were important, even hallowed, goals, but they were also tools—for the sake of preparing a home and haven for world Jewry, particularly for the refugees from persecution in Europe. This dialectical approach was the most deep-set feature of their *Weltanschauung*.

The single basic contention of the New Historians, on the other hand, is that the approach of the Yishuv and the Zionist leadership was single-minded, that they regarded themselves as the supreme goal and their attitude toward European Jewry was purely instrumental—they were a tool or means to realize and reinforce the Yishuv and Zionist aims. The priorities were clear: the Yishuv and Zionist aims were at the top, and European Jewry was lower down. It is a hierarchical view, devoid of dialectics.

This principle gives rise to another problem, which may be defined as “the perception of the other.” According to the New Historians, the Yishuv and its leadership viewed European Jewry—survivors, displaced persons, and “illegal” and new immigrants—as the other, as strangers. To

a large extent, this perception holds true for Sephardi Jews as well. There is a clear line between us and them. We were on one side, they were on the other, and the attitude toward them was pointed and inflexible, as the attitude to the other is meant to be.

According to the Zionist historians, however, the Yishuv's and Zionist movement's perception of European Jewry was more complex, more ambivalent: Europe's Jews were seen as both the other and our own, a duality aptly captured by the title of Hanna Yablonka's first book *Ahim Zarim* (Stranger Brothers).<sup>37</sup> A faint, elusive, and hazy line separated us from them, much as in a love-hate relationship.

I have had occasion to address the issue.<sup>38</sup> I have argued that, while the Yishuv saw the Holocaust as the ultimate proof of diaspora passivity, indeed, of diaspora shame—and, thus as the supreme vindication of the sad triumph of Zionism's basic premise—on the other hand, and at the same time, another, different aspect stood out: the Yishuv's sense of duty toward diaspora Jewry. The Yishuv felt a supreme sense of responsibility not only for the Jews being slaughtered in Europe but for world Jewry as a whole. This sense of responsibility stemmed from an ingrained feeling that the Yishuv was the “best” of the Jewish people, the vanguard, regardless of its size and power. The feeling was assumed, a given, and had nothing to do with reality. It was expressed by Avraham Tarshish, a member of Kibbutz 'Ein Harod and leader of the United Kibbutz Movement, in January 1943, when the enormity of the killing was coming to light.

If ever there was a meaning to the rescue of the nation by Zionism, it concerns the Yishuv's obligation today to the half million Jews living in Eretz-Israel who, by great devotion, were saved from persecution and death. If we do not fulfill the tasks before us, it is doubtful whether it was worthwhile for generations of Jews to have . . . established this Yishuv. Because this is not a Yishuv of choice, but it is chosen, if only because of the tasks laid upon it.<sup>39</sup>

Zionist historians thus saw the attitude of the Yishuv toward European Jewry as complex: it was arrogant, but also genuinely concerned; it was patronizing, but it shared a sense of solidarity. It was egocentric, almost childishly so, but with no trace of cynicism. For the New Historians, in contrast, cynicism is a key standard by which to judge Yishuv conduct. They use cynicism as strident evidence of a callous, if not in-

humane, attitude toward people who had been through the worst hell in the annals of mankind.

A chief feature of the New Historians' methodology is the frequent—and largely ahistorical—use of direct quotations from Zionist and Yishuv leaders to prove the latter's cynical, instrumental approach to European Jewry. Two such examples come from speeches by David Ben-Gurion and Yizhak Gruenbaum, the latter the head of the United Rescue Committee. The first, supposedly illustrative of this "cynical cruelty," is from Ben-Gurion's speech to the Mapai Central Committee shortly after *Kristallnacht* and the publication of the Woodhead Commission<sup>40</sup> report (well before the Holocaust had begun): "Were I to know that all German Jewish children could be rescued by transferring them to England, and only half by transfer to Palestine, I would opt for the latter because our concern is not only the personal interest of these children but the historic interest of the Jewish people."<sup>41</sup>

The second example, taken from Gruenbaum's remarks before the Inner Zionist Executive in early 1943, when the destruction of European Jewry was coming to light, is meant to demonstrate the real set of priorities of the Yishuv and the Zionist movement.

A mood has begun to take hold of the Land of Israel, which, I believe, is most dangerous to Zionism, to redemption, to our efforts at redemption, to our war. I don't wish to offend anyone, but I can't understand how this sort of thing, something that has never happened before, could happen in the Land of Israel: it never happened overseas—how was it possible that in the Land of Israel, at a public meeting, I should have been the object of [such] catcalls [as]: "You have no money, take Keren HaYesod's funds. Take the money from the bank; after all, there's money there, Keren HaYesod has money." . . . I have been asked: "[Should we use] Keren HaYesod's money . . . for the rescue of Jews in Diaspora countries?" I said "no," and I say "no" again. . . . I think it must be spelled out here: Zionism comes first.<sup>42</sup>

The difference between the perceptions of the Old and New Historians can be seen in the varying treatments of David Ben-Gurion's stance during the Holocaust and of the Yishuv's attitude toward those who came "from there"—the survivors and "illegal" immigrants. The stance of the New Historians is represented by Idith Zertal's book on



survivors immigrating to Israel.<sup>43</sup> As reported in *HaAretz*, she meant the book to demonstrate

how the Holocaust, and particularly the Holocaust survivors, even before the establishment of the state, were regarded as assets for purposes of its establishment. How they—they, who were not free to choose their own path—were conscripted by Zionism, how they were “used” . . . how, beyond proclamations and rhetoric, they were turned into tools, portable objects.<sup>44</sup>

Zertal’s main charge is that Zionism saw the survivors, including illegal immigrants, as instruments in the Zionist struggle. In this context, she asserted: “Zionism took the tragic events of the Holocaust and turned them into the main weapon of Land-of-Israel Zionism in the struggle for political sovereignty.” Her comments on the illegal immigrants ship, the *Exodus*, illustrate this assertion.

The journey of the *Exodus* was not aimed at actually bringing Jewish refugees to the shores of the land of Israel. It was aimed at breaking the British blockade by an operational, political demonstration, the refugee ship serving as the battering ram on the battle front of the campaign. Asked about it, the refugees said that they had not chosen this course to begin with but had been conscripted by Zionism into the war for Eretz-Israel without being asked.<sup>45</sup>

The picture Zertal painted is clear, unequivocal, and free of all doubt: we, the Yishuv, Zionism, were the end while they were the means; we were the subjects, they the objects.

The most radical expression of this approach is not an academic work but a poem composed by a noted scholar of Hebrew literature, Binyamin Harshavsky.<sup>46</sup> In the mid-1980s, under the pseudonym of Gabi Daniel, he published a poem that caused a sensation.<sup>47</sup> Provocatively entitled “Peter the Great,” the poem likened the czar’s attitude toward his army of serfs to that of Ben-Gurion’s toward the Holocaust survivors. Radical and extreme as it may be, the poem faithfully reflects the mindset that views survivors as anonymous pawns on the chessboard of Zionist policy. In this regard, Anita Shapira wrote that the poem expresses two principles: first, the “claims of dehumanization and instrumental use of the survivors”; and, second, the image of the survivors. In the poem, she

said, the “survivors are passive, their voice is not heard, and they have no will of their own.”<sup>48</sup>

An entirely different picture was portrayed by Hagit Lavsky, a mainstream Zionist historian, in an article published in the early 1990s.<sup>49</sup> Lavsky maintained that some researchers in the 1970s had already concluded that it was inaccurate to charge Yishuv leaders with sweepingly and simplistically relating to survivors as objects. She cited two books published at the time, by Tsemach Tsameriion and Yehuda Bauer.<sup>50</sup> These two authors, she said,

had found the survivor population to have been an active, diverse community, and had even advanced the hypothesis that cohesive forces from within this population had functioned to channel their activity along the Zionist path. This came to the fore in the Zionist spirit that dominated both journalism and the educational and cultural networks in the DP [displaced persons] camps, as well as in the efforts of survivors to reach the Land of Israel.<sup>51</sup>

Studies relating to the image of refugees and survivors, such as those produced by Aviva Halamish and Ze’ev Mankowitz, reflected the same trend. Halamish, in her book on the *Exodus*, makes the point that the ship’s saga changed the image of the illegal immigrants in Yishuv eyes. At first, “they were seen as fugitives from the sword, on whose behalf one had to rush to the rescue.” In no time at all, however, they had been transformed into “almost the sole standardbearers of the ‘close struggle.’”<sup>52</sup> This episode, added the author, “improved the image of the ‘illegal’ immigrants, and the Yishuv was swept up in a collective catharsis of admiration for them.” They were thus transformed from a passive into an active, even heroic, element in the national saga.

In time, the heroic role played by the illegal immigrants faded in Israel’s collective memory. The explanation for this, according to Halamish, is that “the ‘illegals’ had been assigned a passive role—if not to say as downright ‘extras’—in the internal Yishuv struggle, which dictated not only the actions of the period but also the writing of its history.”<sup>53</sup>

In this context, paradoxically, one can discern a “meeting of extremes” between official Zionist historiography and its challengers. Equally paradoxical is the stand taken by critical Zionist historiography against both the official and the New Historiography in its claim that the illegals were a decisive component of the *Exodus* episode. The illegals,

critical Zionist historiography maintains, shouldered the lion's share of this epopoeia, even more so than "our boys"—the members of the Palmah, the native sons of the Land of Israel.

In an essay describing the survivors, Ze'ev Mankowitz argues that their leadership sprouted from within, from the refugee population itself.<sup>54</sup> They were Zionists, and they defined their main goal as promoting 'Aliya (immigration to the Land of Israel) and establishing a Jewish state. The Zionist impulse, he stresses, stemmed from the survivor leadership, not from the Jewish Yishuv's emissaries. The author examined the motives of the survivor leadership in trying to concentrate the refugees in a defined area—the American Zone in southern Germany—soon after the end of the war.

Already in June 1945, the local Zionist groupings that sprung up after liberation began to work towards a more comprehensive, regional organization. Equally noteworthy is the political thinking which underpinned this organization. These survivors understood that the Zionist movement had lost its human hinterland in the Holocaust and that their primary task was to keep the Saved Remnant together in the hope that the majority would avoid the uncertainties of dispersion and, when the time came, would be able to make their way to Palestine. What we have here, in embryonic form, is the idea of concentrating *She'erit Hapleita* in one area.<sup>55</sup>

Mankowitz ignores neither Zionism's manipulative aspect nor the crucial role that the Zionist leadership assigned to the DPs in the political struggle. In his eyes, however, the DPs were neither a tool nor a passive entity but active agents seeking to shape their own destiny.

The dispute over Ben-Gurion's attitude toward the Holocaust brings us back to the central issue of instrumentalism. Tom Segev,<sup>56</sup> for example, related to the cognitive and ideological aspects of Ben-Gurion's behavior during the Holocaust rather than the pragmatic. After all, it was obvious that the Yishuv could not save millions of Jews; the failing of the Yishuv leaders, including Ben-Gurion, lay elsewhere—in their "great emotional withdrawal from the catastrophe [befalling] European Jewry." Segev quoted a paragraph from Ben-Gurion's letter to Yehoshua Kastner, Israel's brother ("My activities at the time centered on rallying Jewry to press for the establishment of a Jewish state")<sup>57</sup> and claimed that this was "a key point." Segev continued: "After the war Ben-Gurion's greatest

fear was that the Holocaust survivors might not want to come to the Land of Israel; he did not fear for their fate—after all, they had been saved; he feared that there might not be sufficient manpower to establish the state.”

This position can also be found in the work of S. B. Beit-Zvi.<sup>58</sup> His was one of the first works to deal critically with the attitude of the Zionist leadership toward the Holocaust. Many of the New Historians consider Beit-Zvi a trailblazer on the subject, as can be seen in this eulogy written after his death in 1994.

Beit-Zvi dared to give his thoughts free rein, into reaches that few of his generation had even dared to dream of. His readiness to face the truth enabled him to arrive at penetrating conclusions, boldly, even though they went against the current. . . . [T]he importance [of the thesis] . . . advanced in his book . . . is only now becoming clear to a new generation of historians.<sup>59</sup>

Beit-Zvi wrote in his book that during the Holocaust Ben-Gurion had given preference to the interests of Zionism and ignored the rescue of Europe's Jews. He cited numerous examples. Beit-Zvi claimed that Ben-Gurion didn't know what was happening in Europe because he didn't want to know. Writing ironically, he said: “Truly, Ben-Gurion didn't know. He knew even less than other people. He didn't know because he wasn't interested in ‘details.’”<sup>60</sup>

He also claimed that in Ben-Gurion's world the Holocaust was a marginal, even trivial matter. He described a press conference called by Ben-Gurion in October 1942 after a lengthy absence from the country. The conference lasted for more than an hour with Ben-Gurion holding forth on many topics: “Anti-Semitism in America, the Biltmore Program, a Jewish army, Hadassah [the Zionist Women's Organization], the Magnes group,” which advocated a binational state, and so on. There was only one topic he did not mention. This is how Beit-Zvi put it: “On the Holocaust—not a word. Nothing was said, nothing was asked; the subject was not on the agenda.”<sup>61</sup> Farther on, the author noted that this was not an isolated incident. Ben-Gurion made a large number of speeches at the time; in all of them, he ignored the subject.

These conclusions led the author to deliver a categorical diagnosis: the only Holocaust issue that interested Ben-Gurion was that of the survivors. The one question he asked was “whether enough Jews would survive to bring Zionism to fruition.”<sup>62</sup> In his world, this was the overriding

issue because it was closely intertwined with the struggle to establish Jewish sovereignty in Palestine; it was the one significant issue. He was thus not concerned with rescue per se, but only in the context of the Zionist political struggle; that is, he related to the survivors and the chances of rescue solely through Zionist-colored glasses.

Tuvia Friling, a leading scholar on Ben-Gurion's attitude toward the Holocaust, presented a completely contrary view.<sup>63</sup> His 1986 article, written largely to refute Beit-Zvi's claims,<sup>64</sup> explored "the stereotype" of Ben-Gurion's conduct with regard to the Holocaust. This stereotype consisted of three elements.

The first element was the charge of "aloofness" or "detachment." Friling thought that this charge was inconsistent with two pieces of evidence that he brought to bear.<sup>65</sup> One was the fact that "since appeals of this sort [concerning rescue] were addressed to Ben-Gurion, we must conclude that he was both aware of and tactically involved in the rescue activities." The other, connected to the first, was that "appeals of this kind, concerning rescue efforts, came to Ben-Gurion from the whole political spectrum—Bader of (the Left) *HaShomer HaTza'ir*, and from the religious and the secular right in the Yishuv."<sup>66</sup> These facts, Friling concluded, show that Ben-Gurion, the key figure in all spheres of the Yishuv, was also the key figure in rescue matters, which purportedly were far from his mind and heart.

The second element Friling addressed was "lack of knowledge" and, stemming from this charge, the claim of his "not wanting to know." To counter this notion, the author cited Ben-Gurion's speech before the Mapai Central Committee in February 1943 following a detailed report by Zvi Yehieli, one of the heads of the illegal immigration operations.<sup>67</sup> According to Friling, Ben-Gurion elaborated on the Yishuv's rescue efforts and the work of the Yishuv Delegation in Istanbul and Geneva. Ben-Gurion's speech, Friling argued, showed both claims to be unfounded.

Friling also rebutted Beit-Zvi's main argument, namely, that Ben-Gurion put the Zionist endeavor ahead of saving Jewish lives. In late November 1942, Ben-Gurion addressed the then topical issue of attempts to rescue Jewish children from the Balkans, saying that they were to be rescued and sent anywhere that would have them.<sup>68</sup> Further evidence in this vein was provided by his stand on the Teheran children.<sup>69</sup> Ben-Gurion did everything he could to reach a compromise with the religious parties, including the anti-Zionist ultra-Orthodox, regarding the education of these children and, in Friling's view, these efforts "reflect his position on the question of rescue and its place on the Yishuv

agenda, undermining the assumption that Ben-Gurion pitted Zionism against rescue attempts.”<sup>70</sup>

What are the main conclusions of this analysis? First, there seems to be a covert alliance between the positions of the New Historians and the official stand of the Yishuv establishment. Each viewed the survivors as passive, though for different reasons. The Yishuv’s position derived from its image of diaspora Jewry. Diaspora Jews, including survivors, were seen as passive and submissive; it was the task of the Yishuv to do all it could to help them, their fellow Jews. This perspective stemmed from the psychological makeup of the local Jews, and, though it may have been arrogant and patronizing, it was free of ill will. The position of the New Historians, on the other hand, is that the behavior of the Yishuv and its leaders toward survivors was mean and unfeeling. The Yishuv saw its own approach in the most positive light—after all, it was helping survivors who were unable to help themselves. The New Historians saw the Yishuv as exploiting submissive survivors in order to advance its own interests, which it believed to be their interests as well. Thus, although their outlooks are very different, their basic perceptions of survivors as passive are similar.

Second, there is another implicit alliance between the New Historians, most of whom consider themselves part of the radical Left, and the indictors of the Zionist establishment on the radical Right, including even the anti-Zionist, ultra-Orthodox religious camp. In the 1950s, particularly at the time of the Kastner trial,<sup>71</sup> central figures from the Right, including members of the Herut Party, accused the state’s leaders, who hailed from Mapai (and who, during the Holocaust, had dominated the Jewish Agency), of having ignored the rescue of European Jewry. In particular, they accused Ben-Gurion and Moshe Shertok (Sharett),<sup>72</sup> the head of the Jewish Agency’s Political Department, of having torpedoed the Brand Mission.<sup>73</sup> The gist of the charges against them was that they had given priority to marginal, even vested, interests such as collaborating with the British authorities or looking out for their own (Mapai, the Histadrut trade union organization, and the kibbutz movement). The critics also charged the state’s leaders and other establishment figures with carefully maintaining a “conspiracy of silence,” with harboring “dark secrets” ostensibly connected to the actions of the Yishuv leadership during that period, and with an attempt to purvey a falsified version of events in order to gloss over their reprehensible behavior.

In this context, Shmuel Tamir, the attorney for the defense in the Kastner trial, wrote that Shertok had tried in every way possible to refute

the charges against the Yishuv leadership, that he had used every occasion to advance his own version of events, and that he had taken great care to appear only where he would not lay himself open to legal repercussions. Accordingly, he had refrained from appearing as a witness in the two major trials that devoted extensive discussions to the Holocaust-related failings of the Zionist leadership—the Kastner and Eichmann trials.<sup>74</sup>

Elsewhere in his book,<sup>75</sup> Tamir cited speeches by Ben-Gurion and Shertok from 1942, claiming that “the subject of European Jewry’s extermination and rescue does not come up in them.” To a large extent, Tamir’s observations made their way into Beit-Zvi’s book (he wrote briefly, though identically, on the matter) and from there to the seething controversy on the topic that erupted in the 1990s.

The curious nexus between the radical Right’s criticism of the Yishuv leadership, voiced in the 1950s, and the current historians’ criticism is indicative of the meeting of extremes noted earlier in this essay.

One possible explanation for this curious kinship—hardly a holy alliance—between the anti-Zionist, ultra-Orthodox,<sup>76</sup> the post-Zionists, and the New Historians is not so much a common “love of Mordechai” as a common “hatred of Haman,” a shared loathing for the Zionist establishment headed by Mapai and symbolized by David Ben-Gurion.

The importance of the controversy over Yishuv attitudes toward the Holocaust is, to my mind, twofold. First, it furnishes tools with which to understand the attitude of Israeli society toward the Holocaust and its survivors. Second, it sheds light on the connection between that attitude and our own hopes and aspirations and, more particularly, our fears and traumas.

## NOTES

1. On the conference, see Yechiam Weitz, ed., *Bein Hazon le-Revizya: Me'ah Shnot Historiographya Tziyonit* [From Vision to Revision: A Hundred Years of Zionist Historiography] (Jerusalem, 1997).

2. Daniel Frankel, *'Al Pi ha-Tehom: Ha-Mediniyut ha-Tziyonit ve-She'elat Yehudei Germania, 1933–1938* [On the Edge of the Abyss: Zionist Policy and the Plight of the German Jews, 1933–1938] (Jerusalem, 1994). Most of the articles written on this issue were published in the *HaAretz* daily.

3. Anita Shapira, “Historiographya ve-zikaron: Mikre Latrun, 1948” [Memory and Historiography: The Latrun Case, 1948] *Alpayim* 10 (1994): 9–41.

4. Dina Porat, *Hanhaga BeMilkud: Hayishuv Nochah Hashoah 1942–1945* [Leadership in a Trap: The Yishuv and the Holocaust, 1942–1945] (Tel Aviv, 1986). An expanded English version was published soon after: Dina Porat, *The Blue and the Yellow*

*Stars of David: The Zionist Leadership in Palestine and the Holocaust, 1939–1945* (Cambridge, MA, 1990).

5. Yona Hadari, “‘Od kos ‘al ha-ir ha-bo‘eret” [Another Glass of Water over the Burning City], *HaAretz Supplement*, 3 October 1986.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Hava Eshkoli-Wagman, *Elem: Mapai le-nokhah ha-Shoah, 1939–1942* [Silence: Mapai and the Holocaust, 1939–1942], (Jerusalem, 1994); Dalia Ofer, *Derekh Bayam* [A Way through the Sea] (Jerusalem, 1988), English: *Escaping the Holocaust: Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel, 1939–1944* (Oxford, 1999); Yechiam Weitz, *Muda‘ut ve-Hoser Onim: Mapai le-nokhah ha-Shoah, 1943–1945* [Consciousness and Impotence: Mapai in the Face of the Holocaust, 1943–1945] (Jerusalem, 1994); Tuvia Friling, *Hetz ba-‘Arafel: David Ben-Gurion, Hanhagat ha-Yishuv, ve-Nisionot Hatzala ba-Shoah* [Arrow in the Dark: David Ben-Gurion, the Yishuv Leadership, and Rescue Attempts during the Holocaust] (Sede Boqer, 1998); Raya Cohen, *Bein “Sham” le-“Kan”*: *Sipuram shel ‘Eidim le-Hurban—Shweitz, 1939–1942* [“Here” versus “There”]: The Story of Witnesses to Destruction—Switzerland, 1939–1942], (Tel Aviv, 1999); Shaul Webber, *Hultza Khula ‘al Rek‘a Shahor: Yahasam shel Tnu‘ot ha-No‘ar be-Yisra‘el la-Golah bi-Tkufat ha-Sho‘ah ve-Ahareha* [A Blue Shirt against a Black Background: Israeli Youth Movement Attitudes toward the Diaspora during and after the Holocaust] (Tel Aviv, 1998).

8. For a list of the articles on the topic published up to 1985, see Dina Porat and Yechiam Weitz, eds., *Bein Magen David la-Tlai ha-Tzahov: Ha-Yishuv ha-Yehudi be-Eretz Yisrael ve-Sho‘at Yehudei Europa, 1939–1945* [The Star of David and the Yellow Star: The Jewish Community in Palestine and the Holocaust, 1939–1945] (Jerusalem, 2002).

9. Shabtai Teveth, *Ha-Kark‘a ha-Bo‘er* (Tel Aviv, 1987). This is also the English title of Teveth’s abridged, single-volume biography *Ben-Gurion: The Burning Ground, 1886–1948* (Boston, 1987). See also Teveth’s *Kinat David: O Hayei David Ben-Gurion* [David’s Zeal: The Life of David Ben-Gurion], 3 vols. (Jerusalem, 1976–87).

10. *Ibid.*, 6.

11. *Ibid.* This is the title of the last chapter, 423–50.

12. *Ibid.*, 441.

13. Shabtai Teveth, *David Ben-Gurion and the Holocaust* (New York, 1996); Yechiam Weitz, “The Positions of David Ben-Gurion and Yitzhak Tabenkin vis-à-vis the Holocaust of European Jewry,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 5, no. 2 (1990): 191–204; and Dina Porat, “Ben-Gurion and the Holocaust,” *Zionism* 12 (1987): 293–314.

14. For a detailed list of these articles, see Porat and Weitz, *Star of David*, 442. See also Friling, *Arrow*; and Tuvia Friling, “David Ben-Gurion ve-Shoat Yehudei Europa, 1939–1945” [David Ben-Gurion and the Holocaust of European Jewry, 1939–1945], PhD diss., HU, 1990.

15. Tom Segev, *Ha-Milyon ha-Shvi‘i: Ha-Yisre‘elim ve-ha-Shoah* (Jerusalem, 1991); English: *The Seventh Million: the Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York, 1993).

16. Tuvia Friling, “Ha-milyon ha-shvi‘i ke-mitz‘ad ha-ivelet ve-ha-rish‘ut shel hatnu‘a ha-Tziyonit” [The Seventh Million: The March of Folly and Wickedness of the Zionist Movement], *IbTY* 2 (1992): 317–68.

17. *Ibid.*, 367.

18. Dalia Ofer, “Pe‘ulot ‘ezra ve-hatzala shel ha-mishlahat ha-Eretz-Yisre‘elit



be-Kushta" [Aid and Rescue Actions of the Palestinian Mission in Istanbul, 1943], *YM* 15 (November 1972): 33–58. Her studies in this direction were expanded to cover the field as a whole in *Escaping the Holocaust: Illegal Immigration to the Land of Israel, 1939–1944* (Oxford, 1999). See also Arie Morgenstern, "Va'ad ha-hatzala hamehad she-liyad ha-sokhnut u-pe'ulotav ba-shanim, 1943–1945" [The Actions of the Jewish Agency's United Rescue Committee in 1943–1945], *YM* 13 (June 1971): 60–103; and Hava Eshkoli, "'Emdat ha-Manhigim ha-Yehudit be-Eretz Yisrael le-Hatzalat Yehudei Europa" [The Attitude of the Jewish Leadership in Palestine toward the Rescue Operations of European Jewry], *YM* 24 (1977): 87–116.

19. On this, see Anita Shapira, "Toldotav shel mitos: Kavim la-Historiography odot Ben-Gurion ve-ha-shoa" [The History of the Mythology: The Historiography of Ben-Gurion and the Holocaust], *Alpayim* 18 (1999): 36–38.

20. Dina Porat, "Ha-Historiography ha-Yisre'elit 'al ha-Yishuv le-nokhah ha-Shoah" [Israeli Historiography of the Yishuv in View of the Holocaust], *YZ* 6 (1990): 117–32.

21. *Ibid.*, 123.

22. *Ibid.*, 122.

23. Yoav Gelber, "Ktivat toldot ha-Tziyonut: Mei-apologetika l'hakhasha" [Studies in the History of Zionism: From Apologetics to Denial], in Weitz, *From Vision to Revision*; Israel Kolatt, "Ha-Akademizatzya shel toldot ha-Tziyonut" [The Academization of Zionist History], in Weitz, *From Vision to Revision*.

24. It was published as Yehuda Bauer, *Diplomacy and Resistance* (Philadelphia, 1970).

25. Gelber, "Studies," 77.

26. *Ibid.*, 79.

27. Bauer, *Diplomacy*, 278; on this, see Gelber, "Studies."

28. Yehuda Slutzki, "The Palestine Jewish Community and Its Assistance to European Jewry in the Holocaust Years," in *Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust* (proceedings of the conference "Manifestations of Jewish Resistance," Jerusalem, 7–11 April 1968), (Jerusalem 1970), 414–24.

29. *Ibid.*, 415.

30. For example, see Yechiam Weitz, "The Yishuv's Response to the Destruction of European Jewry, 1942–1943," *Studies in Zionism* 8, no. 2 (1987): 211–22.

31. *HaTziyonut: Me'asef le-Toldot ha-Tnu'a ha-Tziyonit ve-ha-Yishuv ha-Yehudi be-Eretz Yisrael* [Zionism: An Anthology on the History of the Zionist Movement and the Jewish Yishuv in the Land of Israel], nos. 1–6 (1970–81).

32. See Yechiam Weitz, "Ha-Tziyonut ke-distziplina mada'it" [Zionism as a Scientific Discipline], *HaAretz Books Supplement*, 21 May 1997.

33. These included, for example, Roni Stauber, "Ha-vikuah ha-politi 'al mishpat Kastner 'al-pi ha-'itonut ha-miflagtit" [The Controversy in the Political Press over the Kastner Trial], *HaTziyonut*, no. 13: 219–46.

34. These included, for example, Dan Laor, "Ha-'Aliya ha-hamonit ke-tokhen nossi ba-sifrut ha-'Ivrit" [Mass Immigration as a Topic in Hebrew Literature], *HaTziyonut*, no. 14; and Pnina Lahav, "Bet ha-misphat ha-elyon ha-Yisre'eli: Shnot ha-'itzuv, 1948–1955" [Israel's Supreme Court: The Formative Decade, 1948–1955], *HaTziyonut*, no. 14.

35. In the 1980s *HaTziyonut* was the major academic journal focusing on the

history of the State of Israel. In 1991, the Ben-Gurion Research Centre began to put out the annual *'Iyunim Bi-Tkumat Yisrael* [Studies in Zionism, the Yishuv, and the State of Israel]. Both are important journals.

36. The basic study on the mass immigration is Dvora Hacothen, *'Olim be-Se'ara: Ha-'Aliya ha-Gdola ve-Klitata be-Yisrael, 1948–1953* [Immigrants in Turmoil: The Great Wave of Immigration to Israel and Its Absorption, 1948–1953] (Jerusalem, 1994).

37. Hanna Yablonka, *Ahim Zarim: Nitzolei ha-Shoah bi-Medinat Yisrael, 1948–1952* [Stranger Brothers: Holocaust Survivors in Israel, 1948–1952] (Jerusalem 1994).

38. Yechiam Weitz, "Yishuv, Diaspora, and Holocaust: Reality and Myth," *YIVO Annual* 23 (1996): 365–90.

39. He was addressing the United Kibbutz Movement Council, 1 January 1943, Ramat Ha-Kovesh, KMA, section 5, container 7, file 1.

40. The commission was appointed by the British cabinet to pave the way for MacDonald's anti-Zionist white paper (17 May 1939).

41. Meeting of the Mapai Central Committee, 7 December 1938, Labor Party Archive 23/38.

42. Meeting of the Zionist Smaller Actions Committee (18 January 1943), CZA S25/295.

43. Idith Zertal, *From Catastrophe to Power: The Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel* (Berkeley, 1998).

44. Dalia Karpel, "Al gabam shel ha-nitsolim" [On the Backs of the Survivors], *HaAretz Supplement*, 31 May 1996.

45. Ibid.

46. Harshavsky used a variety of pseudonyms, sometimes writing under the name H. Binyamin, sometimes as Benjamin Harshav.

47. The poem appeared in *Igra: Almanac for Literature and Art* (1985), 199. For a partial list of the reactions in the press, see Shapira, "Historiography," 33, n. 63.

48. Shapira, "Historiography," 34.

49. Hagit Lavsky, "'She'erit hapleita': Mi-obyekt le-subyekt—megamot ba-mehkar" [The Surviving Remnant: From Object to Subject—New Directions in Historical Research], *YZ* 6 (1990): 25–44.

50. Tsemach Tsameriion, *Ha-'Itonut shel She'erit ha-Pleita be-Germania ke-Bitui le-Ve'ayoteha* [The Press of Jewish Holocaust Survivors in Germany as an Expression of Their Problems] (Tel Aviv, 1970); Yehuda Bauer, *Flight and Rescue* (New York, 1970).

51. Lavsky, "Surviving Remnant," 41.

52. Aviva Halamish, *Exodus: Ha-Sipur ha-Amiti* [Exodus: The Real Story] (Tel Aviv, 1990), 247. The "close stuggle" (*ha-maavak ha-tzamud*) referred to limited opposition to the British (1945–47), and continued illegal immigration and settlement. It was the term used by Yishuv and Haganah moderates in contrast to the more activist wing, which wanted an unmitigated "continuous struggle" (*maavak ratzuf*), including more militant means.

53. Ibid. See also her insightful article on this issue, Aviva Halamish, "Illegal Immigration: Values, Myth, and Reality," *Studies in Zionism* 9, no. 1 (1988): 47–62.

54. Ze'ev Mankowitz, "The Formation of She'erit Hapleita, November 1944–May 1945," *YvS* 20 (1990): 337–70.

55. *Ibid.*, 357–58. See also Ze'ev Mankowitz, *Life between Memory and Hope: The Survivors of the Holocaust in Occupied Germany* (Cambridge, 2002).

56. Tom Segev, "LeHagen 'al Dimuyoi Hamithologi shei Ben Gurion" [In Defense of Ben Gurion's Mythical Image], *HaAretz Books Supplement*, 18 January 1995. The article is a review of Dvora Hacoheh's *Tokhnit ha-Milyon: Tokhmuto shel David Ben-Gurion le-Aliya Hamonit ba-Shanim, 1942–1945* [From Fantasy to Reality: Ben-Gurion's Plan for Mass Immigration, 1942–1945] (Tel Aviv, 1994).

57. Ben-Gurion to Kastner, 9 February 1958.

58. S. B. Beit-Zvi, *Ha-Tziyonut ha-Post-Ugandit be-Mashber ha-Shoah* [Post-Ugandan Zionism in the Crucible of the Holocaust] (Tel Aviv, 1977).

59. Joseph Grodzinsky, "Le-hilahem be-Tziyonizatzia shel ha-Shoah" [Fighting the "Zionization" of the Holocaust], *HaAretz*, 15 July 1994.

60. Beit-Zvi, *Post-Ugandan Zionism*, 104.

61. *Ibid.*, 103.

62. *Ibid.*, 133.

63. Tuvia Friling, "Ben-Gurion and the Holocaust of European Jewry, 1939–1945: A Stereotype Re-examined," *YvS* 17 (1986).

64. *Ibid.*, 201–2.

65. *Ibid.*, 215.

66. *Ibid.* Manahem Bader was his movement's delegate to the Yishuv Delegation in Istanbul.

67. *Ibid.*, 216–17. Yehieli was a member of Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Meuhad and a senior participant in the Mossad for Illegal Immigration.

68. *Ibid.*, 211–12.

69. On this, see Ada Schein, "The Controversy in the Yishuv on the Teheran Children," *YM* 54 (1993): 133–62.

70. Friling, "Ben-Gurion," 218.

71. See Yechiam Weitz, *Ha-Ish she-Nirtzah Pa'amayim: Mishpato u-Moto shel Yisrael Kastner* [The Man Who Was Murdered Twice: The Trial and Death of Israel Kastner] (Jerusalem, 1993).

72. Sharett was the prime minister of Israel at the time of the trial (1954–55).

73. In May 1944, Joel Brand flew from Budapest to Istanbul with a Nazi proposal: "goods for blood," ten thousand lorries loaded with fuel and grocery goods in exchange for ending the destruction of Hungarian Jewry. See Yehuda Bauer, *Jews for Sale? Nazi-Jewish Negotiations* (New Haven and London, 1994), 145–71.

74. Shmuel Tamir, *Ben ha-Aretz* [Son of This Land] (Tel Aviv, 2002).

75. *Ibid.*, 1125–26.

76. On the charges of the ultra-Orthodox, see Dina Porat, "'Amalek's Partners': The Charges of Israel's Anti-Zionist Ultra-Orthodox in the 1980s against Zionism in the Holocaust," *HaTziyonut* 19 (1995): 295–325.

*Mustafa Kabha*

## **A Palestinian Look at the New Historians and Post-Zionism in Israel**

The vagueness and ambiguity surrounding the discourse on the New Historians and post-Zionism in Israel's media and academic community was summed up by Anita Shapira, in *New Jews, Old Jews*.

The debate on the issue of the New Historians, which caused quite a stir in the Israeli media . . . [is] characterized by numerous question and exclamation marks. The many articles and discussions . . . it engendered did not clarify the subjects of the debate, its limits, essence, and purpose. It was fascinating in its vagueness and astonishing in the passions it aroused. Is the heart of the debate methodological, factual, interpretative? Does it relate to one field of study or may it be applied to other fields? Does it take place in the domain of history or has it spread to other disciplines? Is the debate between trends, generations, people? Is it concerned with the past or with the present and the future? And, finally, who initiated the debate and where is it headed?<sup>1</sup>

Nearly six years have passed since this was written, two and a half of which have been dominated by the second Intifada, better known as the Aqsa Intifada. This has dramatically brought the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to a new climax, impacting on, among other things, the essence of the discourse and the views of the actors involved. But the questions raised by Shapira have still not been resolved, nor the vagueness and ambiguity cleared up. And if this is true of the intellectual discourse on the Israeli side, its perception and reception by the other side—the Arab world in general and the Palestinians, in particular—is all the more vague and complicated.

This essay examines the historiographic discourse on the New Historians and the post-Zionist narrative as reflected in the words of

Palestinian and Arab writers and its influence on the formation and consolidation of the Palestinian historical narrative. It surveys Arab diagnoses of the phenomenon and interpretations of its historical context. It also sets forth the attitude of Arab writers toward the New Historians, individually and collectively, and the Arab perceptions of their different backgrounds and approaches.

### **Perceptions and Interpretations**

Arab writers became interested in the issue of the New Historians in Israel in the early 1990s, following the brouhaha caused by Benny Morris's *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949*.<sup>2</sup> Published first in English and then in Hebrew and Arabic, the book has served as a source for most of the Arab and Palestinian historians discussing the history of the 1948 war and the Palestinian Nakba (Disaster). They subsequently began to show an interest also in the work of other New Historians, including Avi Shlaim, Ilan Pappé, Tom Segev, Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, and Simha Flapan. Taken together, these works constituted the building blocks of the Palestinian historical narrative, which has taken increasing shape in recent decades. These sources were used by Arab and Palestinian historians as the archival basis for opinions that were similar to those espoused by the New Historians, but which Arab writers, in many cases, had previously not substantiated with archival references; this was due in part to a lack of access to Israeli archives and a lack of proficiency in Hebrew but mainly to the fact that the archives had not yet been opened to researchers. Nevertheless, the broad reliance on the writings of the New Historians did not safeguard Arab historians and writers from a great deal of confusion about the phenomenon of the New Historians and its place in the wider context of post-Zionism. The confusion applied even to the identity of the Israeli writers and their identification with the different trends in Israeli historiography or with trends in other disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and political science. Thus, as interest grew in the phenomenon of the New Historians and post-Zionism in the late 1990s, the discussion was extended from historians specializing in the Palestinian issue, especially the Nakba, to include wider discussions of Israel, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and even globalization and postmodernism. The expanded circle of interested parties and polemicists naturally involved also writers who were not well versed in the Israeli experience. They had only indirect knowledge of the Israeli intellectual discourse, mostly through

translations into Arabic, and these were largely inaccurate (certainly as regards terminology and names). In addition, problematic paragraphs were sometimes entirely deleted or chapter headings changed.<sup>3</sup> All this only added to the vagueness and ambiguity: New Historians were confused with post-Zionists, authors' names were omitted, and writers were wrongly identified with specific trends. For example, Old, or establishment, Historians who objected to the New Historians, such as Efraim Karsh and Anita Shapira, were situated in the camp of the New Historians.<sup>4</sup> The end result was many differing opinions. Some welcome the phenomenon as important, positive, and worthy of Arab attention, primarily because of the support provided by the group's writings for the construction and shaping of the Arab-Palestinian narrative, though also because of the methodology, which, through exposure and contact, could influence Arab and Palestinian research and historiography.<sup>5</sup> Others dismiss the New Historians' conclusions as myths to be debunked, no different from those of the Old Israeli Historians.<sup>6</sup>

An intermediate approach attributes some significance to the discussions of the New Historians and post-Zionism but does not expect any positive outcome to ensue from them. These researchers doubt the ability of post-Zionists to change the foundations of the Zionist platform and the attitudes of the Zionist movement and the State of Israel toward Arabs and Palestinians in the ongoing national struggle. Therefore, they describe the attempts of the New Historians as a youthful rebellion at the end of which the rebels will be exposed, placated, and returned to the "tribe." The proponents of this outlook point to the example of Benny Morris and the change said to have been effected in his views following the failure of the Camp David talks and the outbreak of the second Intifada in late September 2000.<sup>7</sup>

It should be stated here that most of the people dealing with the question have focused largely on the conclusions of the New Historians aside from a few writers such as Nur Masalha, who took issue also with the facts presented, the methods used, and the processes used to arrive at these conclusions.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Phenomenon Defined and the Background**

Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, one of the most renowned Palestinian intellectuals, defined and listed the New Historians in an essay published in *Aafak* entitled "The Eighth Israel."<sup>9</sup>

Experts and politicians following occurrences in the field of critical research of Israeli society claim that this phenomenon is a product of the intellectual efforts of a limited number of Israeli academics specializing in history. . . . [Specifically] this list includes Simha Flapan, Benny Morris, Baruch Kimmerling, Avi Shlaim, Ilan Pappé, Gideon Shafir, and Ella Shohat, in addition to the younger generation, consisting of Danny Rabinowitz and Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin.<sup>10</sup>

Later Abu-Lughod explains that he did not include the works of Israel Shahak as, in his opinion, the latter's training in chemistry, rather than history or sociology, could be the decisive factor in his "different critical approach in discussing the roots of Zionist thought and ideology, not only the performance of the Zionist movement."<sup>11</sup> As for the historical background of the phenomenon, Abu-Lughod relates the emergence of the New Historians and new sociologists, and the development of their writing, to a series of events in the Arab-Israeli conflict that led to a degree of calm in Israeli society and made possible the appearance of a critical, antiestablishment tone.

It is no anomaly that critical studies of the history of the Israeli entity appear in a fixed/specific period and by researchers from the core of Israeli society. This may be perceived as the ultimate realization of Zionist ideology, as these studies appeared in the wake of Israel's recognition of victory over Palestinian and Arab resistance, as a result of which Israel took control of the destiny of the Palestinian people and their land, in addition to its clear political hegemony over the Arab states. This takeover was conspicuous (after signing the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in 1979) in Israel's attitude toward what remained of Arab steadfastness and resistance in Syria, Jordan, the PLO, and Lebanon, and in its attempts to neutralize Arab military power.<sup>12</sup>

Edward Said attempted a sketch of Israel's New Historians in an article in the *Al-Hayat* newspaper, in which he recounts his personal experience with two of the senior members of this group (Benny Morris and Ilan Pappé) at a symposium held in May 1998 in Paris. The Israeli side was represented, in addition to Morris and Pappé, by Zeev Sternhell and Itamar Rabinovich. The Palestinian side was represented, in addition to Said, by Nur Al-Din Masalha and other historians. Said describes his impressions as follows:

One of the strongest experiences carved in my memory after the symposium was the emphasis of the Israeli side, whose members came from different political currents, on the need to distance oneself from one's emotions, be objective and espouse a critical dimension toward events, in contrast to the insistence of the Palestinian side on clinging to emotions and the need to write a new history.<sup>13</sup>

After describing his experience as a party to the discourse, Said explained the views of the two sides expressed at the symposium: "Israel and the Israelis are the side with strength, controlling the conflict. They hold all the land, and they have all the military strength, and this led to their wish for a calm, amiable discussion."<sup>14</sup>

Muhammad Hamza Ghanayim (an Arab Israeli who has introduced Arab and Palestinian readers to many aspects of Israel's written culture through translations and articles on various subjects) also portrayed the New Historians (Benny Morris, Tom Segev, and Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin) via a series of interviews with important Israeli scholars. The series was published as a book by the Palestinian Centre for Israeli Research (Madar) entitled *Waghan le-Wagh* (Face to Face).<sup>15</sup> In his introductions to the interviews with Morris and Raz-Krakotzkin, he outlines the historical context of the phenomenon as part of the general discourse on postmodernism since the mid-1980s, the welcome influence of the new Western culture imitated almost in toto.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, Ghanayim also relates the discourse on the New Historians to developments in the conflict with the Palestinians.

Suddenly the collective memory of the Nakba and all its aspects became a subject of research and discourse. Similarly, the "new" public discussion among Arabs and Palestinians on the question of "transfer" or collective deportation of the Palestinians to Arab countries—which is considered the most sensitive issue in the history of the conflict in Israeli eyes—became a key to understanding the complicated present and perhaps . . . a type of nostalgia for "alternatives that did not exist," alternatives whose historical realization was thwarted by Zionism.<sup>17</sup>

Ghanayim's irony seems to be aimed also at some of the New Historians. In addition, he found fault with the idea of their novelty, terming their emergence "anticipated."



In fact, a certain built-in mechanism seems to be at work behind the appearance of this group of Israeli new historians . . . [which] makes [it] an “anticipated phenomenon.” Israeli archive regulations permit researchers access to documents thirty years after the occurrence of historical events. A number of young Israeli researchers engaged in studying these documents in the 1980s, began to publish the results of their research in academic research journals such as *Cathedra*, *Ha-Tziyonut*, and *Studies in Zionism*, in the first half of the 1980s. Prestigious publishing houses in Britain published these important studies (the most prominent of which was Benny Morris’s on “The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem”). This encouraged them to present themselves as the first historians writing the real history of the establishment of the State of Israel and to present everything previously written as no more than Zionist propaganda striving to favorably portray the “miracle of the establishment of the State of Israel,” primarily for internal reasons and later for external propaganda.<sup>18</sup>

‘Abdo al-Asadi, a Palestinian writing in the Kuwaiti journal *Al-Arabi*, also considered the difficulties of defining and understanding the terms *post-Zionism* and *New Historians*.

The definition of the phenomenon of post-Zionism is indeed complex. This complexity is expressed by the term’s inability to indicate a regression in Zionist ideology or its replacement by another ideology with known, defined substance. We must note here that the word *post* comes from Western philosophical thought, “modernism” and “postmodernism,” but I cannot find similarities between the meaning of the Western term and *post-Zionism*. Western philosophical thought and the development of postmodernism contradict modernism and the prior period; however the philosophical thought of post-Zionism has not yet indicated a wish or call to ideologically circumvent or oppose Zionist ideology.<sup>19</sup>

Al-Asadi, too, deems the term New Historians problematic or, at least in its Israeli context, falling short of the criteria of New History as it is perceived in Europe.

The term *New Historians* in Israel is taken from the term *New History* in Europe, which is the product of the common effort of a number of scientific disciplines documenting, in a social framework, diplomatic history, or the history of the elites, without belonging to the elite. But Israeli *New Historians* were pre-occupied with political history, which they analyzed using the tools of the elite, thus clinging to the foundations formed by members of the classical trend (the Old Historians) concerning the narrative of the establishment of the State of Israel.<sup>20</sup>

Despite Al-Asadi's generalizations in his definitions of *post-Zionism* and *New Historians*, he tried to show the different trends and opinions in post-Zionism.

We must emphasize . . . three streams. . . . The first is the claim that Zionism has succeeded in realizing its programs in such a way that its existence is no longer justified, and the second calls for Zionism's need to recognize its mistaken attitude toward Palestinians without denying the legitimacy of Zionism, while the third stream sees Zionism as a colonial movement born in colonial sin.<sup>21</sup>

A closer look at Al-Asadi's categorization reveals the fundamental differences between the three streams, although there is no indication of this in his earlier generalized definitions, where distinctions are indiscernible.

Muhsin Khadir, an Egyptian academic specializing in Israel at Cairo's Ein Shams University, has also attempted to sort out the connection and/or confusion between the same two concepts.

The concept of New Historians and the concept of post-Zionism are connected. Indeed, the latter is more extensive than the former, but the one cannot be understood without the other. . . . [T]he New Historians belong to an elite group that does not carry much weight in Israeli society. Ideologically and symbolically, however, it is significant, even if it has not succeeded in influencing Israeli decision makers.<sup>22</sup>

The ideological and symbolic dimension notwithstanding, Muhsin Khadir recommends reserving judgment about the New Historians:

they are definitely not “new angels” since most of them, he says, still believe that “expulsion of the Palestinians was immoral but may have been necessary.”<sup>23</sup>

Unlike these definitions and observations, which approximate a general diagnosis of the phenomenon, there have also been absurd inaccuracies. For example, the Web site of the Arab Center for Future Research (ACFR) states:

The erosion of consensus in Israeli society and corrective efforts resulted in the emergence of a new trend known as “revisionism” or the “New Historians” . . . which aroused great debate between its exponents and opponents. The debate was unusually sharp, in comparison with other countries dealing with harsher truths than those addressed by Israeli revisionism. It is interesting that the Labor Party has embraced this trend as an unspoken creed, whereas the Likud strongly opposed [the New Historians]. This has placed them at the heart of Israeli politics and at the focus of the struggle between the two poles.<sup>24</sup>

The implied relationship between the Labor Party and the New Historians is reiterated, the author going so far as to suggest a historical conspiracy between the two. He describes former member of the Knesset Yossi Beilin as the architect of the group’s ideology, and Yitzhak Rabin as having embraced and nurtured its ideas and introduced its works into the Education Ministry’s curricula during his premiership.<sup>25</sup> He ends by concluding that the New Historians constitute the first stage in the realization of Beilin’s plan to reinforce the secular foundations of the State of Israel, a plan the writer terms the “secularization of the Jews.”<sup>26</sup>

Some writers in the Arab world refuse to see post-Zionism and the New Historians as representative of a clear ideological trend, perceiving them, rather, as reflecting a general condition of Israeli society. Thus, Jalal al-Din ‘Iz al-Din ‘Ali, an Egyptian writer on Israeli affairs for the Kuwaiti *Al-‘Arabi*, tells us:

In considering the post-Zionist phenomenon in the Arab world, the strongest voice belongs to those who perceive [it] . . . as unique to a certain ideological school, consisting of critical sociologists and mainly New Historians. In my opinion, the phenomenon expresses a general condition reached by Israeli society due to a series of intrinsic and extrinsic variables, as a result

of which internal Israeli divisions have reached a peak, making it impossible to continue with the Israeli “social contract” or the ideological framework of Zionism.<sup>27</sup>

Based on this interpretation, ‘Iz al-Din ‘Ali sees post-Zionism as an internal Israeli affair and its exponents—in terms of their approach to the conflict with the Arab world—as not very different from other parts of Israeli society.<sup>28</sup>

Wageh Kawthrani, another *Al-‘Arabi* writer, also objected to the depiction of post-Zionism and the New Historians as representing a new trend in Zionist ideology. He speaks of a slight change in the Zionist “platform” as regards the relationship with the Palestinians, a platform that, in his opinion, aims to explain the nature of the relationship between “butcher” and “victim.” In his view, the tendency differs little from the main trend since, despite their acknowledgment of sin, post-Zionists and New Historians continue to hold on to racial-Zionist foundations, which hope to benefit from European anti-Semitism at the expense of the Palestinians.<sup>29</sup>

Kawthrani sees post-Zionism as an attempt by Israeli writers to flee from Zionism’s poor image in the world, which stems from its performance in the conflict with the Palestinians. Thus, he believes that, as long as these researchers continue to discuss the points of departure of Zionist actions and mechanisms rather than the points at which it harmed others, it should not be perceived as New History; the New Historian must first of all search for justice, as did the scholars who produced new European narratives following a reexamination of anti-Semitic tendencies in their own national movements. Consequently, Kawthrani claims, post-Zionism must be founded a priori on a rejection of Zionism, the mirror image of anti-Semitism.<sup>30</sup>

### **Historians and Sociologists Identified and Differentiated**

As stated, the confusion among Arab writers surrounding the phenomenon of the New Historians affects also the composition of the group. Certain scholars, such as Benny Morris, Ilan Pappé, and Simha Flapan, are cited by all writers. Others receive only a single mention, including those who are neither regarded nor regard themselves as part of the group, such as Anita Shapira.

Ibrahim Abu-Lughod in the essay cited earlier lists fifteen scholars who, in his opinion, belong to the group of critical sociologists and New Historians: Simha Flapan, Binyamin Beit-Halachmi, Baruch Kimmerling, Joel Migdal, Benny Morris, Ilan Pappé, Danny Rabinowitz, Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, Tom Segev, Gershon Shafir, Israel Shahak, Avi Shlaim, Ella Shohat, Sami Smooha, and Zeev Sternhell.<sup>31</sup> It is noteworthy that Abu-Lughod was almost the only one to consistently refer to both critical sociologists and historians, rather than just historians, although his list includes people (such as scientist Israel Shahak) who do not fit into either category.

The essay on the ACFR Web site enumerates the New Israeli Historians as Avi Shlaim, Ilan Pappé, Zeev Sternhell, Tom Segev, Noam Chomsky, and Simha Flapan,<sup>32</sup> identical to the list given by Khaled Al-Harub on the subject.<sup>33</sup> The most confused writer seems to be Muhammad Issa Salhiya, a Palestinian reporter, who included Benny Morris (defined as the foremost New Historian and thus, unlike the rest, worthy of a detailed review of his life), Tom Segev, Avi Shlaim, Ilan Pappé, Baruch Kimmerling, Shabtai Teveth, Efraim Karsh, Zeev Sternhell, and Israel Shahak.<sup>34</sup> Some of these (e.g., Efraim Karsh and Shabtai Teveth) would undoubtedly be taken aback at their inclusion in Salhiya's list.

Al-'Afif al-Akhdar, a Tunisian intellectual, does not specify New Historians by name; instead, he lists the circles that, in his opinion, constitute the post-Zionist phenomenon, describing them as "the widest sector of Israeli scholars and intellectuals," including "authors, poets, artists, reporters, media people, shapers of public opinion, and the *HaAretz* newspaper."<sup>35</sup> Fadel Sultani, an expatriate Iraqi intellectual and poet, includes among the New Historians Simha Flapan, Ilan Pappé, Yossi Amitai, Michael Cohen, and Uri Milstein.<sup>36</sup>

Some of the inaccuracies may be attributed to the widespread premise of many Arab and Palestinian writers that any Israeli writer who differs from the mainstream is post-Zionist and any historian whose research approach differs from that of establishment scholars is a New Historian. But other inaccuracies—such as identifying Efraim Karsh, Shabtai Teveth, and others as New Historians—are difficult to explain. They may derive from a tendency toward sweeping generalizations in all that concerns discussion of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Be that as it may, some of the Arab and Palestinian writers on the New Historians tend to distinguish also between the various individuals in the group. Some of the observations are quite precise and consistent (e.g., on Ilan Pappé); some are more generalized and result at times from

a change in the approach or views of the historians themselves (e.g., Benny Morris).

Edward Said singles out Pappé from the rest of the group of Israeli historians whom he met in Paris, describing him as an “anti-Zionist, socialist historian” and “the most brilliant historian” of the group.<sup>37</sup> Elsewhere, Said describes the rest of the group as follows.

Their most conspicuous quality (excluding Pappé) is the profound contradictions in their writings, making them almost schizophrenic, and the best example is Benny Morris, who, ten years ago, composed the most important Israeli work on the roots of the Palestinian refugee problem. His study proved beyond the shadow of a doubt, and based on Zionist archives, that the Palestinians were forced to relocate as part of the “expulsion” policy adopted by Ben-Gurion. Morris’s precise research emphasized the fact that brigade commanders were regularly asked to deport Palestinians, burn their villages, and take systematic control of their homes and lands. However, it is strange that Morris refuses to reach the obvious conclusion at the end of his book . . . and thus it seems that Morris remained a Zionist in order to believe the Zionist ideological narrative, according to which the Palestinians chose to leave rather than being deported by the Israelis.<sup>38</sup>

Said also expressed astonishment at the views of Zeev Sternhell, who, though he recognized the great injustice done to the Palestinians and acknowledged that Zionism was a colonial movement, declared that the colonization was a necessity.<sup>39</sup>

‘Abdo al-Asadi, in his characterization of prominent New Historians, devoted the most space to Benny Morris.

There was an element of schizophrenia in Benny Morris. . . . On the one hand, he held Israel responsible for creating the refugee problem; on the other hand, he decided that there was no prior plan of deportation and that everything that happened was a direct result of military actions. Thus, Benny Morris, the intellectual and the historian, did not manage to break free of the schizophrenia that marked his historical research and his political views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.<sup>40</sup>

Based on the above, and in contrast to many other observers, al-Asadi does not believe that Benny Morris's views underwent a change as a result of the outbreak of the Intifada.

In his new writings, Benny Morris did not present new ideas that deviated from his political and ideological-intellectual outlook. I find that he gives voice to his position and his mind-set. From the start of his historical studies, he made clear his outright objection to a comparison between post-Zionism and anti-Zionism, and his lack of desire to diminish Zionism. On the contrary, Morris always emphasized the fact that Zionism is not only a national liberation movement but rather a movement calling for the realization of human-universal values.<sup>41</sup>

In light of this, al-Asadi urges his Arab colleagues to stop "crying" over the so-called change in Morris's views and accusing him of "betraying" his ideas and research. In al-Asadi's opinion, Morris was and remained true to his ideological principles, having never classified himself as leftist or anti-Zionist and having had no intention of eroding Zionist ideology or practice. On the contrary:

He combed the Zionist archives for sources on the Palmah and was shocked by his systematic and critical examination of the material he found; as his scientific research approach did not support a continued critical approach, he returned relatively early to the theoretical framework of Zionist ideology. Thus, while he admitted that there had been acts of expulsion, he refused to acknowledge that expulsion had been systematic or preplanned.<sup>42</sup>

Going on with his review of the New Historians, al-Asadi portrays Avi Shlaim as the antithesis of Benny Morris, Shlaim having reached the conclusions warranted by Morris's work.<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, Shlaim's view on the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, especially the failure of the Camp David talks and the collapse of the Oslo process is different from Morris's. Writes al-Asadi:

Shlaim's view was contrary to that of Morris, as he believed that the failure to reach a historical agreement with the Palestinian people stemmed from Israel's policy of expansion rather

than from a tendency of the Palestinians to lie, as claimed by Morris. Shlaim took pains to discredit the fable, which holds that Barak made the Palestinians a generous offer. He also showed that “the proper view for any serious historian is to examine the documents and their significance and not be dragged after the platform of Israel’s formal narrative.”<sup>44</sup>

The last sentence was no doubt directed at Morris, whom Arab writers found “hard to digest.” On the one hand, his books underlie the foundations of the Palestinian historical narrative; on the other, the change in his views, particularly as expressed after the autumn of 2000, considerably shocked wide circles of Arab scholars and writers, who often cited Morris’s works, which they saw as reinforcing claims that they and others had put forth for years. This shock may reflect a concern in these circles over cracks appearing in the foundations of the Palestinian narrative, for which Morris’s works provided strong support.

Al-Asadi defines Ilan Pappé as an “organic scholar,” politically engaged rather than confined to the ivory tower.

Pappé is distinguished from his colleagues in the group of New Historians and critical sociologists by his sober call to view political events in their historical context. Thus, he claimed that the continual deterioration that occurred in the occupied Palestinian territories stemmed from the policy of “power and tyranny” espoused by Israel’s controlling elite, who believe that their military, political, economic, and international strength enables them to force on the Palestinians the political solution that they desire and the territory that Israel determines.<sup>45</sup>

Among the works discussed on the ACFR Web site as it follows the discourse on the New Historians and post-Zionism, is Benny Morris’s *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881–1999*.<sup>46</sup> The review describes the relationship of the New Historians with both the Israeli establishment and Old Historians. Written in the summer of 2000, before the outbreak of the second Intifada, it calls Morris the “pioneer” of the group and their most important historian: “Although we Arabs read these works [of the New Historians] as expositions striving to turn the criminal into ‘state’s evidence,’ we cannot deny Morris’s uniqueness and the differences between him and the rest of the group members, as he presents long objective passages in his historical work.”<sup>47</sup>



It must be reiterated, however, that there has been a clear change in the evaluation of Morris, both his person and his works, since the outbreak of the Aqsa Intifada, in all likelihood a consequence of his media interviews, articles, and other statements attributed to him. This shift stands out all the more in light of the consistently high appreciation of Ilan Pappé, Avi Shlaim, and Simha Flapan (who has since passed away).

### **The Debate on Substance**

Arab and Palestinian writers, as noted earlier, were not overly preoccupied with the substance of the works of the New Historians, generally limiting themselves to a discussion of their conclusions or general leanings. Some, however, pointed to certain shortcomings of the research such as an ignorance of Arabic. This was particularly true with respect to Benny Morris.<sup>48</sup> The exclusion of Arabic sources (available in, among other places, Israeli archives) must detract from a balanced view or full picture of both sides of the conflict. Some critics also remarked on the suppression of specific aspects, such as the British role in subjugating the Palestinian people.

In discussing British-Arab relations, New Historians or sociologists have concentrated on the period between 1947 and 1950 or no earlier than the period of the [1939] white paper. At times, they have noted the “defeat” of the Palestinian people in 1948 and their inability to successfully withstand the Jewish forces . . . attributing this to the weakness of the Palestinian social structure or their political backwardness or the Arab countries, which had taken control of their destiny. Even the progressive critics, however, have neglected the tyrannical, hostile role played by Britain toward the Palestinian people, the clear identification [with the Jewish side] that characterized British policy during the Mandate and contributed to the establishment of the “Jewish State,” and the shattering of Palestinian society and its final surrender during the 1930s, and not, as some believe, during the 1940s.<sup>49</sup>

In this connection, Abu-Lughod finds no difference between the New and Old Historians, as neither related seriously to “the constant re-

sistance of the Palestinian people to British Mandate policy and Zionist aspirations.”<sup>50</sup>

In addition, Abu-Lughod charges all Israeli historians with orientalist tendencies as they deliberately ignored both “the actual presence of the Palestinian people on their land” and the social, economic, and cultural developments that predated the British Mandate, processes that do receive attention in the discussion of other societies in the Middle East. In Abu-Lughod’s opinion, this approach is conspicuous, for example, in Kimmerling and Migdal’s *Palestinians: The Making of a People*,<sup>51</sup> which, while different from the Zionist narrative, is nevertheless typical of orientalism. The book opens with the local rebellion against Egyptian rule in 1834 and then jumps forward eighty years as if nothing happened in the interim.<sup>52</sup> He concludes that when it comes to the Palestinians the New Historians “drift toward orientalism, which does not see [Palestinian] society as evolving like other human societies but as locked into the influence of static factors such as clan or family or tyrannical rule or religion, and they forget the ‘elite factor’ or permanent desire [of ruling echelons] to retain power. . . . The [orientalist] approach portrays the Palestinian people as strange and incomprehensible.”<sup>53</sup> According to ‘Abdo al-Asadi, on the other hand, the New Historians and post-Zionists are mainly at fault in their biased focus on the Israeli side and their periodization of short or defined time spans (1948 or 1967). This leads him to conclude that this is geared to papering over or resolving the contradictions and ensuing crises within Israeli society.<sup>54</sup>

‘Imad ‘Abed al-Ghani devoted the eighth chapter of *The Culture of Violence in Israeli Political Sociology* to a survey of the New Historians and post-Zionists, whom he perceives as attempting to analyze and criticize the Zionist model not in order to change it but in order to cleanse and purify it, making it more moral.<sup>55</sup>

Muhammad Ahmad al-Nabulsi, in another psycho-historical study of Israeli society, describes the writings of the New Historians as filled with “deceit and deception” and the historians themselves as “merchants of air.” He accuses them of regression and even “handing over their weapons” after the outbreak of the second Intifada and the election of Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon.<sup>56</sup>

As opposed to the skeptics and faultfinders who question the integrity of the New Historians, other observers stress the significance of their emergence and the need to acquaint oneself with the phenomenon and scrutinize the substance of their writings. Edward Said, for example, noted: “The great significance of the New Israeli Historians is that they

proved in their works that which Palestinians, historians, and nonhistorians had been saying all the time about what happened to us as a nation. They did this, of course, as Israelis; they wrote first and foremost in the name of their people and their society.”<sup>57</sup>

Sayyid Yasin, an Egyptian researcher specializing in Israel and the Arab world, also sees the New Historians as an important phenomenon, the first to write the “real history” of the establishment of the State of Israel. Their core significance, according to Yasin, lies in their having “removed the false consciousness that was dominant in Israeli society and which had emphasized the legitimacy of the establishment of the state and the morality of Israeli policy.”<sup>58</sup>

In contrast, Muhammad Abu Gadir, an Egyptian expert on Israel, sees the significance of the New Historians in the challenge they pose to Israel’s classical historical narrative and the fault they find with the foundations of its statehood.<sup>59</sup> Hisham Sharabi, a Palestinian professor of history at Georgetown University, also emphasizes the significance of the phenomenon and extols what he sees as the most important conclusion in their research, namely, that “the displacement of the Palestinians from their homes in 1948 was a consequence not of Palestinian fears, as claimed by the formal historical narrative of the State of Israel, but of a predetermined Zionist plan.”<sup>60</sup> Sharabi, however, faults the New Historians for describing the injustice but taking no public stand.<sup>61</sup>

### **Arab Cooperation with the New Historians? Palestinian New Historians?**

Interestingly enough, the Arab discourse on the Israeli New Historians rarely addresses the fact that there is no similar phenomenon among Palestinian historians. This may be due to the conspicuous imbalance between the two nations or the disproportionate development of the two societies and the two historical narratives. Discussion of the Israeli phenomenon has nevertheless encouraged some Palestinian and Arab writers to criticize the approach of their own societies and to call for discussion and self-examination. Edward Said, for instance, believed that a dialogue with Israel’s New Historians would be beneficial: “I think that Arab scholars should contact these historians and invite them to symposiums at universities and cultural institutions in the Arab world. Our duty as Palestinians and Arabs is to confront Israeli cultural and academic circles through brave and public participation in lectures at Israeli institutions.”<sup>62</sup>

Moreover, Said did not settle for public confrontation with the New Historians but urged Palestinians and Arabs to learn from them as regards the study of their own history and the examination of their own national myths. He called on Arab scholars and historians to scrutinize their history, including their leaderships and institutions, with a new critical look.<sup>63</sup>

Sayyid Yasin voiced a similar view when calling for Arab historians to build on the efforts of the Israeli New Historians and to translate their works into Arabic.<sup>64</sup> In contrast, Muhammad Ahmad al-Nabulsi opposes all cooperation with the New Historians, terming the entire phenomenon no more than a Zionist “ploy,” as they merely made public documents that Israeli law permitted them to see thirty years after the events.<sup>65</sup>

## Conclusion

The concepts of Israel’s New Historians and post-Zionists have drawn the attention of Arab and Palestinian writers and researchers. A large number of those who write about the phenomenon, however, are, despite extensive discussion, insufficiently acquainted with it. They tend to generalize, and their writings suffer from inaccuracies and confusion. Nevertheless, some (mostly those who have had contact with the exponents of the ideas) have succeeded in understanding the historical-cultural context in which the ideas emerged and have striven to derive benefit through increasing contact with these scholars in various arenas.

But since September 2000 the heightened Israeli-Palestinian conflict has seen a regression in the evaluation of the group of New Historians. This is especially true with respect to Morris, whose books serve as the foundation for composers and shapers of the Palestinian historical narrative. His so-called change of view has greatly embarrassed those writers who frequently cited and praised his works.

The approach of Arab and Palestinian writers, in my opinion, should not be based on the personal positions of individuals associated with the group. It should be more to the point, relating more to the research methods and findings of the New Historians and post-Zionists than to the individual conclusions based on these findings.

The call of Edward Said and like-minded scholars to establish and maintain contact with these scholars, invite them to universities and research institutions, and confront them at academic conclaves is a step in the right direction. It could lead to reciprocal influences and interaction,

which, in turn, could result in the emergence of a critical current on the Arab side, reflecting, among other things, an insider's view and resting on Arab documents that, to date, have not been adequately utilized, notably as regards inter-Arab relations on the Palestinian question and especially during the crucial period of the 1948 war, its repercussions, and its consequences.

Ignorance of Arabic is considered, perhaps rightfully, a drawback in the work of some New Historians. But let us not forget that their critical approach was aimed primarily at the narrative of the Zionist establishment. This establishment, in describing the rise of the State of Israel, fashioned a series of conventions and myths that in many cases were far from a faithful representation of actual events in the field and were recorded largely in the (Hebrew) documents of, first, various institutions and apparatuses of the Zionist movement and, subsequently, the State of Israel.

Actively combing through Arab archives and using Arab sources on these events will go a long way toward constructing a more solid Arab-Palestinian narrative, which can also help fill in the gaps in the work of Israel's New Historians.

## NOTES

1. Anita Shapira, *Yehudim Hadashim, Yehudim Yeshanim* [New Jews, Old Jews] (Tel Aviv, 1997), 19.

2. Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1949* (Cambridge, 1988).

3. This group includes the Hebrew-Arabic translation projects headed by Ghazi Al-Sa'adi in Amman, who specialized in the memoirs of Israeli leaders, as well as books on history and current events, particularly as pertains directly to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

4. See, for example, Muhammad Ahmad al-Nabulsi, "Khurafat ma ba'd al-suhyoniyah" [The Myth of Post-Zionism], *Al-Kifah Al-'Arabi* [The Arab Struggle], 30 October 2001.

5. This was the line Edward Said took, for example, in his *Nehayat 'Amaliyyat Al-salam Auslo uma Ba'dahu* [The End of the Peace Process: The Oslo Process and Its Consequences] (Beirut, 2002), 244.

6. Al-Nabulsi, "Myth."

7. An example of this approach can be found in 'Abdo Al-Asadi, "Qira'ah fi fikr mulawwitho Israel" [A Look at the Thoughts of the Troublemakers of Israel], *Al-'Arabi*, 1 October 2001.

8. Nur Masalha, "1948 and After Revisited," *JPS* 24, no. 4 (summer 1995): 92.

9. Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, "Israel al-thmenah" [The Eighth Israel], *Ajfa'k* 4 (winter 1999).

10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Edward Said, "Tarikh jadid, afkar jadidah" [New History, Old Ideas], *Al-Hayat*, 26 May 1998.
14. Ibid.
15. Muhammad Hamza Ghanayim, *Waghan leWagh* [Face-to-Face] (Ramallah, 2001).
16. Ibid., 49.
17. Ibid., 50.
18. Ibid., 52.
19. Al-Asadi, "Look," 16–17.
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