

About This Issue

AMEU draws its readership largely from among academics, church groups and various professional classes. These constituencies are represented in the makeup of our Board of Directors and National Council. Sadly, at this time, we report the deaths of three of our members: Robert E. Marsh, John G. Nolan, and W. Thomas Mallison. Coming respectively out of the business, religious and legal communities, they brought with them to our organization a wide range of experience and expertise. Yet, as the all-too-short paragraphs on page 2 suggest, their lives were far more than the sum of their sketchy biographical parts.

This issue's feature article by Ilan Pappé, an historian at Haifa University, challenges Israel's official account of what happened 50 years ago in Palestine. Dr. Pappé is one of a growing number of Israeli historians whose analyses of newly released documents by the U. S., England and Israel have led them to conclude that what really happened back then is far closer to what Palestinians have been saying all along.

Ilan Pappé also knows that revising history doesn't undo history's wrongs. He knows that acknowledging that Palestinians were driven from their homes in accordance with a Zionist Master Plan doesn't make the refugee camps go away. Photos of these camps, taken from United Nations files, appear throughout the pages of this article. They, after all, are the real witnesses to the Master Plan's success.—**John F. Mahoney, Executive Director**

Israeli Historians Ask:

What Really Happened Fifty Years Ago?

BY ILAN PAPPÉ

Since the 1980s, Israel's academia has been engaged in and torn by a debate on Zionist history in general and on the chronicles of the 1948 war in particular. Recently these issues have reached a wider public through mainstream newspapers, television and radio.

The debate is generated by Israeli scholars who challenge the official Israeli historical version of Zionism's origins and the birth of Israel. Theirs is a non-Zionist narrative of history and this is its main importance.

It is not that alternatives to the Zionist history are new. Ever since the state of Israel was created the official Zionist account of events has been challenged by competing historical narratives. First and foremost, there is the Palestinian version—a version man-



Ilan Pappé is the author of The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-1951, which is available through AMEU. See book catalog on pages 14-15.

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IN MEMORIAM

Robert E. Marsh. He played the piano by ear, painted museum-quality portraits, spoke Arabic, and never failed to phone me after an AMEU board meeting to say how well he thought it went — the “minutia” of Bob Marsh’s life that didn’t make it into his *New York Times* obituary.

The obituary did trace the main points: that he was born in 1914, served in WW II on the staff of General Douglas MacArthur, worked 30 years with the Arabian American Oil Company and its affiliate, the Trans-Arabian Pipe Line Company. Upon his “retirement,” up until his death on December 11, 1997, he was associated with The Olayan Group in Beirut, London, Athens and New York.

In 1978, Bob joined AMEU’s Board of Directors. From the beginning his interest centered on our Book Program. Education, he believed, was the key to eliminating discrimination and promoting justice. Through his efforts, and those of supportive friends of his, AMEU’s annual book sales rose by over 2,000 percent! Not that he would take credit for it.

The day before he died, he spoke to me about Mohamed Heikal’s book *Secret Channels*, a work that sold well in Europe but was not available in the United States — the sort of book Bob liked to make available through AMEU. His last words to me were “Let’s look into it, John.” We will, Bob.

W. Thomas Mallison. Tom Mallison liked to quote the Roman philosopher/emperor Marcus Aurelius who warned that the only thing separating men from the jungle was the law. And Tom knew firsthand what happens when the law fails. In World War II he received the Purple Heart for bravery under fire in the Pacific.

Following the war, Tom became one of the nation’s leading authorities in international law. He joined the George Washington University faculty in 1951 and served as the first director of its International and Comparative Law Program from 1967 until he retired in 1987. He also taught at the Naval War College, received a Doctorate of Juridical Science Degree from Yale University, served as principal United States negotiator on various international agreements, and worked, often pro bono, as a consultant for various organizations, including the UN.

It was his work on behalf of the Palestinians, however, that distinguished him. Only the rule of law, he was convinced, could bring peace to Israelis and Palestinians. To that end he worked courageously, often in

collaboration with his wife, Sally, to articulate the rights under international law of the weaker party in the conflict. *The Palestine Problem in International Law and World Order* by the Mallisons still stands as a classic work on the subject. In 1978, Tom willingly endorsed the aims of Americans for Middle East Understanding by lending the prestige of his name to our National Council. And on many occasions when I phoned him over the past 20 years, he offered us the benefit of his wise counsel.

Dr. Mallison died on November 24, 1997. Ramsey Clark, former U.S. Attorney General and Tom’s close friend, once said that he felt the truest test of any individual’s commitment to Human Rights in our society — with all its hopes, fears, love and hate — lies in the commitment to Human Rights for Palestinians. Tom Mallison passed that test with flying colors.

John G. Nolan. Bishop (then Monsignor) John Nolan served as Secretary General of the Catholic Near East Welfare Association from 1965 to 1987, and President of the Pontifical Mission for Palestine from 1976 to 1987. Ordained to the Catholic episcopacy in 1988, John was Auxiliary Bishop for the Military Services, U.S.A. from 1988 until his death on November 19, 1997.

He liked to play gin rummy — especially with wealthy businessmen. If he lost, he’d pick up the tab for lunch; if he won, the loser had to support a child in CNEWA’s Needy Child Sponsorship Program, a humanitarian effort he founded. My guess is John seldom lost.

From 1972 until 1988, Bishop Nolan served on AMEU’s board of directors, and from 1988 until his death, was a member of our National Council. It takes courage for a prominent Roman Catholic cleric in a major Catholic archdiocese to publicly endorse an organization that supports Palestinian rights and often is critical of Israel’s violations of those rights. For John it was all part of bringing comfort to the persecuted and truth to the uninformed.

I first met John Nolan in 1975, and in one of those strange twists and turns of history, too complicated to go into here, I can say that he is the reason I found my way to AMEU.

So, from your colleagues on the board and all of us on the staff of AMEU, our thanks, John, for all your support over our 31-year history.

And, on a personal note, I thank you.

—John F. Mahoney

(Continued from Page 1.)

ifested in scholarly works, novels and poetry and expressed through the years in various political declarations and resolutions by the Palestine Liberation Organization.

But there also were challenges from the Jewish community in Palestine and later from within Israeli society. The challengers within Israel itself were mainly supporters of the Israeli Communist Party or of small radical and leftist anti-Zionist political groups. In these political circles, history was taught very differently from the official version learned by most Israelis. The historical version of the non- and anti-Zionist left is closer to the Palestinian version than the official Zionist narrative. The official and mainstream Zionist version of events concerning the birth of Israel was also challenged by right-wingers in Israel who attributed the 1948 Jewish success solely to the Stern Gang and other Jewish terrorist organizations that fought against the British and clashed with Palestinians throughout the 1940s.

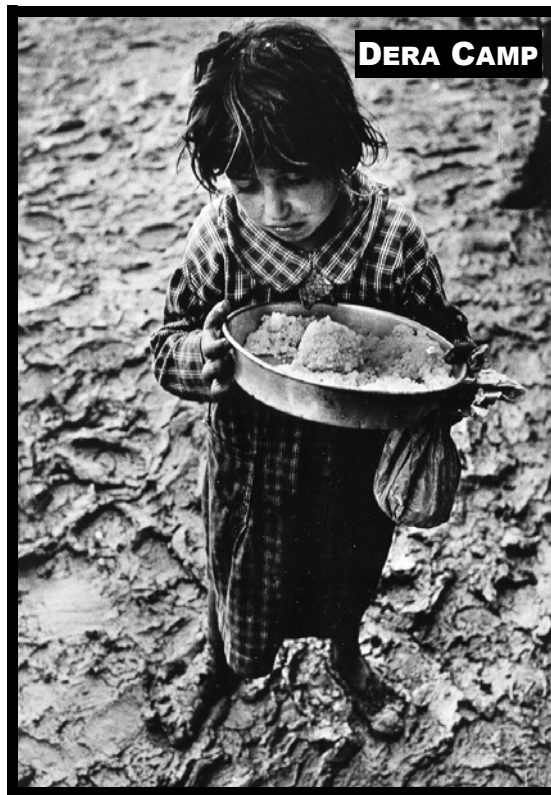
Not only was the 1948 story challenged. The prevailing myths about the treatment of minority groups in Israel received new scrutiny. After the 1967 war, Israel's Black Panther movement questioned the conduct of the young state towards the Jewish immigrants it brought from the Arab countries.

Similarly, the Palestinian community in Israel, the Israeli Arabs as they are known today, began to demand a re-reading of one of the ugliest chapters in the state's history. In the wake of the 1948 war, the Palestinian population that remained under Israeli rule was placed under a severe and brutal military regime for nearly two decades (1948-1966). This minority was robbed of every human and civil right and maltreated by local military governors. Awareness of this has cast a shadow over the collective memory of the Israeli left, which was accustomed to reminiscing about the little and beautiful state of pre-1967 Israel.

Israelis who challenged the official version of Israel's birth and its early years as a young state shared a common experience—their accounts were excluded from the historical Zionist narrative or distorted in the way Israeli history was taught in high schools and universities. They maintain that their history has been at best obfuscated or at worst totally erased from the Israeli national ethos, an ethos reflected in official state ceremonies, canonical literature, poetry and the

media

Until the 1970s, their cries of exclusion surfaced only in local novels and poetry or within political grassroots movements representing their particular interests. Their historical accounts were not presented as "facts" or as part of a scholarly attempt to reconstruct the past. And here lies the novelty of the phenomenon that emerged in the early 1980s. These challenges began to be heard not only by Palestinians and in parochial political and social movements, but were addressed within the Israeli academic community as well. The research of young Israeli scholars provided legitimization and validation to the challenging social and political voices crying out against the misconduct and evils inflicted first by the Zionist movement and later by the state of Israel.



In other words, from the very heart of the Israeli intellectual elite came a position adopting many of the political and ideological claims made by movements that represented the victims of official Zionism. One result of this academic inquiry into the past was the emergence of a historiographical picture that undermined some of the principal myths surrounding the creation of the Jewish state and the origins of the Zionist movement. In a country where the government frequently calls upon history to justify actions of the present day, this challenge can have far-reaching effects.

I cannot overemphasize the fact that it is professional Israeli historians, recognized as such in their own society, who are offering an alternative way of looking at the history of Israel and Zionism. They are accepted as qualified to judge what is true and what is false in

order to provide an accurate and reliable picture of the past.

The new historians have concentrated their scholarly scrutiny on three issues. The first is the origins of Zionist ideology and practice in the late 19th century; the second is an attempt to write the history of the 1948 war using newly available archival documentation; and the third is an analysis of the state's attitude towards the Palestinian minority and Jewish immigrants from Arab countries. Other issues are beginning to attract the attention of the more radical scholars in Israel. These include Zionism and the Holocaust, militarism in Israeli society, and analyzing Zionism from a feminist perspective to evaluate its effects on women. These issues, however, have not yet formed a substantial body of research.

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Origins of the New Scholarship

The new scholarship is being conducted by historians and sociologists who generally are of the same generation. Most of them were born in Israel, studied for their higher degrees abroad, and are now in their forties. Their thinking was shaped by five catalytic events. Ingrained historical myths of nations or ethnic groups are seldom shattered by the discovery of new historical evidence or because sociologists apply a radical new approach to their analyses. But dramatic political, social and economic events can create a reality that stands in stark contradiction to myths and official ideologies.

The five catalytic events and the affected myths are:

1. The 1973 Arab-Israeli

War. In this case the "victimized" myth was that of Israel's invincibility. The relative Arab success in the war and the total failure of Israel's world-renowned military intelligence sent shock waves throughout Israeli society. The war undermined common Israeli stereotypes about Arab military ineptitude. Arab forces were in fact able to carry out a surprise attack, fight in darkness, and persevere on the battlefield.

No less impressive and thought provoking was the pragmatic nature of the Arab military plan. After all this was *a priori* a limited war aimed at breaking a deadlock in the diplomatic efforts to solve the conflict. Thwarted after two years of futile attempts to convince Israel to accept the principle of land for peace, President Sadat of Egypt decided, in alliance with Syria, to try and take by force the areas occupied by Israel in the 1967 war. The war was conducted in such a way as to facilitate the swift intervention of the United Nations and the two superpowers. There was no room to hide an aggressive Israeli policy behind claims that the state faced neighbors bent on destroying it in all-out war.

Most Israelis were shaken in their previous confidence that its military could impose its will upon demand. Given the Arabs' relative success in the 1973 confrontation, new questions were raised about the previous wars. The reasons behind Israel's victory in the 1948 war were probed afresh. As a result, the official version of Israel's victory as miraculous was displaced by a more normal,

commonsensical view.

2. The political earthquake of 1977. The Labor Party dominated Zionist life from 1882 until the Likud victory in the 1977 general elections. The myth of Jewish homogeneity was exposed and broken in the wake of the violent polarization of Israeli society during the election campaign. One outgrowth was that Labor policies of the past were subjected to new and more critical scrutiny, including its policies in the 1948 war and the early years of statehood.

3. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's visit to Israel in 1977 and the ensuing peace process. The myth of Arab intransigence collapsed and the Israeli claim that there was no one to talk with on the Arab side proved to be untrue. Moreover, many Israelis were ready to blame their government for the failure of the Egyptian-Israeli negotiations on the future of the Palestinian Occupied

Territories, the autonomy talks as they were called then. The new willingness to blame Israel for being the inflexible and intransigent party to the conflict led to questions about how genuine Israel had been in seeking peace in previous years, particularly after the 1948 war.

4. Public debate about Israel's invasion of Lebanon

in 1982. For the first time in its history Israel was fighting without a national consensus. A public debate ensued about the war aims and the need to stay in Lebanon. Never before had a substantial segment of the citizenry expressed serious doubts about the wisdom

behind military operations undertaken by the government. This had been a sacred cow, a never-to-be-touched taboo. Reservists formed a movement refusing military service in Lebanon, which was the most extreme manifestation of the readiness to slaughter the cow and violate the taboo. This movement gathered momentum and opened the way for a re-examination of Israel's past military initiatives.

5. The continued occupation of the Palestinian territories and the Palestinian resistance to it.

Even before the *intifada*, Israeli Jewish society was divided on this issue in an unprecedented way. A growing number of Jews began to support an Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories and thus found themselves aligned with the mainstream of Palestinian politics in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

As the local leadership in the Occupied Territories identified more and more with the P.L.O., so were Zionists



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on the left ready to listen to an organization hitherto regarded as a terrorist movement *per se*. This political dialogue affected the academic community, exposing it directly for the first time to the Palestinian historical narrative. This exposure led a number of Israeli scholars to legitimize some of the major claims that Palestinians had posited throughout the years.

The major claim accepted by the new scholars is that Israel and the Zionist movement are directly responsible for the Palestinian Catastrophe. Acceptance of this claim alone has far-reaching implications for the present peace process, especially when negotiations address the issue of Palestinian refugees. These scholars may differ with their Palestinian counterparts about the reasons Israel and Zionism were so destructive to the Palestinians, but they agree on the end result. No less important is the acceptance of the Palestinian claim that the international community was pro-Zionist to the degree that Palestinians had little chance to realize their national aspirations.

Nonetheless, deep fissures remain between the historical perceptions of the Zionist Left and mainstream Palestinians. These gaps are clearly evident in the issues addressed and the priorities given to them in the new historical works produced nowadays by Israeli Jews and Palestinians.

Early Zionism Revisited

One of the first issues to be revisited in a new way was the nature of the Zionist project in Palestine from its very beginning. The new scholars in Israel, mainly sociologists, employed neutral methodology and a comparative theoretical approach to examine this subject.¹ Choosing to explore this issue at all was groundbreaking in itself. Hitherto, Jewish rights to Palestine were taken for granted by official historians; it was not a subject to be questioned.

The result was that for the first time Israeli scholars concurred with their Palestinian counterparts that Zionism was essentially a colonialist movement, motivated by financial and strategic interests, no different in fact from colonialist movements in 19th century Europe and employing methods similar to those of the Europeans who

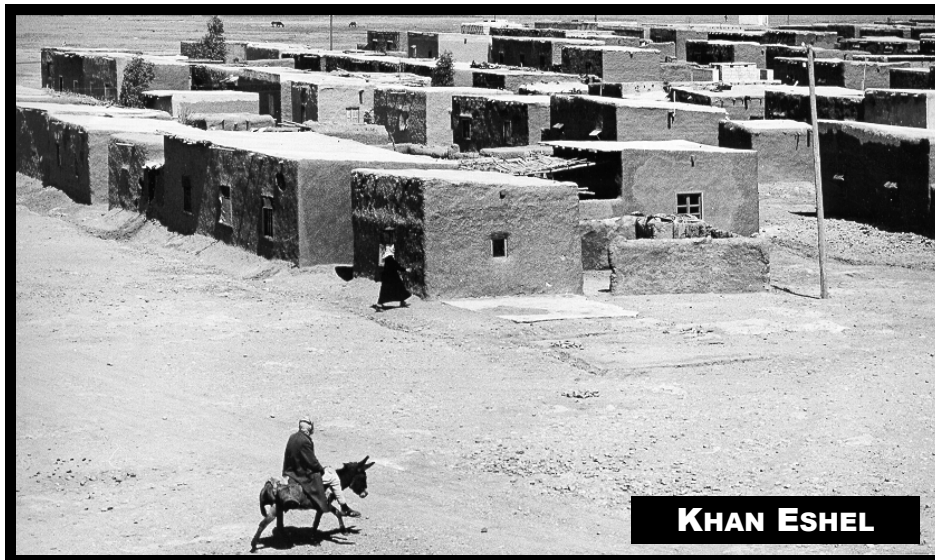
colonized Africa and Asia.

The new scholars also examined the Zionist success as an outcome of cooperation between British and Jewish colonialism. While Jewish colonialism was definitely moved by national considerations, at the end of the day it was carried out as a pure colonialist act against the local population: a mixture of exploitation and expropriation. The early Zionists lacked their own resources and means for a successful colonial enterprise. However, Britain made up for these deficiencies, first through the Balfour Declaration promising a Jewish homeland in Palestine, then through the infrastructure established under the Mandate.

This new view also has a different approach to the jewel in the Zionist crown of yesteryears: the kibbutz. Long touted as a paragon of socialist and communal life, the kibbutz is seen by the new scholars as a utilitarian, colonialist invention that enabled newcomers to cope with scarcity and a hostile environment.

A similar approach is employed with regard to other communal forms of settlement and even to the labor union, the pride of Israel's labor movement. The new scholars do not deny the socialist ideology behind some of these Zionist projects, but they accord this ideology a secondary role. Thus a trade union is not an organization meant to protect the

rights of Jewish workers; it is mainly a tool to oust Palestinians from the labor market in the Mandatory period.²



KHAN ESHEL

Rewriting the 1948 War

A second group of challengers are for the most part professional historians who have become known as the

“new historians.” Among the revisionists, their work, which focuses on the chronicles of the 1948 war, has received the widest exposure outside Israel. While the five catalytic events described earlier provide a partial explanation for the radical scholarly views coming from this group, the timing of their works also was determined by a more mundane factor. They were motivated to present a revisionist point of view to a large extent by the declassification of relevant archival material in Israel, Britain and the United States.

All three countries operate under similar regulations for

the declassification of diplomatic and governmental documents. Toward the end of the 1970s new material was made available to anyone wishing to look at the history of Palestine. Documentation for every other year in the Zionist history of Palestine prior to 1948 was accessible earlier. But no other year played the same emotional and ideological role in the lives of both Jews and Arabs in Palestine as did 1948: for the Israelis, a miraculous year of redemption; for the Palestinians, a catastrophic year of national disaster.

Some of the scholars mining the mountains of new documents were of an ideological persuasion that prepared them to take a more neutral position than their predecessors. For example, they referred to the war simply by the year it happened – the 1948 war, rather than the Israeli term, the “War of Independence,” or the Arabic reference, *Nakba* (Catastrophe). But more importantly, the end result of their research was an historical account that sharply contradicted the official Israeli version of the 1948 war.

The first book in this direction was Simha Flapan’s book, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities* that appeared in 1987.³ His work dealt specifically with the events of 1948, but was less documented than subsequent works on the subject. Those who followed complemented his work and expanded the scope of the debate. They viewed the events of 1948 in a wider historical context by connecting it to a discussion of the roots and meaning of Zionism. The latter development added new and far more intriguing explanations for Israeli conduct in the 1948 war.

Media interest, domestic and global, have kept the debate alive in the public at large. The issue has become part of the general debate on how to celebrate Israel’s 50th anniversary and how the history of the state should be taught and disseminated within Israel.

The new historians neither form a school of thought, nor do they agree on methodology. To convey the nature of what these revisionist Israeli historians have done, I will sketch the historical picture as it emerges from their work and juxtapose it with the official version—a version still taught in Israeli schools and still rooted deeply in the collective memory of Jewish society in Israel.

Challenging the Myth of Annihilation

The new historiographical picture is a fundamental challenge to the official history that says the Jewish community in Palestine faced possible annihilation on the eve of the 1948 war. Archival documents expose a fragmented Arab world wrought by dismay and confusion and a Palestinian community that possessed no military ability with which to threaten the Jews. The Arab world went about announcing its commitment to the Palestinians in strident, war-like rhetoric, but it did little on the ground to save Palestine.

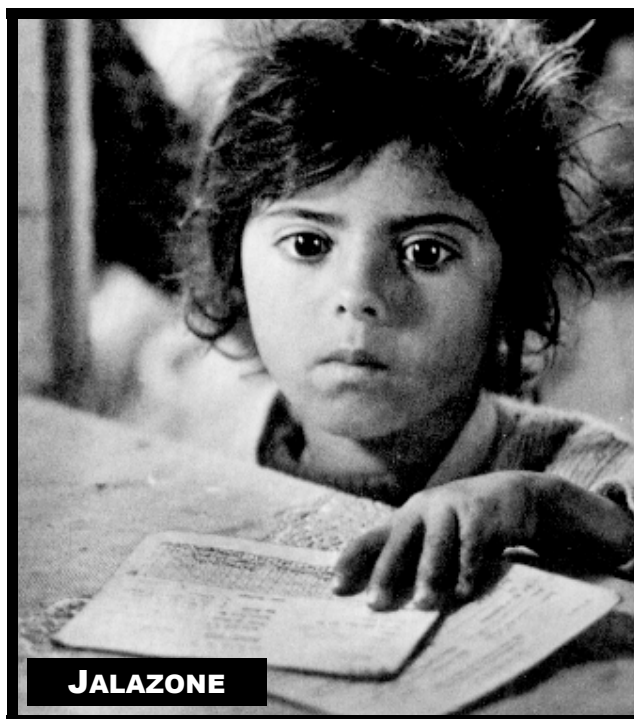
The new historians argue that annihilation was impossible because of Jewish superiority in two crucial areas, diplomacy and military preparedness.⁴ The Jewish community had carried the day in diplomatic maneuvering in the United Nations and by accurately analyzing the balance of military power on the ground. An unwritten agreement between the Jewish Agency and the Arab Legion, the strongest Arab force in the area, practically guaranteed that the battle-ready Jewish forces would prevail.

There are sociological explanations for the Jewish victories on the diplomatic and battle fronts. The Jewish community in Palestine is depicted as more highly organized than the Palestinians and much more aware of the need to prepare itself for the end of the Mandate. The Jewish community benefited from a

neutral British policy. London was worried only about securing a safe British withdrawal from Palestine once it had decided it could no longer hold the territory.

Contrary to both the Palestinian and Zionist historical narratives, the new historians do not accuse Britain of favoring either side or of collusion with the enemy. They also reject the claim of Jewish extremists that their terrorist campaign forced Britain to withdraw. An economic crisis in Britain and the overall decline of the British Empire forced Britain to be content with holding only those areas of its empire that were of high strategic value in the Cold War era. Palestine was not one of them. Early on, leaders of the Jewish community recognized the imminent end of British rule in Palestine, while the political leadership of the Palestinians seemed convinced that the British Mandate would remain longer, especially after the failure of the Palestinian revolt against it from 1936-39.

From the moment London decided to refer the Palestine



Mandate to the United Nations—from February 1947 onwards—the Jewish leadership in Palestine effectively mobilized its community and prepared it for the takeover of the Mandatory government and its functions. The Palestinian leadership, with its prominent members exiled abroad by the British, did very little in this direction, and failed to organize its community financially or militarily.

The result was that the Jewish community was superior both militarily and financially when a civil war broke out between the two communities in November 1947. Jewish superiority also was evident in the number of fighting men. In the local war, which lasted between November 1947 and May 1948, Jewish forces took control of all of the mixed Jewish-Arab towns in Palestine and seized crucial transport routes as well. The end of Palestinian presence in Palestine began not because few Jews fought against many Arabs, as the official Zionist version would have it, nor was it a miracle, as the mainstream Israeli historians tend to describe it. It was simply the outcome of a military advantage.

There also was the diplomatic battle over Palestine. In the official Israeli history this was another miraculous victory against all odds. The battlefield was the United Nations, to which the Palestine Mandate had been referred. The Zionist diplomats skillfully put forward the Jewish Holocaust in Europe in order to minimize the moral and political claims made by the Palestinian national movement or, as was more often the case, by the Arab states on behalf of the Palestinians.⁵

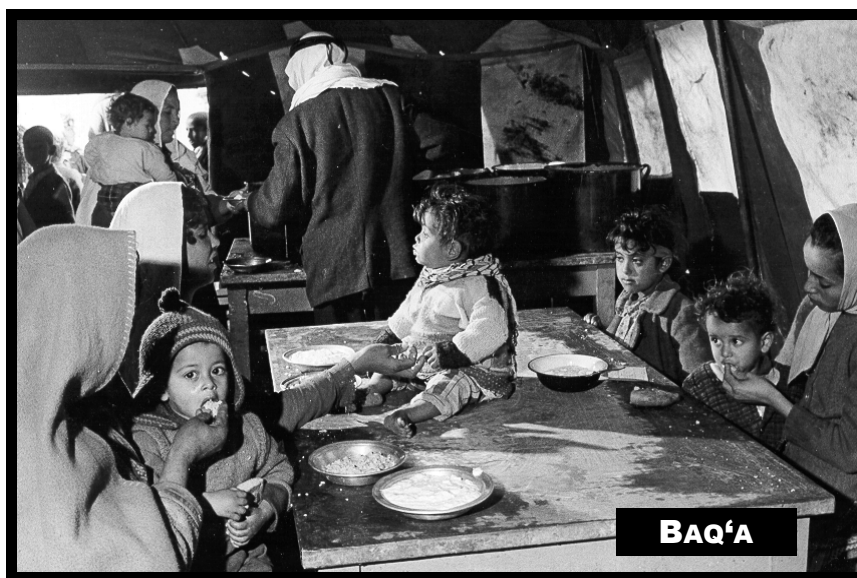
Various leaders presenting the Zionist case, among them Aba Hillel Silver, the leader of the American Zionist movement, asked the U.N. to realize that the Jewish community was asking not only for a solution to the Palestine problem, but also for compensation for the evils inflicted on Jews throughout 2,000 years of Christianity and the Holocaust.

The U.N. appointed a special body, the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), to make the decision over Palestine and UNSCOP members were asked to visit the camps of Holocaust survivors. Many of these survivors wanted to emigrate to the United States, a wish that undermined the Zionist claim that the fate of European Jewry was connected to that of the Jewish community in Palestine. When UNSCOP representatives arrived at the camps, they were unaware that backstage manipulations were limiting their contacts solely to survivors who wished to emigrate to Palestine.

UNSCOP accepted the Zionist reasoning and rejected the Palestinian position. It agreed to connect the fate of Jews wherever they lived with that of the Jewish community in Palestine. Thus, the demographic majority enjoyed by the Palestinians played no role in the commission's

considerations. The Palestinians' fear that they would be uprooted from their own homeland was simply pushed aside. These fears had been expressed in the 1930s by Ishaq Musa al-Husayni in his novel *Mudhakirrat Dajaja* (*The Memories of a Hen*). They became reality in 1948. When eventually UNSCOP made its famous partition proposal, later adopted by the U.N. General Assembly as Resolution 181, it granted the larger territorial share of Palestine to a future Jewish state and allocated the smaller area to the future Palestinian state.

The diplomatic battle also was won due to lack of interest and enthusiasm among the Arab diplomats in the U.N. who



took it upon themselves to present the Palestinian case. But even had they shown more interest, one doubts they could have changed the course of events for the Palestinians given the American pro-Zionist position. Americans ran the show in the United Nations and their pro-Zionism was a reflection of the strength of the Jewish lobby in Washington. The Soviet Union also had a pro-Zionist agenda at the time. The Americans helped the Zionist movement to pressure Latin American countries into voting for partition. If anyone was working against all odds, it was the Palestinians, who had neither superpower backing nor any way of moving behind the scenes of American politics.

How supportive was the Jewish Agency of the partition principle? The late Simha Flapan claimed that the only reason the Jewish Agency supported the partition plan was its knowledge that no Arab state or Palestinian leader could accept it. After all, according to the U.N. partition plan, 45 percent of the population of the proposed Jewish state were Arabs. Zionist leaders were totally opposed to a binational state. Some of the new historians repeated this logic, but one has to admit this issue does not figure as an important subject in the analysis of the history of 1948. Much more important seems to be the analysis of how the partition resolution

served the political goals of the Jewish community in Palestine.

Israel's siege mentality fostered and perpetuated the myth of annihilation and is central to Israel's collective memory of 1948. Yet it is clear that the international community was attuned to Israel's point of view and prepared to act in its favor. One need only look at the pro-Zionist and anti-Palestinian position of the two superpowers to conclude that at least diplomatically the Palestinians lost the battle over Palestine before one shot had been fired.

Britain's neutrality did not help the Palestinians either and the Arab world, as mentioned, did not contribute much beyond words and declarations. Most new historians agree that even after the entrance into the battle on May 15, 1948, of regular Arab troops, the comparative military reality on the ground still provides a logical explanation for Israel's overwhelming victory. There is little to warrant the official Israeli version of a vulnerable, bare-handed David fighting a fierce Goliath.

The lack of coordination among the Arab armies was the main reason the Arab world could not translate its demographic superiority into a military advantage. The Arab contingents also were ill-prepared and lacked military expertise. Only one Arab army, the Arab Legion of Transjordan, could have brought prepared and militarily experienced fighting men into the conflict, but they were kept on the sidelines by a covert understanding.⁶

The new historians insist that the military balance of power, indeed the results of the war itself, were considerably affected by the political agreement reached between the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Jewish Agency prior to the war. This agreement was tacit, not written, and it confined the Arab Legion to the struggle over Jerusalem and its vicinity. Thus it was disabled from joining a larger battle that could have linked it with Syrian troops entering Palestine in the north and Egyptian forces entering in the south. New evidence was found in Egypt of how Egyptian and Syrian generals were misled into believing their forces would eventually meet with the Legionnaires entering Palestine from the east. In return for limiting the role of the Arab Legion, the Kingdom of Jordan received *de facto* acquiescence from Israel to annex the parts of Palestine that became known as the West Bank.

The other Arab governments of the day sent far fewer troops than they had promised because they feared weakening their control over fragile political systems at home. Some of these countries were still under semi-colonial rule, some were emerging from such rule but still in the midst of a troubled transitional period.

A recurring theme in some of the works of the new historians is that the tacit understanding between the Hashemites and the Jews determined to a large extent the geopolitical reality of post-1948 Palestine. The Jews and Hashemites divided the country between them with not a modicum of Palestinian sovereignty or political presence. Historian Avi Shlaim called it Israeli-Jordanian collusion, doomed to failure exactly because it totally ignored Palestinian rights in Palestine.⁷

Thus, contrary to a long-cherished official history, a strong and efficient Arab force did not threaten the existence of a Jewish state, nor did the rest of the Arab armies possess the potential of its total destruction. One doubts whether they were capable of doing any more than taking and occupying isolated Jewish settlements for a short while.

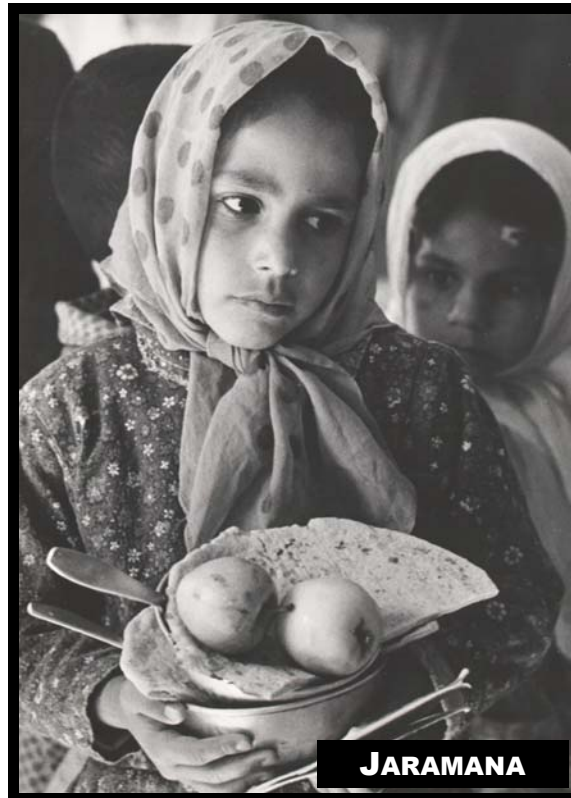
Israel's Responsibility for Refugees

The Jewish military advantage was translated into an act of mass expulsion of more than half of the Palestinian population. The Israeli forces, apart from rare exceptions, expelled the Palestinians from every village and town they occupied. In some cases, this expulsion was accompanied by massacres as was the case in Lydda, Ramleh, Dawimiyya, Sa'sa, Ein Zietun and other places. Expulsion also was accompanied by rape, looting and confiscation. Expulsion was not always direct.

Sometimes the Jewish fighters terrorized and terrified villagers into fleeing their homes. In a few cases total surrender saved some of the population from expulsion, but not always.

Did these atrocities and acts against civilians simply erupt in the heat of battle or were they the result of a premeditated expulsion plan? New historian Benny Morris, who wrote the most important scholarly research on this question, is joined by others in talking about this immoral chapter as emanating from the war atmosphere.⁸

Morris's conclusion differs from that of some Palestinian



historians, even though both rely on similar documentation. Nur Masalha's argument in *Expulsion of the Palestinians* is quite straight forward.⁹ From the very beginning, the Zionist movement considered compulsory transfer of the local population as the only possible way to settle the conflict in Palestine. It became an integral part of the Zionist strategy of survival. There was some hope that a voluntary transfer would be agreed upon, but it was recognized towards the end of the Mandate that only a compulsory one could work.

Moreover, while Morris limits the category of expulsion to direct physical expulsion, Masalha widens the scope to include psychological warfare, massacres, cutting off water and food supplies, and undermining the economy.¹⁰ Under this definition, many more Palestinians can be seen as victims of direct expulsory Zionist policy. In fact, apart from the 70,000 who left in the first wave, it includes everyone else.

The result of the war—the fact that so many Palestinians became refugees—led historians who had written before the declassification of new material to assume that only a Zionist policy of transfer could have caused such a mass exodus. After the declassification, Norman Finkelstein and other critics of Morris claimed that the documents Morris himself had unearthed indicate how systematic was the Israeli policy of expulsion.¹¹

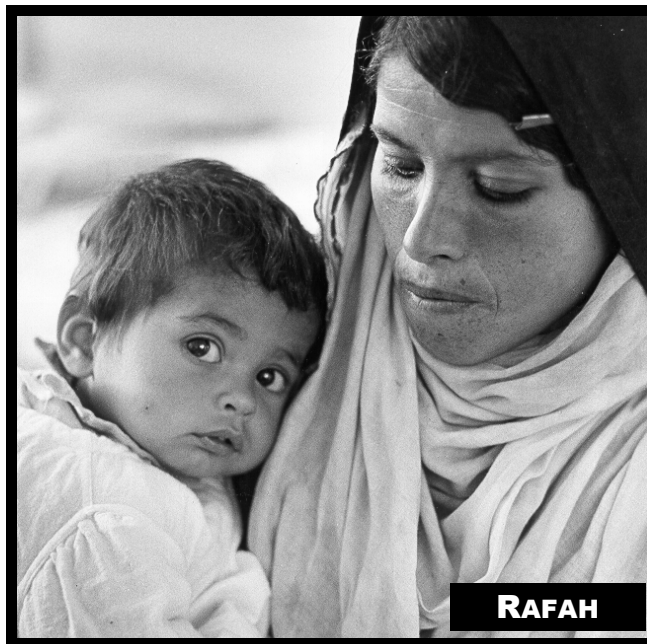
Walid Khalidi put forward the main counter-argument to Morris's version. In my book *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-1951*, I have devoted several pages to the Morris-Khalidi debate.¹² Here, ten years after the debate began, are their positions:

Khalidi reiterated the argument he had first made some two decades earlier about the existence of a Zionist master plan for the expulsion of the Palestinians. The declassification of new material and the appearance of Morris's work did not alter Khalidi's position. He always has based his view on Plan Dalet ("Plan D"), a document originally published in Hebrew that Khalidi translated into English in the 1960s.

Morris also writes about Plan D, describing it as a military strategy rather than a political blueprint for expelling Palestine's Arabs. The Jewish state needed to secure its interior in preparation for the impending battle along its borders. In practice, this meant the depopulation and destruction of the villages that hosted hostile local militia and irregular forces.¹³

But Morris's main point is that Plan D was not implemented at all. He describes a Jewish leadership that was

confused and indecisive under the stress of ongoing war, one that failed to provide clear guidelines on any issue. Morris attributes most of the expulsion decisions to local commanders who were probably not aware of Plan D. I find his view hardly convincing. It must be pointed out that Plan D specifically refers to the fate of the mixed towns. I quote my own counter-argument from my book:



someone out of his flat, the fact that he had left before I had a chance to expel him in no way alters the fact of my intention.¹⁴

In disagreeing with Morris, Khalidi, like Masalha after him, puts the plan in a wider historical perspective. Khalidi writes: "Plan D... was the name given by the Zionist High Command to the general plan for military operations within the framework of which the Zionists launched successive offensives in April and

May 1948 in various parts of Palestine. These offensives, which entailed the destruction of the bulk of the Palestine Arabs, were calculated to achieve the military *fait accompli* upon which the state of Israel was to be based."¹⁵

Khalidi and Morris agree that 70,000 refugees fled in the first wave and that about 250,000 were expelled in the final stages of war. However, this accounts for only half of the refugee population. The dispute between the two is about the 350,000 or so who exited Palestine between March and June 1948. While Morris thinks this half left of its own accord, Khalidi argues that it was expelled as well.

Another acute argument has centered on refugees from Haifa, around 65,000 in number. Zionist historiography cites Haifa as an example of Jewish efforts to persuade Arabs to stay. Morris, in this case, accepts the official version, Khalidi does not. Both Khalidi and Masalha describe the means by which the Haifa population was driven out. Haifa was evicted in the wake of plan D, as were the Palestinians in the mixed towns of Jaffa, Safad and Tiberias.¹⁶

Whether the expulsion is analyzed historiographically as the implementation of a master plan or as an unplanned development in the 1948 war, the mere reference to what the Israelis had done to put Palestinians to flight stands in stark contrast to the mainstream Zionist version of the war's history. The official version, reiterated lately by mainstream historians in Israel in their debate with the new historians, is

that the Palestinian leadership called upon its community to leave so that they would not impede the invading Arab armies. No recognition of atrocities beyond Deir Yassin is given in this version, and even this atrocity is attributed to renegade right wing terrorists, not to the Haganah, the main military force of the Jewish community. The new historians, on the other hand, attribute other massacres to the Haganah and some have even discovered a link between the Haganah and the Deir Yassin massacre.

The new historians' description of the moral conduct of the Israeli army calls into question the famous Israeli insistence that it educates its soldiers to believe in the "purity of arms." This oxymoron manifests the wish of the founding fathers of Zionism, who were mainly Labor Zionists, to present their movement as humane and liberal, a shining model for the rest of the non-democratic Middle East. Here, they were saying, is a people that uses force only when a brutal enemy leaves it no other option, a people wrought with remorse when it is involved in killing, wounding or harming the other. The new historians struck a nerve on this issue, eliciting a vigorous response from traditional Israeli historians, who have produced scholarly analyses in keeping with the idealistic application of force by the Zionist movement.¹⁷

This chapter in the new history shattered more than any other the founding myths of the state of Israel. A state founded in a dirty war ending in the expulsion of the local population was a historical version that was only heard before in Palestinian and Arab propaganda. But no less important was the new historians' erosion of the Israeli self-image of their state as being peace-loving and peace-seeking in comparison to an intransigent Arab world.

The Myth of Arab Intransigence

Even before the end of the 1948 war, the U.N. began a peace effort through the services of U.N. Mediator Folke Bernadotte. Bernadotte suggested a three-tier solution to the Palestine question: repatriation of the Palestinian refugees,

the internationalization of Jerusalem, and the partitioning of Palestine into two states. As long as the fighting continued, both sides refused to even begin negotiations on the Bernadotte proposal. But a growing number of U.N. members, among them the United States, gradually accepted

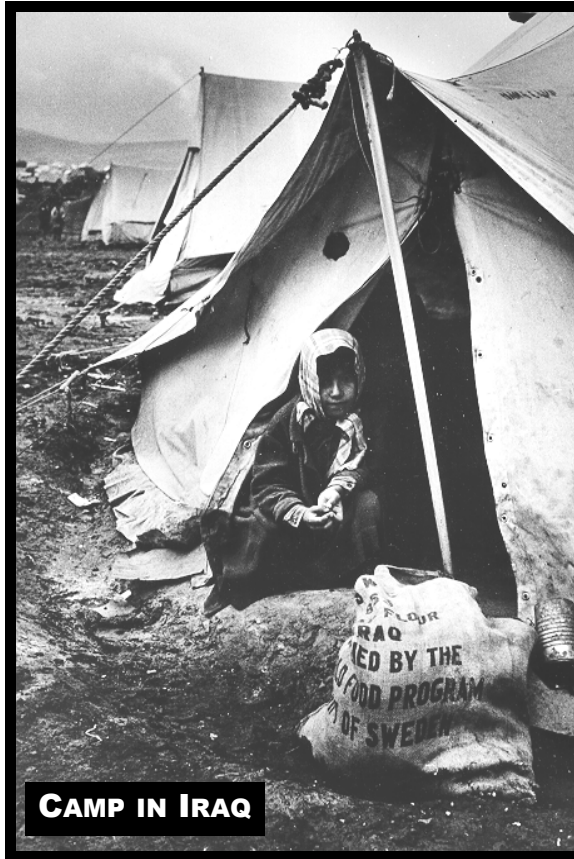
his logic. Israeli extremists assassinated Bernadotte because he had succeeded in returning the principle of partitioning the area into a Jewish and an Arab (or Palestinian) state to the international agenda.

After his assassination, the U.N. appointed the Palestine Conciliation Commission (PCC), with members from the U.S., France and Turkey. This body convened a peace conference in Lausanne, Switzerland in the spring of 1949. Before the conference, the U.N. General Assembly adopted a resolution that in effect replaced the November 1947 partition resolution. This new resolution, Resolution 194 of December 11, 1948, accepted Bernadotte's triangular basis for a comprehensive peace: an unconditional return of all the refugees to their homes, the internationalization of Jerusalem, and the partitioning of Palestine into two states. This time, several Arab states and various representatives of the Palestinians accepted this as a basis for negotiations, as did the United States, which was running the show at Lausanne.

The Israeli government was divided. Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion strongly opposed any peace negotiations along those lines. The only route he was willing to explore, and even this with little enthusiasm, was solidifying the understanding with the Hashemites over the partition of post-Mandatory Palestine. The only reason he was willing to allow Israel to participate in the peace conference was his fear of an angry American reaction. He also believed Israel's being accepted as a member of the U.N. depended on Israel's willingness to take part in the peace process.

Ben-Gurion's foreign minister, Moshe Sharett, thought differently and was at least willing to exhaust the window of opportunity offered by the U.N. The Americans, for a while, were quite irritated by Ben-Gurion's inflexible position and exerted pressure on the Jewish state by withholding financial assistance. But the Americans soon lost interest in the whole affair. American pressure suddenly stopped and the conference ended without any meaningful negotiations. The road to peace was not taken due to Israeli, not Arab, intransigence.

This chapter also reveals the differences that remain between the Palestinian narrative and the new historians. Palestinian and other Arab historians find it unacceptable



that, so early on, there was a willingness in the Arab world to accept Israel as a *fait accompli*, provided Palestine would be divided according to the 1947 plan (i.e., a Palestinian state of the Galilee, West Bank and Gaza Strip). Such acceptance is seen as tantamount to treason for abandoning the right of the Palestinians to struggle for the whole of Palestine.

Reexamining the Young State

The social cry heard in the 1970s by Jews from North African origin—a cry against social and economic deprivation—was brought to the fore by the then opposition party, the Likud, in the 1977 general elections. The Likud's leader, the late Menachem Begin, succeeded in focusing the attention of the electorate on the issue of discrimination against Sephardic Jews throughout the years of Labor rule in Palestine and later in Israel.

Begin exposed existing rifts in the delicate structure of Israeli society. After a political protest movement emerged and the social outcry was voiced, scholars in academia began looking more critically at the way the country was shaped in its very beginning. The new historiographical picture—very much as in the case of early Zionism and the 1948 war—was, to put it mildly, far from complimentary to the revered forefathers of the state. Although the scholars accepted the objective difficulties faced by the young state, they attributed the maltreatment of Arab citizens and Jewish Arab immigrants to an ideology of superiority and, at times, racism towards Arabs in general—and not to “difficult times.” Racism, social insensitivity and patterns of behavior common to a veteran group of immigrants towards newcomers and the “other” underlay a policy that widened social and economic gaps in the Jewish states. This policy was a far cry from the Zionist ideal of creating a homogenous, thriving society of “new Jews.”

Until the 1970s, Israel's official sociologists described the country as a successful model of modernization where the different ethnic and cultural groups became as one in a melting pot. But the club of the happily assimilated usually excluded anyone who did not share the European cultural aspirations of the Jewish state's founders. Palestinians and Oriental Jews were the main victims of this attempt at forced Westernization and, for different reasons, it also affected the

status of women in Israeli society. Jewish nationalism was no less misogynist than it was anti-Arab.

The critical sociology emerging in the 1970s went much further than merely portraying a different Israeli society and state in the 1950s. It loudly proclaimed what some of the new historians of the 1948 war had only hinted at. It accused the mainstream Israeli academic community, especially its sociology and history departments, of providing the academic and theoretical scaffolding for justifying the brutal policies of modernization and Judaization in the early 1950s. Such sociologists explained the policies and conduct of the government vis-a-vis Arab Jews and the Palestinians who remained in Israel after the 1948 war as a natural and positive course of historical development. It was associated with enlightenment, liberalism and the faithful application of democratic principles.¹⁸



Conclusions

Scholars who make up the new Israeli historians and sociologists differ on many essential points and I have knowingly reduced their arguments into one point of view for the purposes of this brief treatment. However, they have many common features. They work from within Israeli society, not against it. They strive to construct Israel as a normal society, not as a society of chosen Jews who are part of a unique

or sacred course of history. They wish to rectify what their research reveals as past evils.

They see themselves as successors of Jewish settlers who succeeded in conquering Palestine not because they possessed an ideology that was morally or humanly superior to the native population but, on the contrary, because their ideology justified the use of every possible inhumane means to implement their vision. Other colonialist societies have resorted to similar practices to subdue and exploit native populations. There was a high price exacted in creating a Jewish state in Palestine. And there were victims, the plight of whom still fuels the fire of conflict in Palestine.

These challengers to the long-held histories and myths directly and indirectly expose the link between past and present. They associate current problems tearing Israeli society today with the inherent problems resulting from the way the Jewish state was established. These problems prevent the Israel of today from finding the way to reconcile Jewish nationalism and the principles of democracy or the

values of liberalism.

The basic contradiction between the ideals of Zionism and the interests and aspirations of a local Palestinian national movement and society are still with us, although we may have a better understanding of the origins of this contradiction because of the work of these new historians. The principal victims of this clash between the ideals of Zionism and the reality in Palestine were the hundreds of thousands of refugees who lost their land and their hopes for a normal existence as people in their own homeland. Rewriting history to register the truth of those past cataclysmic events is one way of acknowledging their plight and, in doing so, advancing the chances for peace.

More than anything else the new scholars challenged the collective memory of most Jews in Israel, particularly the collective memory of 1948, a year that still fuels most of the principal Israeli myths. It had a twofold effect on Israeli historiography: it legitimized the historical narrative of the Palestinians on the one hand, and it somewhat “normalized” the national collective memory of Israelis on the other.

In their finding that it was not an Israeli David defeating an Arab Goliath in the 1948 war, the new historians sent a message to Israeli society that Israel is not an invincible state that can necessarily live by its sword and force its will by its army. Historical circumstances unfavorable to Israel can develop at any given moment. The nation should pursue paths that will gain acceptance by its neighbors.

Unfortunately, some Israelis, following this logic, support a strong nuclear potential. But this is not the message carried by the new historians. Their conclusion is that Israel must acknowledge its neighbors’ fears and understand that the Arab states and the Palestinians do not see the “Defense” in Israeli Defense Forces, but see only an army used again and again to expand the territory of the Jewish state. Israel has to recognize how the other side perceives it: a state established on the ruins of Palestine as the result of a long process of Jewish colonization beginning in 1882. Some Israeli scholars have begun not only to recognize this as a position of the other side, but as a truthful description of past events.

How important is this new outlook in shaping Israel’s future conduct and nature? It is a difficult issue and brings us to a more general question: how much does academia in general affect society as a whole?

The debate on Israel’s origins aroused great interest in Israel—but in most cases it generated angry reactions against what was seen as betrayal. Nonetheless, the Israeli discourse now includes references that no longer ignore alternative analyses of what occurred in the past. Some mainstream scholars, as well as authors of new textbooks for schools and producers of television and radio programs, accept at least some of the points made by the new scholars. Although arguing against the new view, they concede that Israel or

Zionism is seen as maltreating the Palestinian population in ways that explain current Palestinian and Arab animosity. These explanations of Palestinian grievances no longer rest on the conventional depictions of Arabs as emotional people susceptible to irrational and fanatic behavior.

More importantly, the new way of looking at the myths of Israel’s foundation is being expressed beyond academia. Novelists, artists, filmmakers and playwrights have produced works with historical references that convey the messages emanating from the new scholars’ research to wider audiences. Of particular interest are films that portray a different kind of Palestinian, criticize the conduct of Israeli soldiers and show empathy to the aspirations of the other side in the Arab-Israeli Conflict.

For example, “Crossfire” was the first Israeli movie to portray the frustration and despair that Palestinians felt in 1947 when they learned that the U.N. General Assembly had passed the partition resolution. In another film, “Cup Final,” about an Israeli soldier taken captive by the P.L.O. in the Lebanon war, there are frequent references by the captors to the link between their actions and Israel’s responsibility for turning Palestinians into refugees. The television documentary “Tekuma,” carried on Israel’s Channel One, is devoted to the history of Israel and presents an account affected to a large extent by the new historians’ work.

As the academic debate continues, the industry of these new cultural products grows, and these may in the long run strengthen the political voices already presenting these issues on the margins of the Israeli political map.

End Notes

1. Uri Ram, *The Changing Agenda of Israeli Sociology; Theory, Ideology and Identity* (State University of New York Press, New York, 1995). The

(Continued on page 13)



Only an internal revolution can have the power to heal our people of their murderous sickness of causeless hatred. It is bound to bring complete ruin upon us. Only then will the old and young in our land realize how great was our responsibility to those miserable Arab refugees in whose towns we have settled Jews who were brought from afar; whose homes we have inherited, whose fields we now sow and harvest; the fruit of whose gardens, orchards and vineyards we gather; and in whose cities that we robbed, we put up houses of education, charity, and prayer while we babble and rave about being the 'people of the book' and the 'light of the nations.'—*Jewish philosopher Martin Buber writing to fellow Jews in the publication Thud's Ner, 1961.*

There is not one single place built in this country that did not have a former Arab population.—*Moshe Dyan, a former Israeli Defense Minister, speaking in 1967 to students at Technion, Haifa.*

(Continued from page 12)

whole book is devoted to this phenomenon. A further discussion is in three articles: Ilan Pappé, "Post-Zionist Critique on Israel and the Palestinians," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Part I, 102, Volume 26/2 (Winter 1997), pp. 29-41; Part II, 103, Volume 26/3, (Spring 1997), pp. 37-43; Part III, 104, Volume 26/4 (Summer 1997), pp. 60-69.

2. The assertion about the kibbutz is made by Gershon Shafir in *Land, Labor and the Origins of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, 1882-1914* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1987) and the one about trade unions is made by Zachary Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies; Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906-1948* (California University Press, California 1996).

3. Simha Flapan, *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities* (Croom Helm, London 1987).

4. This claim is made by Avi Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1988) and Ilan Pappé, *Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948-1951* (St. Martin's Press, New York 1988).

5. See the testimony of a member of UNSCOP, Jorge Gracia-Granados, *The Birth of Israel* (New York, 1948), pp. 6-9.

6. The balance of military power is discussed in Ilan Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-1951* (I. B. Tauris, London 1992), pp. 102-134.

7. Shlaim, *Collusion*, *ibid.*

8. Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-49* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1988).

9. Nur Masalha, "A Critique of Benny Morris," *Expulsion of the Palestinians* (Institute of Palestine Studies, Washington 1992), pp. 175-190.

10. "The Debate on the 1948 Exodus," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol.

21, No. 1 (Autumn 1991), pp. 90-97.

11. Norman G. Finkelstein, *Image and Reality in the Israeli-Palestine Conflict* (New York 1995), p. 51-87.

12. Pappé, *The Making*, pp. 87-101.

13. Morris, *Birth*, pp. 62-63.

14. Pappé, *The Making*, p. 94.

15. Khalidi, "Plan Dalet," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1, p. 8.

16. Pappé, *The Making*, p. 94.

17. This appears in a recent book by Anita Shapria, *Land and Power, The Zionist Resort to Force* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1992).

18. A book appeared in Hebrew summarizing the contributions of the new sociologists: Uri Ram (ed), *The Israeli Society: A Critical Approach* (Magemnot, Tel-Aviv 1988).

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Ilan Pappé, *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-1951*, (I. B. Tauris, London 1992).

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Tom Segev, *1949 The First Israelis* (Domino, Jerusalem 1984).

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