

# The Historiography of Israel's New Historians; rewriting the history of 1948

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*To Marie*

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## Introduction

My motivation for embarking on this study of the historiography of Israel's "New Historians", was frankly the discovery of the level of misunderstandings, distortions and plain propaganda expressed by the pro-Israel lobby in Norway. During my studies at bachelor level at the University of Bergen, I was reading historical literature that contrasted the views expressed by what I call the "Christian Zionists" on many levels. Their views I knew intimately from an upbringing in a conservative Christian community, and from my teachers in upper secondary boarding school which was owned by the pro-Zionist Norwegian Lutheran Mission. These views were of course religiously inspired: - The creation of the modern state of Israel was the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies in the Bible, and the Jewish victory in the 1948 "War of Independence" was a miracle only possible by divine intervention. The Jews could not be blamed for the Palestinian refugee problem, and the fault for the continuant conflict lay solely on the Arabs.

However, at the same boarding school I was also introduced to the plight of the Palestinian people through a newfound friend with a Marxist background. He told me about Palestinian children being tortured in prison after throwing rocks at Israeli soldiers, and enlightened me on the Israeli-Palastini death toll-ratio during the first Palestinian intifada. I started to question the blind support for Israel amongst my teachers and other conservative Christian authorities, and donned a red *keffiyeh*, a Palestinian headscarf as a symbol of support for the Palestinian case (this was before it became a fashion and lost all political denotation, and us wearing them raised heads at the conservative Christian boarding school).

My adolescence rebellion aside, understanding that there was more than one side of the conflict was more than many in my surroundings were able to do. I grew tired of endless discussions (of which there were many) about who was guilty of what in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and decided to study the question in more depth at the University of Bergen. I wrote a paper on the Oslo peace-process as a conclusion of my bachelor degree, and discovered that there were a lot of discrepancies between the official Israeli narrative expressed by the diplomats of the Israeli foreign office, and the historiography of Israeli historians recommended as credible sources by the University. I found this discrepancy intriguing, and understood more of why pro-Zionists in Norway and elsewhere could continue expressing a long since debunked

mythology of the birth of Israel. They simply reproduced the propaganda they were being fed by the Israeli foreign relations officials. Why Israeli officials believe that it is in their best interest to present half-truths and sometimes blatant lies to the Western audiences could be a whole other research project. My interest has been to try to understand why the Israeli historians who are known as the New Historians have not been able to change the paradigm of the official Zionist narrative.

I believe that my research is significant for the following reasons:

One: There is a paucity of scholars outside Israel who work in the field of Israeli historiography, and those who do often fail to steer clear of the political polarization due to the Arab-Israeli conflict:<sup>1</sup>

*“The attribution of responsibility in an ethnic conflict such as that between Israelis and Palestinians, entirely to one of the antagonists is a product of volition and filtered cognition, an assertion by the will more than an exercise of judgment. Operating in unintended symmetry, champions and revilers of Israel have constructed historical narratives that free their constituencies of accountability for their actions. The normalization of Israeli historiography demands removing it from the framework of competitive victimhood.”<sup>1</sup>*

Any contribution from outsiders who manages to avoid the pitfalls of victimization of one of the parties, is potentially an important one. Standing with one foot in both the Christian conservative camp, as well as the left-wing pro-Palestinian camp, I hope I have been able to address this question with the balance required. I know the history of the Holocaust and respect the unique situation of the Jewish people in the aftermath of the Second World War. At the same time I know and respect the history of the Palestinian *Nakba*, the origin of the Palestinian refugee problem. If my thesis is found unsatisfactory by advocates from both parties, I might still have found the right balance.

Two: The palpable existence of a mythology surrounding the birth of Israel is not a viable *status quo* for the historical understanding of the Arab-Israeli conflict. My

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<sup>1</sup> Penslar, Derek J. (2007). *Israel in History*. New York, Routledge.

position is that all myths must be debunked and holy cows slaughtered. In this case, this is especially important as the existence of myths might be blocking the road towards a finalized peace treaty between the Israelis and the Palestinian people. There must exist a common perception of what happened in 1947-1948 if the parties shall be able to agree on how to deal with the Palestinian refugee problem. My hope is that this thesis will help to cast a light on the historiography of the conflict, and thus be a small contribution to establishing a commonly accepted perception of the history.

This master thesis is divided in five chapters in addition to the introduction and the conclusion. The first chapter is a short historical background that serves as an introduction to the history of Palestine and Israel. The second chapter is an overview of the historiography of Israel, or more precisely the historiography on the state of Israel by Israeli historians, as well as containing a short overview of a selection of Palestinian historians and their writings on the *Nakba*. Thus I am able to place the writings of the New Historians in the historiographical context. The third chapter contains a short biography of each of the New Historians reaching up until the emergence of the New Historiography as a phenomenon in the late 1980s. It also contains an overview of the political and historiographical developments that affected the development of the New Historiography. This is vital in understanding how such a unique new perspective could emerge. In chapter four I present an overview of the main themes and findings of the New Historians, as well as a discussion on the methodology employed by the New Historians and their underlying ideologies. In chapter five I explore the personal repercussions experienced by the New Historians as a consequence of the controversies surrounding their findings, as well as the political and historiographical consequences of the New Historiography.

Finally: This master thesis does not follow the normal approach of such thesis, in that it is not a historical research of a period or an event, but rather a historiographical research – a survey of the historiography of a certain group of historians. The methodology of this thesis thus differs somewhat from other history master thesis. Furay and Salevouris (1988) define historiography as "*the study of the way history has been and is written — the history of historical writing... When you study*

'historiography' you do not study the events of the past directly, but the changing interpretations of those events in the works of individual historians."<sup>2</sup> As a historiographer I want to capture the essence of a selected historian or history writing of a certain era. I also need to place the selected historiography in its context, and explain the catalysts for the development of different historiographical approaches. The most important reason for doing historiographical research is being able to explain how not only history itself, but also the history-writing can shape and change a nation. An example of such a work is Q. Edward Wang's book, *Inventing China through History: The May Fourth Approach to Historiography* (2001)<sup>3</sup>.

For a historiographical work, this master thesis has a narrow perspective. I focus on four books from four historians published in 1987 and 1988 which were the foundation of the New Historiography of Israel. These will be presented in chapter two.

### *Research Questions*

In developing the master thesis, I found that formulating precise research questions helped focus my reading. However, the thesis goes beyond the framework of these questions, which I have attempted to answer in the conclusion.

Research question one: What is new in the historiography of the New Historians?

Why were they called "the New Historians"? What is new about them? These are the questions I have attempted to answer in the thesis. It is an essential question, as it goes to the core of the debate between the Israeli historians of the different traditions. My thesis will show that than writing "new history" as the term is known from the historiographical trend of *nouvelle historique* in France, the so-called New Historians (I will still use this term all though the thesis) really are classical

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<sup>2</sup> From Furay and Salevouris (1988) *The Methods and Skills of History: A Practical Guide*. Referred in an article on Wikipedia. URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historiography>. Retrieved: 13.11.12

<sup>3</sup> Referred to in George G. Iggers and Q. Edward Wang's (2008), *A Global History of Modern Historiography*. Pearson Education Limited, Great Britain. (Page X).



revisionists which have freed themselves from the paradigm of the Zionist historiography of Israel.

Research question two: Why did the historiography of the New Historians cause such fierce reactions?

Yes indeed, why? Because the reactions have evidently been fierce, and the debate has been heated if not even a hateful one. One New Historian has been forced into exile, while another has conceded from many of his previous views. My thesis will show that a combination of the New Historiography having a real impact on the politics of peace-negotiations, as well as the indignation of Zionist historians which indirectly were discredited by the New Historians, fueled the criticism.

These questions have helped me keeping to a certain line of research, but a third question has always been the main focus of my thesis:

Research question three: Why was the New Historians unsuccessful in changing the paradigm of the official version of the birth of Israel?

The answer to this question is found within the mentality of the Israeli society. - A mentality that has been changing over the years, and has been drastically affected by the ongoing conflict with the Palestinians. The paradigm of Israel historiography was shifting during the 1990s, opening for new historical interpretations. But the collapse of the Camp David agreement in 2000 and the following second intifada shifted the Israeli society markedly to the right, which effectively was the end of accommodation to the historiography of the New Historians.

## **Chapter 1: Historical Background**

The purpose of this chapter is to give the reader an overview of the long lines of the history of Israel up to the first Arab-Israeli war 1947-1949, and by this establishing a common ground of understanding about the Arab-Israeli conflict and the historiography that deals with this conflict. The sources used in this chapter are mostly academic secondary literature, and the chapter is written in an effort to avoid any pitfalls of controversy.

## Mandate period

The League of Nations approved the establishment of the mandate of Palestine in June 1922 in the aftermath of the British conquest of the southern Ottoman Middle East during World War I. The mandate came to effect September 29th 1923. Even before the establishment of the mandate, the Zionist movement founded by Theodore Herzl, had facilitated mass immigration of Jews into Palestine. These waves of immigration known as the “aliyahs” (Hebrew, meaning “ascend”), were a part of the Zionist plan to found a national home for Jews from all over the world in Palestine in accordance with the Balfour-declaration (see figure 1, next page).<sup>4</sup> Pogroms<sup>5</sup> in Russia, and political persecution of Jews in Western Europe<sup>6</sup> accelerated the exodus of European Jewry.



Foreign Office,  
November 2nd, 1917.

Dear Lord Rothschild,

I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet

'His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country'

I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.

Y. a. i.  
Arthur Balfour

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<sup>4</sup> Cleveland, W. (2004). *A History of the Modern Middle East*. Oxford, Westview press. (p. 244, 254)

<sup>5</sup> Violent riots targeting Jews in cities all over the vast Russian empire

<sup>6</sup> See the “Dreyfus affair”. URL: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/anti-semitism/Dreyfus.html> retrieved 18.09.12

Figure 1.

### *Jewish Immigration*

Although European Jews in much larger numbers immigrated to Western countries such as Great Britain and The United States, thousands of Jews settled at the beaches of The Palestine Mediterranean Coast. This led to a series of conflicts and civil war between Jews, Arabs and the British during the mandate period, most notably the Arab revolt in 1936-39 which was violently brought down by the British troops assisted by Jewish militia<sup>7,8</sup> The Arabs felt betrayed by the British, who had given the leaders of the Arab uprising against the Turks during the World War I, promises of Arab sovereignty in Arab-speaking parts of the former Ottoman Empire).<sup>9</sup> In an attempt to appease the Arab population of Palestine, the British authorities tried to restrict the immigration of Jews to Palestine. This policy was a part of the *MacDonald White Paper of 1939*<sup>10</sup> which also declared that the British obligations to the Jews in the Balfour declaration were fulfilled now that 450.000 Jews lived within the boundaries of the mandate of Palestine. Further on, that the British could not accept the establishment of a Jewish state which left the Arab population as Jewish subjects, as this would be in conflict with the promises made to the Hashemites<sup>11</sup>.

*"His Majesty's Government believe that the framers of the Mandate in which the Balfour Declaration was embodied could not have intended that Palestine should be converted into a Jewish State against the will of the Arab population of the country. [...] His Majesty's Government therefore now declare unequivocally that it is not part of their policy that Palestine should become a Jewish State. They would indeed regard it as contrary to their obligations to the Arabs under the Mandate, as well as to the assurances which have been given to the Arab people in the past, that the Arab*

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<sup>7</sup> The Jewish militia was called *Haganah*, Hebrew for *defense*.

<sup>8</sup> Cleveland, W. (2004). *A History of the Modern Middle East*. Oxford, Westview press. (p. 260)

<sup>9</sup> Cleveland, W. (2004). *A History of the Modern Middle East*. Oxford, Westview press. (p. 158)

<sup>10</sup> Named after Malcolm MacDonald, The British Colonial Secretary who presided over it.

<sup>11</sup> The Arab dynasty of King Hussain of the Hijaz and his descendants.

population of Palestine should be made the subjects of a Jewish State against their will.”<sup>12</sup>

### *The Second World War*

Shortly after the White Paper policies were enacted, the World War II broke out. The Zionists leader, David Ben-Gurion ushered militiamen from the *Yishuv*<sup>13</sup> to join the fighting on the British side against the Nazis, proclaiming: “*We must support the (British) army as though there were no White Paper, and fight the White Paper as though there were no war.*”<sup>14</sup> While thousands of Jewish volunteers went to fight on the British side, the Zionist organizations undermined the White Paper policies to limit Jewish immigration to Palestine. In open defiance of the British policies, the Jewish Agency<sup>15</sup> hired ships to ship Jews out of southern Europe landing them on the shores of Tel Aviv, trying to bring as many Jews as possible to safety in Palestine away from the atrocities and genocide that was going on in Nazi Occupied Europe.<sup>16</sup>

However, the feeling of injustice in the policies of the British White Paper of 1939 was not forgotten in the turmoil of the war. If anything, the resentment toward the British policy of limiting the number of Jewish immigrants only grew as the reports from the concentration-camps arrived after their liberation at the end of the war. Although Ben-Gurion wanted to wait the war out before confronting the British and claiming independence, not everybody had his patience. *Lehi*<sup>17</sup>, an offshoot of *Irgun*<sup>18</sup>; the

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<sup>12</sup> Webpage: The Avalon Project, Yale. British White Paper of 1939. URL: [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/brwh1939.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/brwh1939.asp), retrieved 18.09.12

<sup>13</sup> Hebrew: referring to the body of Jewish residents in Palestine, before the establishment of the State of Israel

<sup>14</sup> Teveth, S. (1987), *Ben-Gurion: The Burning Ground, 1886–1948*, Houghton Mifflin

<sup>15</sup> The pre-state Zionist leadership of the *Yishuv* led by David Ben-Gurion.

<sup>16</sup> Cleveland, W. (2004). *A History of the Modern Middle East*. Oxford, Westview press. (p. 262)

<sup>17</sup> Formally *Loḥamei Herut Yisra'el* Hebrew: *Fighters for the Freedom of Israel*, (also called the Stern-gang. Zionist extremist organization in Palestine, founded in 1940 by Avraham Stern (1907–42) after a split in the right-wing underground movement *Irgun Zvai Leumi*. Encyclopedia Britannica.

<sup>18</sup> *Irgun Zvai Leumi*, Hebrew: *National Military Organization*. Founded in 1931. (Encyclopedia Britannica.)

militia organization of the Zionist Revisionist<sup>19</sup>, were targeting British officials during wartime, and in 1944 they assassinated the British minister of state for the Middle East, Lord Moyne. The largest and most efficient of the oppositional groups: Irgun had called off their operations against the British government during the Second World War.<sup>20</sup>

### *Post-war conflict*

However, this campaign was commenced again after the capitulation of Nazi-Germany, when Irgun carried out a series of bombings; including the 1946 bombing of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem which served as headquarter for the British administration in Palestine. 91 people were killed, including 28 high-ranking British officials and other British citizens.<sup>21</sup> At the end of the World War II in 1945, the Jewish Agency had also joined the conflict. Its military wing: *Haganah*<sup>22</sup>, executed a number of successful sabotage missions targeting British communications in Palestine. This volatile situation convinced Ernest Bevin, the Foreign Secretary of Britain, that they had lost control of the situation in Palestine. He then referred the matter to the United Nations for a resolution. This led to hectic diplomacy in the UN-system that ended up with the creation of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) by the General Assembly.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Zionist revisionism was the right-wing opposition of the mainstream political Zionism, which was represented by Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jobotinsky, and later Menachem Begin. The revisionist wanted a more radical approach in dealing with the British mandate policies, and strived for an independent state with Jewish majorities on both banks of the river Jordan. Zionist revisionism was the forerunner to the political parties of Herut and Likud. Source: Jewish Virtual Library. URL: [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Zionism/Revisionist\\_Zionism.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Zionism/Revisionist_Zionism.html), retrieved 22.09.12

<sup>20</sup> Shlaim, Avi (2009): *Israel and Palestine*. London, Verso.

<sup>21</sup> Webpage: Israel National News, 2008. URL : <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/126929#.UFxR9l2Tuts> retrieved 21.09.12

<sup>22</sup> Hebrew, meaning: *defense*. A paramilitary organization established by the Jewish Agency in the mandate period. In 1948, it was transformed into the Israeli Defense Force.

<sup>23</sup> Cleveland, W. (2004). *A History of the Modern Middle East*. Oxford, Westview press. (p. 263-265)

### *The first Arab-Israeli war 1947-1949*

UNSCOP came thus in 1947 up with a plan to grant independence from Britain to Palestine, and to divide the mandate in two roughly equal parts designated to a Jewish, and a Arab-Palestinian state. Being the minority and striving for the development of a Jewish state in Palestine, the Jewish Agency accepted the partition plan, while the Arab leaders mainly rejected it. The UNSCOP proposal was passed in the General Assembly after intense lobbying and pressure by the US President Truman and his administration.<sup>24</sup>

However, The British refused to assist UNSCOP in implementing the partition plan, and announced that they would be leaving the mandate by May 15<sup>th</sup> 1948. This was even before the vote in the General Assembly. The result was that Palestine was plunged into chaos, beginning with Arab protests and riots against the partition plan in 1947, and intensifying as the Haganah launched a campaign to secure all the areas designated to a Jewish state by the UNSCOP partition-plan. This resulted in an intercommunal war between Jews and Arabs over the control of the former mandate.<sup>25</sup> After the declaration of the Jewish state in 1948 following the British withdrawal, five neighboring Arab countries joined the fighting.<sup>26</sup> Their efforts were with one exception<sup>27</sup> fruitless, as the Jews emerged victorious. For the Jews, this is the “War of Independence”, for the Palestinian Arabs, it’s known as *al Nakba*, meaning “the catastrophe”.<sup>28</sup> Upon leaving the mandate in 1948, the British reluctantly accepted the establishment of the Jewish state of Israel by the Zionist movement, but also supported the Arab-Hashemite kingdom of Jordan in securing parts of the Palestine mandate under the crown of King Abdullah.<sup>29</sup> The West Bank of Jordan was under the Hashemites from the end of hostilities in 1949, until the six-

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<sup>24</sup> Cleveland, W. (2004). *A History of the Modern Middle East*. Oxford, Westview press. (p. 264)

<sup>25</sup> Cleveland, W. (2004). *A History of the Modern Middle East*. Oxford, Westview press. (p. 263-265)

<sup>26</sup> These were Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq.

<sup>27</sup> The goal of the Arab Legion of Jordan, was not the total defeat of the Jewish forces, but rather to secure the most of the areas designated to an Palestinian-Arab state by the UNSCOP partition plan. In securing the West-Bank and the Old Town of Jerusalem, their campaign was successful.

<sup>28</sup> Cleveland, W. (2004). *A History of the Modern Middle East*. Oxford, Westview press. (p. 267)

<sup>29</sup> Shlaim, Avi. Interview. Oxford 29. May 2012.

day war in 1967, when it was occupied by Israel. Effectively hindering any hope of establishing a sovereign Palestinian state.<sup>30</sup> The Palestinian-Arabs, who were promised a nation-state of their own by the United Nations, got the worst of it. More than 700.000 were displaced as a result of the conflict, and the people were divided between the new states of Israel and Jordan, as well as other countries.<sup>31</sup> They have fought ever since for the right to return and the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state.

As the historiographical narratives of this conflict are the main theme of this thesis, more aspects of this war will be covered in depth later in the thesis where I will discuss the discrepancies between the Zionist historiography and the New Historiography concerning the factual circumstances of the war.

## Chapter 2: Israeli Historiography

This chapter consists of an overview of Israeli historiography, as well as an introduction to the New Historians. In trying to explain what is *new* in the historiography, I will first need to establish what the characteristics of the *old* historiography were.

In the years following 1948, the Jewish and Palestinian history-writing represented two distinct narratives, in which the different versions were so far apart, it was obvious that not both could be true. In Israel during the decades after the independence, the Palestinians were perceived as the enemies, and their perspective was given little space in the Israeli public debate. It was the official narrative that was repeated and supported, which described Israel as the dove who was forced to carry a sword.<sup>32</sup> Israel was the righteous and triumphant newborn state which had emerged victorious as the David versus the Arab Goliath. However, opposition to this narrative had always existed. Ultra-orthodox Sephardic Jews had opposed Zionism as a political ideology for decades preceding the independence in

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30 Shlaim, Avi (1988): *Collusion across the Jordan*. New York, Columbia University Press. (p. 613)

31 Cleveland, W. (2004): *A History of the Modern Middle East*. Oxford, Westview press. (p. 268-270)

<sup>32</sup> See Shapira, Anita (1991). *The Sword of the Dove* (Land and Power. The Zionist Resort to force, 1881 – 1948). Stanford, California. Stanford University Press.

1948, and groups of moderate Marxists had advocated a secular state for Jews and Arabs alike. But it was not until the emergence of New History in the late 1980-ies, that the Zionist narrative was challenged in a way that managed to shake the very foundations of Israeli self-image.

### *Establishing the group*

The term *New Historians* was first coined by the former Israeli journalist turned historian Benny Morris. He wanted to describe a new generation of historians who looked afresh at the Israeli historical experience, and which conclusions were often at odds with those of the *old history*, meaning the official Zionist and/or patriotic historiography from the post-1948 era. The term was first used in the essay: "The New Historiography" (published in 1988 in "Tikkun")<sup>33</sup>. In this essay Morris claims that the *old* or official historiography tended to omit or distort facts that were unfavorable to the young Jewish state. The New Historians wanted to look behind the veils of propaganda and investigate the records from the 1948 conflict anew to present a more truthful version of the history of Israel and Palestine.<sup>34</sup> This article served to raise a whole lot of attention to Morris' book *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, which had until then not raised many heads. Now, this book got all the attention it deserved, as well as the other works of the New Historians.<sup>35</sup> Morris has later accredited the need of belonging to a community of historians with similar views, as the reason for establishing the group, as he was faced with the onslaught of criticism from the influential MAPAI<sup>36</sup> old guard. Whoever Morris regarded as being part of the group of New Historians changed through the years with his sympathies and antipathies. Before I dive deeper into the material of the New Historians, I will give an overview of the preceding historiography of Israel, or as Morris would call it: The *old* history.

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<sup>33</sup> Later published in the collection of essays: Morris, B. (1990) *1948 and after*, Oxford, Clarendon Press.

<sup>34</sup> Morris, Benny (1990). *1948 and after*. Oxford, Clarendon Press. (p. 6)

<sup>35</sup> Shapira, Anita. "The Past is not a Foreign Country." *The New Republic*. 12.01.2000 URL: <http://ontology.buffalo.edu/smith/courses01/rrtw/Shapira.htm> Retrieved 18.10.12

<sup>36</sup> Hebrew abbreviation of *Mifleget Poalei Eretz Yisrael*. Lit. United Workers Part Workers' Party of the Land of Israel. MAPAI was the forerunner to the Israeli Labor Party.



## The Zionist historiography

In the years following independence, the historiography was focused on nation building, rather than fact-finding. The Israeli leaders used the Zionist perspective to explain the establishment of the state of Israel as the Jewish people destined homeland, and the climax of the history of the Jewish diaspora. To improve the demographic situation versus the Arabs of Palestine, Israel needed mass immigration. Most Jews that were living in Arab countries left their homes for the new Jewish nation. Some took heed of the Israeli call to unite all Jews in the land of Israel, while others were forcibly driven out of the Arab lands. These joined the European Jews who had dominated the Yishuv. The difficulty was how to make one nation of groups of diverse ethnicity and culture who really only was united by religion. In forging the Israeli nation, the Hebrew language was reinvented and government institutions such as the coinage and the army were filled with ancient Jewish symbols. The early historiography also needed to fulfill this national agenda.

### *David Ben-Gurion*

David Ben-Gurion, (born 1886 in Poland, died 1973 in Israel) was a Zionist leader during the mandate period, legendary founder of Israel (1948)<sup>37</sup>, and the first prime minister of Israel.<sup>38</sup> He wrote several books and 'histories' of the Yishuv and of the first years of Israel. Amongst these were *Rebirth and destiny of Israel*, (1954) *Memoirs*, (1970) *Israel, a personal story*, (1972) and *My Talks With Arab Leaders* (1973)<sup>39</sup> These became the hallmark and authority of Zionist history, though not historical works in the academic sense, but more as an expression of a historical will; The history of the idea of Israel. One of the reoccurring themes in Ben-Gurion's books was the notion that the Israeli leaders were desperate to find peace with their Arab neighbors, but met only uncompromising hostility from the Arabs, who had their mind set on the destruction of Israel.<sup>39</sup> In Ben-Gurion's memoirs, he expresses an anxiety for the annihilation of Israel as a whole at the hand of the Arabs. It is clear

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<sup>37</sup> Shlaim, Avi. "Ben Gurion revisited", a review of David Ben-Gurion's, *Medinat Yisrael, veHaolam ha'Aravi, 1949-1956* (David Ben-Gurion, the State of Israel, and the Arab World, 1949-1956) by Zaki Shalom. *Journal of Palestine studies*, Vol. 25, nr. 4, summer 1996.

<sup>38</sup> Elected prime minister in February 1948, resigned in 1954 after the Qibya massacre, back as prime minister in 1955 until 1963.

<sup>39</sup> Morris, B. (1990). *1948 and after*. Oxford, Clarendon Press. (p. 5)

that this gloomy worldview caused a lot of distrust towards the Arab leaders, and must have colored his opinions of Arab receptions to Israeli peace-attempts.<sup>37</sup>

### *Netanel Lorch*

Another influential Zionist history-writer was Lt. Col. Netanel Lorch (1925-1997). The ambassador and former Secretary General of the *Knesset*<sup>40</sup>, was the founder of the IDF<sup>41</sup>'s historical division, and the author<sup>41</sup> of *The Edge of the Sword. Israel's War of Independence, 1947-1949*<sup>42</sup> (Putnam's, 1961)<sup>43</sup>. He also was a representative of the establishment, writing a nationalist narrative. He described the history of 1948 as a heroic conflict, depicting the Israeli David versus the Arab Goliath. The desperate battle of survival for Israel with its back against the wall. For Lorch, the moral perspective was important. That the IDF held the moral high ground and had higher ethical standards than their Arab neighbors. In the IDF there had been a tradition of *Tohar HaNeshek* or *the purity of arms*. Simply put was it the idea that the army was only used for defense, never for offensive purposes. While explaining the exodus of the Palestinians from Lydda, Lorch states: "*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>44</sup> This accord stand in contrast from what we know from more recent historiography in which we are told that Lydda was the scene of the killing of 250 Arabs after the town was in Israeli hands, many of them POWs<sup>45</sup>.<sup>46</sup> Books as *The Edge of the Sword* were important in the building of a moral self-image amongst the military forces, and further on the whole Israeli

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<sup>40</sup> The Israeli Parliament, located in Jerusalem.

<sup>41</sup> IDF is short for the Israeli Defense Force, - the Israeli Army.

<sup>42</sup> As well as *One Long War* (Keter 1976) and *Shield of Zion* (Howell Press 1992)

<sup>43</sup> Webpage: Palestine; Information with Provenance (PIWP database). URL: <http://cosmos.ucc.ie/cs1064/jabowen/IPSC/php/authors.php?auid=17464> Retrieved 09.09.2012.

<sup>44</sup> Lorch, Nathaniel (1961). *The Edge of the Sword* (Tel Aviv) referred in Morris B.(1990): *1948 and After*. Oxford, Clarendon Press

<sup>45</sup> Common abbreviation, means: Prisoners of War.

<sup>46</sup> Morris, Benny (1990). *1948 and after*. Oxford, Clarendon Press. (p. 1)

society.<sup>47</sup> The question of neutrality and historical value of these works must be seen in the context from which they were written.

### *Chaim Herzog*

A third influential Zionist history-writer was Chaim Herzog, the sixth president of Israel (1983-1993). Born in Ireland in 1918 (died in Israel 1997), he emigrated to Palestine in 1935 where he served in the Haganah during the Arab revolt 1936-1939. He went on to fight in the British army during World War II, and participated in the liberation of concentration camps in Germany and Poland. He also participated in the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948 as an officer in the battles for Latrun.<sup>48</sup> Later, as the Israeli ambassador to the UN (1975-1978), he famously argued against the General Assembly resolution labeling Zionism as a racist ideology.<sup>49</sup> Herzog authored several historical works from the events that he had been involved in, including: *Israel's Finest Hour* (1967); *Days of Awe* (1973); *The War of Atonement* (1975); a compilation of his UN speeches: *Who stands accused?: Israel answers its critics.* (1978); *The Arab-Israeli Wars: War and Peace in the Middle East from the War of Independence through Lebanon* (1982).

These historians have in common that they were all establishment figures, writing a nationalist narrative of Israel's history.<sup>50</sup> Thus it's safe to say that the Zionist history-writers offered explanations that were self-serving or at least represented nationalist views. As an Israeli historian in the volatile post-1948 era with continuous border wars, it is understandable that blackening the Israeli reputation was regarded as unpatriotic, or even treacherous. After all, the war was a propaganda war as well as a military struggle, and the Israeli leadership was dependent on the support of the

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<sup>47</sup> Shlaim, Avi. Interview, Oxford 29. May 2012.

<sup>48</sup> Herzog headed the Military Intelligence Branch of the IDF from 1948-50, and again in 1959-62. After the six-day-war in 1967, he became the first military governor of the West Bank. From the webpage: Jewish virtual library. *Chaim Herzog*. URL: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/herzog.html> Retrieved 09.09.2012.

<sup>49</sup> Collins, Tim. Col. (2011) *Ten of the Greatest: Inspirational Speeches*. The Daily mail. URL: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/moslive/article-1296226/Ten-greatest-Inspirational-speeches.html> Retrieved 09.09.2012.

<sup>50</sup> Shlaim, Avi. Interview. Oxford 29. may 2012.

western government, as well as the Jewish diaspora and Christian communities.<sup>51</sup> It is understandable that in this environment, no historian with any ambitions dared challenge the “fathers” of the nation, labeling them as liars. The result was that the history of 1948 was written not by rigorous historians, but by insiders and people from the establishment.<sup>52</sup>

## Other preceding historiography

### *The Nakba historiography*

In the Palestinian community, the *Nakba* literature developed into a genre of its own. Historians such as Aref al-Aref (1892-1973), Sami Hadawia (1904-2004) and Walid Khalidi (born 1925) were significant in explaining the loss of the Palestinians during the *Nakba* to new generations of Palestinian exiles.<sup>53</sup> Central works include: *al-Nakba: Nakbat Bayt al-Maqdis wal-firdaws al-mafqud* (*The catastrophe: The catastrophe of Jerusalem and the lost paradise*) by Araf al-Aref, *Palestine: Loss of a Heritage* (1963), *Palestinian Rights and Losses in 1948* (1988) and *Bitter Harvest: A Modern History of Palestine* (1991) by Sami Hadawi and *Why Did the Palestinians Leave?* *Middle East Forum*, 24, 21–24, (July 1959)<sup>54</sup>, *From Haven to Conquest: Readings in Zionism and the Palestine Problem until 1948*. (1971), and *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (1992) by Walid Khalidi. However, as well as the Zionist historians, they too relied heavily on memories and memoirs, as well as oral testimonies from the refugees. They also have been criticized for not having the necessary objectivity and distance required for writing reliable history. In addition, the written sources were sparse, as the Arab countries military archives were closed (as is mostly the case still today). The Palestinian nation, being stateless and dispersed, lacked the institutions and resources to accumulate documentation and archival material of any authority. The

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<sup>51</sup> Morris, B. (1990). *1948 and after*. Clarendon Press, Oxford. (p. 5)

<sup>52</sup> Shlaim, Avi. Interview. Oxford 29. may 2012.

<sup>53</sup> Bland, Sally. “Sami Hadawi - the scholar who couldn't go home.” Magazine article, (2004)

<http://middleeastwindow.com/node/360>

<sup>54</sup> Reprinted as 'Why Did the Palestinians Leave Revisited', 2005, *Journal of Palestine Studies*, XXXIV, No. 2, 42–54.

result is that there is no equivalent on the Palestinian or Arab side to the vast archival material of the Israelis.<sup>55</sup> Rather ironically, only a relatively small number of Palestinian historians have researched the Nakba, leaving the field of academic discussion to the Israeli historians.<sup>55</sup>

### *Socialist / Communist historiography*

Also, there were earlier challenges put towards the Zionist narrative from the Israeli far left and communist writers. In 1962, an anti-capitalist and anti-Zionist organization called *Matzpen*<sup>56</sup> was founded by activists who had split from the Communist Party of Israel. Consisting of members of both Arab and Jewish ethnicity/heritage, they had a unique vantage point and were able to see the larger picture to a greater extent than Zionist-Israelis. This enabled them to express and put in print an alternate interpretation of the first Arab-Israeli conflict that preceded the conclusions of the New Historians by decades. Much of the writings of the far left was collected by Arie Boder and published in *The Other Israel, The Radical Case against Zionism*. (Doubleday, 1972).<sup>57</sup> The downside was their Marxist views on history in which they interpreted the Arab-Israeli conflict into, seeing the Israeli-Arab conflict as the result of an imperialistic colonial project and ignoring the unique circumstances of the Jewish people in the aftermath of the Holocaust.

#### - Israel Beer

Another issue is the fact that they didn't yet have access to the compelling archival evidence that was to be released several years later, and depended on the testimonies of eyewitnesses and defectors such as former IDF Lt. Col. Israel Beer, who was convicted of spying for the Soviet Union. While in prison, Beer wrote the

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<sup>55</sup> Masalha, Nur. "New History, Post-Zionism and Neo-Colonialism: A Critique of the Israeli 'New Historians'". *Holy Land Studies* 10.1 (2011): 1–53 URL: <http://www.euppublishing.com/doi/pdfplus/10.3366/hls.2011.0002>

<sup>56</sup> Hebrew, meaning: Compass. The official name was the Israeli Socialist Organization, but it became known as Matzpen after its monthly publication.

<sup>57</sup> *The Other Israel, The Radical Case Against Zionism* (1972), Boder A. (editor) Doubleday.

book: *The security of Israel, yesterday, today and tomorrow*<sup>58</sup>. The book was a critique of the Labor Government and David Ben-Gurion in particular for colluding with reactionary forces in the Arab World like King Abdullah of Jordan against the Palestinians. In his opinion, Zionism was not a progressive force, but rather a reactionary force.<sup>59</sup> Beer's notions of collusion between King Abdullah and the Zionists, preceded the works on the subject by New Historians Ilan Pappé and Avi Shalim by 22 years. But his credibility as a convicted spy, and the fact that his entire given background and identity was fabricated, meant that his notions were probably not regarded as credible at the time.<sup>60</sup> However, later Israeli historians such as Dan Schuefetan and Uri Bar-Joseph analyzed the material from Beer and wrote respectably *A Jordanian Option* (1986) and *The Best of Enemies* (1987) which was published before the year that the New Historians came out with their books (1988)<sup>61</sup> These works however did not generate the same national and international attention nor controversy as the concurrent works of the New Historians.

### *Revised Labor-Zionist historiography*

Following the years of the independence, numerous universities were established all over the country.<sup>62</sup> In addition, by the mid-1960s the founding generations of the Yishuv were passing. According to Israeli Historian Israel Kolatt in an essay printed in the first issue of "Cathedra"<sup>63</sup>, this made academic studies in Zionism and the Yishuv (the pre-independence Jewish community in Palestine) possible.<sup>64</sup> The passing of the founding generation meant that the younger generation could write the history of the

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58 Beer, Israel (1966): *Israel's security: Yesterday, today, tomorrow*. Tel Aviv: Amikam

59 Shlaim, Avi. Interview. Oxford 29. may 2012

60 Webpage: Article on Israel Beer in the Jewish virtual library. URL: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/biography/Beer.html> Retrieved: 11.10.12

61 Morris, Benny. Derisionist History. A book review on Avi Shlaim's; *Israel and Palestine: Reappraisals, Revisions, Refutations*. (2009) Published in *The New Republic*, November 28, 2009. URL: <http://www.tnr.com/print/article/books-and-arts/derisionist-history> Retrieved: 15.10.11

62 Weizmann Institute of Science (WIS) 1949, Bar-Ilan University (BIU) 1955, Tel Aviv University (TAU) 1956, University of Haifa (1963), Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU) 1969, Open University of Israel (OPENU) 1974, Ariel University Center of Samaria (1982). Source: Israeli Council of Higher Education. URL: <http://che.org.il/>

63 A journal devoted to the Jews in Palestine from antiquity to the recent past.

<sup>64</sup> Referred in Penslar, Derek J. (2007). *Israel in History*, New York. Routledge.

Yishuv freed of private memories.<sup>65</sup> These factors, claims Kolatt, facilitated the establishment of a first generation of academic Yishuv historians, of which himself was the founder with his dissertation which was completed in 1964.<sup>66</sup> This generation also included historians such as Dan Giladi, Elkane Margalit, Yosef Gorny and Anita Shapira. Also important were the historical oriented social scientists: Yonathan Shapiro, Dan Horowitz, and Moshe Lissak. These scholars usually wrote their dissertations under the guidance of professors on the history of the diaspora Jews. What characterizes this generation is that they by large were sympathetic critics of Labor-Zionism, and the characters that were the heroes of the Yishuv era. Although they today constitute the establishment of the Israeli academia and are the seniors of the universities, they were in the 1970s regarded and regarded themselves as rebels, emancipating from the dogmas of the storytellers of previous generations. However, in fact they were political historians and in-house critics of the Labor-movement. And still to this day, much of the historiography, even that deserving of an international audience remains untranslated.<sup>67</sup>

- *Anita Shapira*

The most successful and notable of historians from this generation is Anita Shapira. Sometimes called "*the Princess of Zionist Historiography*"<sup>68</sup>, she is very much a part of the modern Israeli academic establishment. She is the founder of the Yitzhak Rabin Center for Israel Studies, a Ruben Merenfield Professor of the Study of Zionism and head of the Weizmann Institute for the Study of Zionism at the Tel Aviv University. In addition, she received the Israel Prize in 2008.<sup>69</sup> Shapira started her career writing about the history of the Yishuv, and especially the Labor-movement of the 1930s. Later she focused on the history of the state of Israel, and especially the role of Zionism in Israeli society. Inspired by Begin's remarks about the 1982 invasion

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<sup>65</sup> This same logic has been applied by New Historian Benny Morris to writing the history of the War of Independence / the Palestinian Nakba.

<sup>66</sup> Penslar, Derek J. (2007). *Israel in History*. New York, Routledge. (p. 14)

<sup>67</sup> Penslar, Derek J. (2007). *Israel in History*. New York, Routledge. (p. 16)

<sup>68</sup> Shlaim, Avi. Interview. Oxford 29. may 2012

<sup>69</sup> The Huffington Post. Blogger profile Anita Shapira. URL: <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/anita-shapira> Retrieved 17.10.12

of Lebanon as “a war of choice” (which I will return to later), Shapira wrote *Land and Power: The Zionist Resort to Force, 1881-1948* (1992) which as the title says also deals with the event of the first Arab-Israeli Conflict. In this book she says that originally, Zionism had a defensive *ethos*, but that the escalation in violence following the Arab revolt in the late 1930s caused a shift in the Zionist mentality and forced the movement over in an offensive *ethos*.<sup>70</sup> However, the conclusions are still that the Arabs are to blame, and that there is no fault at Israel. The title of the book in Hebrew is quite revealing. חרב היונה literary means “*The Sword of the Dove*”. Shapira claims that Israel was the Dove that was forced to carry a sword.

### The New Historians

As I have already mentioned. The New Historians are not a card-holding club, but rather individual historians that Benny Morris would describe as part of a group of New Historians following his sympathies and antipathies. However, a core group has over the years crystalized as the definition of the New Historians. These are in addition to Benny Morris himself; Ilan Pappé and Avi Shlaim. These three, together with Simha Flapan were the founders of what can be described as paradigm-shifting historiography by the late 1980s. As Flapan died in 1987, he was never part of the group of New Historians, though his last book certainly was part of the New Historiography.

Indeed, the pioneer of the New Historiography was Simha Flapan (1911-1987). He was first in the field with his book: *The Birth of Israel: Myths and realities* (Pantheon Books, 1987)<sup>71</sup> It was also the most comprehensive work of the early New Historiography, as he listed seven notions from the Zionist narratives, labeled them as myths and aimed for debunking them all at once. Unfortunately, as he died the same year the book was published, he was not a part in the quite heated debate that came as a reaction to the New Historiography.<sup>71</sup> In this book he formulates seven myths, to which each a chapter in his book is devoted, surrounding the birth of Israel and the 1948 war. These were: 1. That Zionists accepted the U.N. partition and planned for peace. 2. That Arabs rejected the partition and launched war. 3. That

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<sup>70</sup> Shlaim, Avi. Interview. Oxford 29. may 2012

<sup>71</sup> Flapan, Simha. (1987). *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*. New York, Pantheon.



Palestinians fled voluntarily, intending reconquest. 4. That all the Arab states united to expel the Jews from Palestine. 5. That the Arab invasion made war inevitable. 6. That defenseless Israel faced destruction by the Arab Goliath. 7. That Israel has always sought peace, but no Arab leader has responded.<sup>72</sup>

In the following year of 1988, the 40-year anniversary of the establishment of the Jewish state of Israel, three books came out which all together laid a damper on celebrations. These books were *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem 1947-1949* (Cambridge University Press, 1988) by Benny Morris, *Collusion across the Jordan, King Abdullah, the Zionist movement and the Partition of Palestine* (Columbia University Press, 1988) by Avi Shlaim and *Britain and the Arab-Israeli conflict, 1948-1951* (St. Martin's Press, 1988) by Ilan Pappé. Where Flapan's book had (according to Benny Morris) severe historical flaws, these books were written with more scrutiny and lay founded on intensive archive research. Along with other concurrent works<sup>73</sup> and a large number of journal articles<sup>74</sup>, these books undermine, if not totally demolish the notions that Flapan formulates as myths. In doing this the new historiography also lays a heavy burden of guilt on Israel for its conduct in the first Arab-Israeli conflict, and especially the origin of the Palestinian refugee problem.<sup>75</sup> It is important to notice that all these books were published in English by historians educated in Britain. That puts them aside from most of the preceding historiography of Israel, which is written in Hebrew by historians mostly educated at Israeli universities.

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<sup>72</sup> Pipes, D. (1988). "The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities, reviewed by Daniel Pipes." from <http://www.danielpipes.org/11151/birth-of-israel-myths-realities>.

<sup>73</sup> Benny Morris lists in *1948 and after* (Oxford 1980) other revisionists writings: Uri Bar-Joseph's *The Best of Enemies, Israel and Transjordan in the war of 1948* (London, 1987); Yitzhak Levy's *Tish'ah Kabin* [Jerusalem in the War of Independence] (IDF press, 1986); Yossi Amitai's *Ahvat Amim Bemivhan* [Testing Brotherhood] (Tel Aviv, 1988); Michael Cohen's *Palestine and the Great Powers, 1945 – 1948* (Princeton University Press, 1982); Anita Shapira's *Me'Piturei Haram'a ad Peiruk Ha'Palmah* [The Army Controversy, 1948] (Tel Aviv, 1985) and *Ha'Halicha al Kav Ha'Ofek* [Visions in Conflict] (Tel Aviv, 1988); Uri Milstein's *History Of Israel's War of Independence ,vol 1.* (1989); Yehoshua Porath's *The Emergence of the Palestinian-Arab National Movement and The Palestinian Arab National Movement 1929-1939* (London, 1974 and 1979). However, not all of these have been labeled as *New Historians*, and in retrospect would some of them not fit such a description.

<sup>74</sup> Articles in in academic journals such as "Middle Eastern Studies", "Studies in Zionism", and the "Middle East Journal".

<sup>75</sup> Shapira, Anita. "The Past is not a Foreign Country." *The New Republic*. 12.01.2000 URL: <http://ontology.buffalo.edu/smith/courses01/rrtw/Shapira.htm> Retrieved 18.10.12

*Benny Morris (born 1948)*

Benny Morris is a professor of history in the Middle East Studies Department of Ben-Gurion University, Israel. He is often called the *Dean* of New Historiography as it was he who coined the term. His research on the actions of the Haganah during the 1948-war and interviews with Palestine refugees in Lebanon led to the book: *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem 1947-1949*. It challenged the myth that the Palestinian refugees left on their own accord, and showed how the villagers all over Palestine were forcible expelled or fled as a result of widespread violence and massacres. *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* was a game-shifter in the Israeli historiography. We can even say that it established a whole new paradigm, as after it was published in English by Cambridge Press in 1988, it has not been possible for serious historians on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to say that the Palestinian left by free will in 1948. At least not without being aware that one were distorting the truth. His dispassionate and positivist use of credible sources shielded him from criticism and rebuttals. That does not mean he was not criticized, far from it. But within the academic context, his writings were accepted as credible history. Much of Morris later bibliography relates to the same questions with titles as: *1948 and after* (Clarendon Press, 1990), *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem 1947-49 Revisited* (Cambridge Middle East Studies, 2004) and *1948, A History of the first Arab-Israeli war* (Yale University Press, 2009).

*Ilan Pappé (born 1954)*

Ilan Pappé is an Israeli historian and social activist, professor of history at the University of Exeter in the UK, and co-director of the Exeter Center for Ethno-Political Studies.<sup>76</sup> Pappé is in addition to being one of the three main New Historians, probably most famous as the author of the book *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (One world, Oxford 2006), and for advocating academic boycott of Israel.<sup>77</sup> Pappé's *Britain and the Arab-Israeli conflict, 1948-1951* (1988) which was based on his

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<sup>76</sup> Webpage: Palestine: Information with Provenance (PIWP database) on Ilan Pappé. URL: <http://cosmos.ucc.ie/cs1064/jabowen/IPSC/php/authors.php?aid=3> Retrieved 19.10.12

<sup>77</sup> The Christian Science Monitor: "British boycott riles Israeli academics"

<http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/0512/p06s01-wome.html>

doctoral dissertation was effectively overshadowed by Avi Shlaim's *Collusion Across the Jordan* (1988) which related to much of the same issues. Both works relate to the questions of which parties were favored by British policies, as well as the nature of the relations between King Abdullah of Jordan and the Zionists. Pappé's later books tend to be more polemic, and serve an outspoken political agenda.

### *Avi Shlaim (born 1945)*

Avi Shlaim is a distinguished Israeli-British scholar, a fellow at St. Anthony's College and professor of foreign relations of the University of Oxford. He was elected a fellow of the British Academy in 2006.<sup>78</sup> He is the oldest of the New Historians (not counting Simha Flapan who passed away in 1987), and was an established historian on European international relations well before he embarked on rewriting the history of Israel with the book *Collusion Across the Jordan*.<sup>79</sup> Having been born in Iraq and living most of his life in the UK, he is of the group of New Historians the one with the most distance to the politics of Israel, and though his works are controversial in Israel, he is widely regarded as a principled and consistent scholar which have steered clear of the controversies that surround the persons of Morris and Pappé. Shlaim has written several books on the Arab-Israeli conflict, most of which relates to the political relations between Israel and its neighboring states. Most notable of his later works is: *The Iron Wall, Israel and the Arab World* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2001).

### *Preliminary conclusions*

The New Historians were preceded by a very diverse historiography, where the mainstream pro-Zionistic narrative was the only one with any real influence in the Israeli society, as well as in the Western world. However, this was the history written by the adult participants in the conflict, and were often bordering on propaganda. The Palestinian narrative had resonance in the Arab world as well as in radical Marxist movements in the West, but would never have any real significance for the

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<sup>78</sup> Shlaim, Avi (2009). *Israel and Palestine: Reappraisals, revisions, refutations*. London, Verso,

<sup>79</sup> Rapoport, Meron. *No peaceful solution*. An interview with Avi Shlaim in Haaretz August 2005. URL: <http://www.haaretz.com/no-peaceful-solution-1.166621> Retrieved 11.10.12

mainstream Israeli perception of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Marxist anti-Zionistic Israelis was a marginalized group and one of the most important works of history by this cohort was written by a man convicted as a Soviet spy. The mid 1960s saw the emergence of a revisionist but still pro-Zionist historiography from historians such as Anita Shapira educated in Israeli institutions. However, they dealt mostly with the history of the pre-independence Yishuv communities, and tended to be sympathetic critics of the old Zionist establishment. Also, these histories are written in Hebrew, and very few books have ever been translated into English. If we can talk about historiographical paradigms, the revisionist Zionists-historians were by and large writing from within the same paradigm as the fathers of the nation who were the authority on the history of the war of independence (1948) and the early years of the Israeli nation-state.

The New Historians were the first to criticize the actions of the Zionists during the first Arab-Israeli conflict in a way that received attention from both the Israeli and international academic institutions. The books published by the three New Historians in 1988 were written in English, by historians educated in prestigious British universities. Thus, they probably felt that they were free from the paradigms of the Zionist historiography. In fact, they labeled the Zionist narrative as mythical and aimed at debunking its myths (in which they were quite successful). These historians, educated in British universities, writing in English, based on sound source material from newly opened Israeli as well as British and American military archives, laid a heavy burden of guilt on Israel for its conduct in the first Arab-Israeli conflict, and especially the origin of the Palestinian refugee problem.

### **Chapter 3: Historiographical Background.**

In this chapter I will present a short biography of the New Historians that reaches up to 1988, as well as a survey of the historical context from which the New Historiography emerged. I will return to their careers and lives in chapter 4: *The Aftermath*, where I will explore the personal repercussions experienced by the historians and the political and historiographical consequences of the New Historiography during the 1990s until recent years.

## Biographies

### *Simha Flapan*

- Was born in Tomaszow, Poland in 1911 and migrated to Palestine in 1930.<sup>80</sup> After a long career as a writer, publisher, peace activist and educator, he became the National Director of the left Zionist MAPAM party in 1954, and the director of its Arab Affairs department. A position he held until 1981.<sup>81</sup> Flapan founded and was the editor-in-chief of *New Outlook*, a Middle East monthly. He also founded and directed the Jewish-Arab institute, and the Israeli Peace Research Institute, as well as lecturing as a fellow at the Harvard University Center for International affairs, and as a Foreign Associate of the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London.<sup>82</sup> As a former left-wing politician, he never assumed to being neutral in writing his most known book: *The Birth of Israel: Myths and realities* (Pantheon Books, 1987) which was published in the year of his death. Either way it delivered a blow at the conventional wisdom about the birth of Israel, and served as an inspiration for the New Historians in their quest to debunk myths in the years to come. His conclusions are still controversial, as all of the New Historiography were controversial in Israel, but within the New Historiography they have been repeated and verified by later works. In retrospect, Flapan's conclusions might even be viewed as moderate compared to the conclusions of New Historian Ilan Pappé.

Articles on the New Historians tend to leave out Flapan with two given reasons: 1: His age. Being born in 1911 he did not belong to the post-independence generation as the other New Historians did. 2: His background as a politician: From 1954 to 1981 he was the National Secretary of Israel's MAPAM party. Also, his book: *The Birth of Israel* (...) is outright polemical in its tone, which Flapan openly admits:

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80 Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*. New York, Pantheon Books.(p. 278)

81 Shlaim, A. (1995): "The Debate about 1948." "International Journal of Middle East Studies" 23(3).

82 Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*. New York, Pantheon Books. (p. 278)

“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>83</sup>.

Benny Morris refers quite critically to *The Birth of Israel* in his essay *The New Historiography*.<sup>84</sup> There he states that it in addition to being a polemical book written from a Marxist perspective; it contains severe historical flaws, and is based on poor research and analysis. Thus it is “not really valuable from a historical point of view.”<sup>84</sup> Another New Historian, Avi Shlaim, seems to hold Flapan’s contribution in higher regard. In an article called *The Debate About 1948*, Shlaim refers to Flapan’s self-proclaimed political agenda, but does not criticize the research that lies behind the book.<sup>85</sup> As Flapan’s *The Births of Israel* in many ways defines the New Historiographical project with the formulations of myths and the attempt to debunk them, it would be an omission to not include Simha Flapan’s work as a part a survey of the New Historiography.

### *Benny Morris*

Benny Morris was born in Kibbutz *Ein HaHoresh* in December 1948. His parents were Jewish immigrants from Great Britain with Marxist beliefs,<sup>86</sup> and Morris grew up in a “left-wing pioneering atmosphere”.<sup>88</sup> His father became an Israeli diplomat,<sup>87</sup> and the family spent many years in New York as well as in Jerusalem. He finished his studies at the Jerusalem’s Hebrew University before going to Cambridge to do a

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83 Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*. New York, Pantheon Books. (p. 10)

84 Morris, B. (1990): *1948 and after*. Oxford. Clarendon Press, (p. 8)

85 Shlaim, Avi. “The Debate About 1948”. Article published in the “International Journal of Middle East Studies”, vol. 23, no. 3, 1995

86 Wilson, Scott. The Washington Post: “Israel Revisited.” March 11th, 2007. URL: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/10/AR2007031001496\\_pf.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/10/AR2007031001496_pf.html)  
Retrieved 06.10.12

87 Later in life, when Benny Morris was working as a journalist in the Jerusalem Post, Morris came upon documents written by his own father on the massacre of Deir Yassin during the first Arab-Israeli War. These were talking points distributed to Israeli diplomatic missions around the world designed to denying the event who was to become one of the most notorious of the conflict.

doctorate on European History.<sup>88</sup> Morris served as a paratrooper in the IDF during the Six-Day War of 1967, and in 1982,<sup>89</sup> he was called back in as a reservist to participate in Israeli invasion of Lebanon.<sup>90</sup> At the time, Morris was working as a journalist for the Jerusalem Post, and he was actually doing journalistic research in Lebanon before donning the uniform as a soldier in a mortar unit during the assault on Beirut. On his way through Lebanon as a reporter, Morris visited Palestinian refugees at the Rashidia camp outside Tyre where he did interviews.<sup>91</sup> The Palestinian refugee problem would later become the defining issue of his career as a historian.

### *Career as a historian*

After Lebanon, Benny Morris received a lucrative offer from *Palmach*, an elite Jewish fighting force, who wanted the ambitious young historian to write their history which included their operations during the first Arab-Israeli conflict. Morris was given full access to their archives but was one month later kicked out after the veterans regretted giving access to their archives to a Cambridge doctorate.<sup>92</sup> Later, one of Palmachs veterans and biographer of David Ben-Gurion; Shabtai Teveth, became one of Morris' fiercest critics. I can only speculate, but it seems likely that Morris and the Palmach veterans didn't see eye to eye on how the material should be presented. However, this coincided with the releasing of other Government archives under the 30-year rule, which enabled Morris to follow his pursuit of exploding myths. Amongst them was the notion of Israel's innocence in creating the Palestinian refugee problem the most ripe. His research led in 1988 to the publishing of the book *The Birth of the*

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<sup>88</sup> Remnik, David. "Blood and Sand", and Interview with Benny Morris. May 5. 2008. The New Yorker, URL:

[http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/books/2008/05/05/080505crbo\\_books\\_remnick?currentPage=1](http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/books/2008/05/05/080505crbo_books_remnick?currentPage=1)

<sup>89</sup> In 1986, Morris was again called in to serve as a reservist in the IDF.

<sup>90</sup> Remnik, David. "Blood and Sand", and Interview with Benny Morris. May 5. 2008. The New Yorker, URL:

[http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/books/2008/05/05/080505crbo\\_books\\_remnick?currentPage=1](http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/books/2008/05/05/080505crbo_books_remnick?currentPage=1)  
Retrieved 06.10.12

<sup>91</sup> Wilson, Scott. The Washington Post: "Israel Revisited." March 11th, 2007. URL:

<sup>92</sup> Morris, B. (2004): *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. (P. 3)

*Palestinian Refugee Problem 1947-1949*. It was a powerful blow to the Zionist narrative, and revolutionized the Israeli Historiography. In this book he shows how Israeli forces expelled thousands of Palestinians and how massacres and other acts of violence such as rape and random killings created an atmosphere of fear that led other Palestinians to flee. This contrasted the traditional narrative, in which the Palestinians fled on request of Arab leaders to give way for the Arab invasion of 1948.<sup>93</sup>

### *Ilan Pappé*

Ilan Pappé was born in Haifa in 1954 to a German-Jewish family. According to himself, he lived his early years in “blissful ignorance about the world beyond the comfortable and safe mount Carmel”<sup>94</sup>. He was not aware that the city’s Arab population had once been much larger, and that the dwellings in which the Israelis inhabited on Mount Carmel, to a large extent had been confiscated from their Arab owners during the years of 1947-1948. In High School he was exposed to the realities of the Palestinians *Nakba* through a couple of Palestinian classmates during a guided school tour of the old town in Haifa city. However, it was not until later the historical interest emerged. In high school he learned literally Arabic, which qualified him to service in the intelligence corps in the Israeli Defense Force, into which he was drafted at 18 years of age. Ilan served as a regular soldier in the intelligence corps during the 1973 *Yom Kippur* War on the Golan Heights.<sup>95</sup> Pappé has later given the following observation about Israel’s intelligence corps:

*“My three compulsory years in the army, including the 1973 war, were spent in that corps, and were not a bad workshop for polishing my Arabic, but quite poisonous if you believed what you were told about the “enemy”.*<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> See Morris, B. (1988): *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press,

<sup>94</sup> Power and History in the Middle East: A Conversation with Ilan Pappé.  
<http://www.logosjournal.com/pappe.htm>

<sup>95</sup> Pappé, I. (2010): *Out of the frame, the struggle for academic freedom in Israel*. New York, Pluto Press.



After military service, Pappé went on to the Hebrew university in Jerusalem where he finished a bachelor degree in Middle Eastern history in 1979. He later left Israel for England and doctoral studies at the University of Oxford (finished in 1984)<sup>96</sup>. There he studied the British angle to the conflicts in the Middle East. Ilan Pappé's *Britain and the Arab-Israeli conflict, 1948-1951* is based on the doctorate theses Pappé submitted.<sup>97</sup> The main findings of the book are the British role in the partition of Palestine between Israel and Jordan at the expense of the Palestinians right to self-determination.<sup>98</sup> This book earned him a place in the group of the New Historians in the eyes of Benny Morris.<sup>99</sup>

### *Avi Shlaim*

Avi Shlaim was born to a wealthy merchant family in Baghdad in 1945, and lived a privileged life there with his parents until he was five years old.<sup>100</sup> In the aftermath of the establishment of Israel in 1948, most Iraqi Jews left Iraq for Israel, Avi and his family were amongst them. In leaving they lost their mansion in Baghdad and their wealth. Shlaim settled in Ramat Gan in Israel with his parents. Being a "oriental" Jew from Bagdad, he was made to feel inferior in his community of Jews with mostly European origin. At sixteen he left for the UK where he attended a Jewish school in London. He returned to Israel to serve national duty in the years 1964-66, just missing the six-day-war of 1967.<sup>101</sup> After finishing military service, he again traveled to the UK and studied history at Cambridge University with the aim of serving as a diplomat in the Israeli Foreign Office.<sup>101</sup> He intended to return to Israel to join the

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<sup>96</sup> University of Exeter, staff page: <http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/iaais/staff/pappe/>

<sup>97</sup> His supervisors at Oxford were Albert Hourani (a British-Lebanese historian and the writer of *A History of the Arab Peoples*) and Roger Owen (an acclaimed British historian). While reviewing his doctoral thesis, Lord Bullock was the internal sensor, and Avi Shlaim was the external from the University of Reading.

<sup>98</sup> Pappé, I. (1988): *Britain and the Arab-Israeli conflict 1948-51*. New York, St. Martin's Press.

<sup>99</sup> Morris, B. (1990): *1948 and after*. Oxford, Clarendon Press.

<sup>100</sup> Attapattu, Don. Interview with Avi Shlaim in the Nation. June 28, 2004 URL: <http://www.thenation.com/article/interview-middle-east-scholar-avi-shlaim> Retrieved 11.10.12

<sup>101</sup> Shlaim's mother had been impressed by the British Foreign Service while seeking shelter in the British embassy in Bagdad during the anti-Jewish riots in 1941, and wanted her son to seek a career in that line of service.

Israeli Foreign Service, but was called back to a position as reader at the University of Reading's department of international relations.<sup>102</sup> He became an expert on European foreign relations, and wrote books on the EEC. From that position he was later invited as an external examiner to review the work of a young Israeli student at the University of Oxford. That student was Ilan Pappé. Shlaim became impressed with Pappé's historical research:

*"Ilan is my intellectual mentor. He is younger than me, but he did all the research about this period, and it was pioneering work. He came up with the notion that Britain's aim towards the end of the people mandate was Greater Transjordan. That Britain didn't want a Palestinian state. It was resigned to a Zionist state, but it colluded with its current King Abdullah to grab and annex the Arab part of Palestine. Hence Ilan was the pioneer, and he influenced my thinking."*<sup>103</sup>

In 1987 he was awarded with a professorship at the University of Oxford,<sup>102</sup> and has since continued his scholarship from that institution. After being inspired by the findings in Pappé's doctoral dissertation to examine the history of the Israeli-Jordanian relations, he embarked on a research project which led to the publishing of the book: *Collusion across the Jordan. King Abdullah, the Zionist movement and the partition of Palestine* (1988). In 676 pages, Shlaim gives a complete survey of the political relations across the Jordan spanning the duration of contact between the Zionists and King Abdullah. The scope and detail in which this relationship was explored completely overshadowed Pappé's account of the same relation in *Britain and the Arab-Israeli conflict 1948-51* (1988), although their vantage point differed. While Pappé viewed the conflict from British lenses, Shlaim's work was a more direct study of the relationship between the Zionists and Abdullah of Jordan.<sup>104</sup>

Of the New Historians, Avi Shlaim was the one with the most classical background as an historian. While it must be said that Flapan had a political motivation behind his writings, and that Pappé and Morris was sympathetically instilled toward the

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<sup>102</sup> Rapoport, Meron. *No peaceful solution*. An interview with Avi Shlaim in Haaretz August 2005. URL: <http://www.haaretz.com/no-peaceful-solution-1.166621> Retrieved 11.10.12

<sup>103</sup> Shlaim, Avi. Interview. Oxford 29. May 2012.

<sup>104</sup> See: Shlaim, A. (1988): *Collusion across the Jordan* (...), New York, Columbia University Press.

Palestinian cause, Shlaim is a different case. He denies having any political agenda: *“I do have an agenda, but it’s a scholarly agenda. My agenda was to write about the history of this conflict as fully as I could, as accurately as I could and as interestingly as I could.”*<sup>105</sup>

## Historiographical context

Before going into the substance of the writings of the New Historiography, I will try to explore the political and historical context in which the New Historians lived and worked. What enabled the New Historians to part from the Zionist historiography? My argument is that the combination of liberal archive laws and a newer before seen schism in Israeli politics after the 1982 Lebanon war, were the main catalysts for making the writings of the New Historians feasible.

### *Liberal archive laws*

Israel has compared to other countries in the region a liberal archive law, passed in 1955 and amended in 1964 and 1981. An important feature is a 30-year rule that allows declassification of official documents after 30 years. This rule was adopted from the British and is a legacy of the British mandate. As Israel has applied this rule very liberally, it allowed in the early 1980-ies the opening of a great deal of documents from the Foreign Office, The Prime Minister’s Office as well as the Defense Ministry, and even the separate IDF archive with the records for 1948.<sup>106</sup> These waste archives dating from the first years after the Israeli independence, made it possible for the first time to write the history of the early years of Israeli statehood based on government documents and correspondence, rather than memories and memoirs.<sup>107</sup> This is one of the main explanations for why the new historiography emerged, and all of the new historians credit the relative liberal archive policy of Israel for making their historical research of the 1947-1949 Arab-Israeli conflict

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<sup>105</sup> Shlaim, Avi. Interview. Oxford 29. may 2012

<sup>106</sup> Shlaim, Avi. Interview. Oxford 29. may 2012

possible.<sup>107</sup> As the 30 year rule was adopted from British policies, the British archives of the mandate administration was also opened, and hence the new historians could study both sides of the conflict between Britain and the Zionists from newly opened archives in both countries. Ilan Pappé who did his doctoral thesis at the University of Oxford, based his research heavily on these archives, and published groundbreaking findings in *Britain and the Arab-Israeli conflict 1948-1951* (London, 1988).

### *Unreleased material*

That being said, not all relevant documents have been released. The main bulk of still classified documents are intelligence materials, as those belonging to the Mossad<sup>108</sup>. Avi Shlaim experienced this while prying for more information on the Israeli-Jordanian peace attempts:

*“Some documents are not released at all. Any files that have intelligence material in them are not released. For my biography of king Hussein of Jordan, most of the secret talks between the king and Israel started in 1963, and they became really important after the 1967-war. I had hoped that documents about these meetings would be released. But they were not released. I asked the state archivist why they were not released? And he said that they contained intelligence material, and that the Mossad were involved as well as diplomats from the foreign ministry. And I said: Why won’t you dismantle the files, and take out all the Mossad documents and leave the foreign documents? And he said: I will check for you. So he checked and the answer was: No. So, not everything is released.”<sup>109</sup>*

Probably more than any of the other New Historians, Benny Morris have depended on intensive research in the IDF archives for his books. In 1988 he published *The Birth of the Palestine Refugee Problem*, mainly based on newly released archive material. However, some of the more sensitive IDF archives were not released at that

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<sup>107</sup> Morris, B. (1990). *“1948 and after”*. Oxford, Clarendon Press.

<sup>108</sup> Mossad, also spelled Mosad, in full *Mossad Merkazi Le-modiin U-letafkidim Meyuhadim*, (Hebrew: “Central Institute for Intelligence and Security”), one of the five major intelligence organizations of Israel, being concerned with espionage, intelligence gathering, and covert political operations in foreign countries. Source: Encyclopedia Britannica.

<sup>109</sup> Shlaim, Avi. Interview. Oxford 29. may 2012.

time, so Morris kept coming back as they released more material. Thus in 2004 he published a second book: *The Birth of the Palestine Refugee Problem, Revisited*, where he incorporates this new material. This signifies the importance of being ahead of the game, and incorporating new material as it comes out. According to Avi Shlaim, Benny Morris is particularly good at this. And further that Morris lives up to the creed of the British historian E. H. Carr, who says in his book: *What is history?: "History is a perpetual dialogue between the historian and his sources."*<sup>110</sup> In his continual return to the archives, Morris is having this dialogue with the sources. His commitment to representing the historical facts as directly as possible has earned him the respect of his fellow historians, despite political differences. In summary it can be said that the whole New Historiographical project rests on the liberal policy of releasing government documents from the archives under the 30-year rule.

#### *The 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon.*

The other main catalyst for the development of the new historical research was according to the new historians themselves the Israeli occupation of South-Lebanon in the later stage of the ongoing Lebanese civil war. The invasion in 1982 and especially Israel's part in the Sabra and Shatila massacre perpetrated by the Christian Lebanese Phalangist-militia had an earth-shattering effect on the Israeli public. It resulted in the first case of political dissent while the war was still ongoing.<sup>111</sup> This dissent and criticism of the right-wing policies of the regime created a window of opportunity for both a different approach to peace within the Israeli public (which in turn led to the Oslo-peace agreement), as well as a reception for a new critical historiography.

#### *The Lebanese Civil War 1975 - 1990*

The ethnically and religiously diverse Lebanon had been governed based on the 1932 census and the 1943 National Pact. However, the demography was changing, and by the 1970ies the Christians was no longer the majority. The Shi'ites, being the new majority demanded more influence, which the Christians were reluctant to grant

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<sup>110</sup> Carr, E. H. (1961): *What is history?* Palgrave.

<sup>111</sup> Shlaim, Avi. Interview. Oxford 29. may 2012.

them.<sup>112</sup> This led to the forging of the Lebanese National Movement, a front based on a loose coalition of discontented Muslims who advocated administrative reform, the abolition of religion as the basis of politics, and support for the Palestinian Commandos. The main destabilizing factor was still the PLO<sup>113</sup> who in 1970 during Black September had been forced out of Jordan by King Hussein. PLO fled to Lebanon and joined the Palestine refugees mainly located in the south. From there they commenced the guerilla-raids into Israel and acted as a state within the state.<sup>112</sup>

The provocation from the PLO, and the mobilization of the Lebanese National Movement, led the Christians to prepare for an armed confrontation by stocking up on arms and ammunitions in a large scale. This in turn caused an arms-race where all the different factions were arming themselves to the teeth. The Christian Phalange chose to hit first, killing 27 Palestinians in an attack on a bus in April 1975.<sup>114</sup> This led to a round of fighting between the Christian Maronites and the PLO that lasted until the PLO forces accepted a cease-fire and withdrew from the fighting at the end of June. However, the fighting was not over between the Lebanese themselves, as the Muslim front clashed with the Christians Phalange in August 1975. The PLO was drawn back into the fighting in January 1976, while the Lebanese army started to disintegrate into the confessional enclaves. This spurred an all-out civil war which was expanded until the Syrian President Al-Asad chose to intervene on behalf of the Christian Maronites by May 1976. The fighting was temporarily brought to a stop and by October 1976, Syria and the PLO accepted a cease-fire agreement, allowing the PLO to again commence its operations into Israel from bases in South-Lebanon.

### *Israeli invasion and UN intervention*

However, the conflict between the Lebanese continued, and the different factions each held military dominance over their sectarian enclaves. War became a way of life, and the authority of the central government did not reach beyond the capital if that. Israel came into the conflict first in 1978, when 25.000 Israeli troops invaded

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<sup>112</sup> Cleveland, W. (2004). *A History of the Modern Middle East*, Oxford, Westview press, (p. 383-384).

<sup>113</sup> The Palestine Liberation Organization.

<sup>114</sup> Cleveland, W. (2004). *A History of the Modern Middle East*, Oxford, Westview press, (p. 384).

Lebanon as far as the Litani-river. Their target was PLOs sphere of control in Lebanon which stretched from their headquarters in West-Beirut along a belt towards their bases in southern Lebanon. The invasion was not successful as the Israelis did not manage to uproot the PLO from their strongholds. It did however cause a massive demographic upheaval as thousands of Palestinians and Lebanese fled before the invading force north towards Beirut. UN-pressure led to the disengagement of Israeli troops and the installation of the United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL) to provide a buffer between Israel and the PLO.<sup>114</sup>

The Begin government where Ariel Sharon served as Defense Minister was not content with the result of their 1978 invasion, and plotted for a new intervention that would destroy the PLO fighting force once and for all as well as push out the Syrian forces that was uncomfortably close to the Israeli border. They understood that they needed to install a stable pro-Israeli regime in Lebanon that could suppress the Palestinian guerilla activity in the south. They started talking to Bashir Gemayel, the Christian militia leader of the Maronites who were in the process of establishing direct control of all the Christian militias. By 1982, Bashir and the Begin-regime were ready to go to action in Lebanon and the Israelis only needed a pretext for an all-out invasion. The pretext was provided by a series of PLO mortar and rocket attacks against settlements in the Galilee. Israel responded with operation *Peace for Galilee*, an invasion of southern Lebanon on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1982.<sup>115</sup>

### *Operation Peace for Galilee*

The expressed goal of the operation was to destroy PLO bases in the south of Lebanon, but the real objectives of the operation was to disintegrate all of the PLO fighting capability in Lebanon including their headquarters in West-Beirut as well as installing Bashir Gemayel as the new president. Objections to the invasion began to rise both internationally as well as in Israel when the Israeli troops within days had pushed as far as the outskirts of the Lebanese capital and Defense Minister Ariel Sharon ordered a siege of the city itself. The heavy civilian casualties from the intense bombardment as well as the deterioration conditions in the besieged capital led to international pressure to let the PLO forces evacuate. An agreement was

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<sup>115</sup> Cleveland, W. (2004). *A History of the Modern Middle East*, Oxford, Westview press, (p. 387)

signed, and by September 1st, a multinational force led by French and US-troops evacuated the remaining PLO fighting force by sea to Tunis. The agreement also guaranteed the security of the Palestinian civilians left in Beirut.<sup>115</sup>

It seemed that Sharon and Begin had reached all their objectives when Bashir Gemayel was elected president in late August. Then two weeks later he was assassinated, and the scheme began to unravel. Sharon then violated the agreement that protected the Palestinians, and entered West Beirut. There he gave passage to the vengeful Maronite Phalange who entered the Palestinian dominated districts/refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila<sup>116</sup> where they massacred more than 1000 civilians that had been left unprotected by the PLO evacuation.<sup>117</sup>

The reports of the massacre produced an international outcry as well as in the Israeli public. This was the first case of political dissent while the war was still ongoing.<sup>118</sup> Peace Now, an Israeli non-governmental peace organization founded by reserve officers led massive protest in Tel Aviv calling for the establishment of a national inquiry commission on the massacre, as well as the resignation of Defense Minister Ariel Sharon who oversaw the Israeli operations in the area.<sup>119</sup>

### *Anti-war protests*

The protests rallied 400.000 demonstrators in Tel Aviv, which equals about 10% of the Israeli population at the time.<sup>120</sup> The Kahan-commission was subsequently installed to look into the circumstances of the killings in the Palestinian refugee camps, and The Defense Minister Ariel Sharon was found to bear "*personal responsibility (...) for ignoring the danger of bloodshed and revenge*" and "*not taking appropriate measures to prevent bloodshed*". They also concluded that the Israeli

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<sup>116</sup> Sabra and Shatila were two districts in West-Beirut in which about 90.000 people lived before the Israeli invasion in 1982. Sabra was a normal city district with a mixed population of both Lebanese and Palestinians, where Shatila was mainly a ramshackle Palestinian refugee camp.

<sup>117</sup> Cleveland, W. (2004). *A History of the Modern Middle East*, Oxford, Westview press. (p. 388)

<sup>118</sup> Shlaim, Avi. Interview. Oxford 29. may 2012.

<sup>119</sup> Webpage: Peace now, Knessets definition. URL: [http://www.knesset.gov.il/lexicon/eng/peace\\_now\\_eng.htm](http://www.knesset.gov.il/lexicon/eng/peace_now_eng.htm) Retrieved 13.09.12

<sup>120</sup> Webpage: Achievements. Canadian Friends of Peace Now. URL: <http://www.peacenowcanada.org/achievements> Retrieved 13.09.12



forces held indirect responsibility for the massacre by facilitating the Phalangist's operations first of all by admitting the Phalangists to the refugee camps in the Israeli occupied area, failing to take action to stop the killings after the first reports of the massacre came in, as well as supporting the militia by illuminating the camps with light-grenades fired by Israeli troops.<sup>121</sup> As a consequence, the commission recommended the removal of Sharon from his position, which Prime Minister Menachem Begin refused to do. Sharon was however forced to resign as Defense Minister by the public uproar following the assassination of Peace Now activist Emil Grunzweig<sup>122</sup>, but remained in the Begin-administration as a *Minister without Portfolio*, and was years later elected Prime Minister of Israel. In this environment of a never before seen dissent and protest against the governments military operations during the war in Lebanon, Prime Minister Begin played (probably rather unwillingly) a decisive role in the opening of the "Pandoras Chest" of history revision that is known as the New Historiography.

### *The importance of Menachem Begin and the Likud for history revision*

Menachem Begin (born 1913 in Brest- Litvosk, modern day Belarus, died in Israel 1983), was the sixth Prime Minister of Israel, and had in 1978 received the Nobel Peace Prize<sup>123</sup> together with Mohammad Anwar al-Sadat (president of Egypt 1970-1981) for the negotiations leading up to the signing of the 1979 Egypt-Israeli Peace Agreement.<sup>124</sup> However, Begin was ever a hawk<sup>125</sup>. Shortly after arriving in Palestine in 1943, he led the Jewish paramilitary terrorist organization Irgun who targeted Arabs and British alike, fighting for Jewish dominance and sovereignty over all of

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<sup>121</sup> Webpage: Khaen Commission report by Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs. URL: <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Foreign%20Relations/Israels%20Foreign%20Relations%20since%201947/1982-1984/104%20Report%20of%20the%20Commission%20of%20Inquiry%20into%20the%20e> Retrieved 13.09.12

<sup>122</sup> Webpage: Peace now, Knessets definition. URL: [http://www.knesset.gov.il/lexicon/eng/peace\\_now\\_eng.htm](http://www.knesset.gov.il/lexicon/eng/peace_now_eng.htm) Retrieved 13.09.12

<sup>123</sup> Webpage: The Nobel Peace Prize Laureates 1978. URL: [http://nobelpeaceprize.org/en\\_GB/laureates/laureates-1978/](http://nobelpeaceprize.org/en_GB/laureates/laureates-1978/) Retrieved 13.09.12

<sup>124</sup> Webpage: BBC, on this day - 1979: Israel and Egypt shakes hands on peace deal. URL: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/march/26/newsid\\_2806000/2806245.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/march/26/newsid_2806000/2806245.stm) Retrieved 13.09.12

<sup>125</sup> Israeli political tradition distinguishes politicians as either hawks or doves, reflecting their views on military actions against the Palestinians and Arab neighboring countries.

Palestine as well as the East Bank of Jordan.<sup>126</sup> As a Zionist Revisionist, Begin argued for an offensive foreign policy and had claimed that all the land on both banks of the river Jordan was *Erez Izrael*, the destined Jewish homeland.<sup>127</sup> When coming to power with *Likud* after decades as the opposition-leader he sought to annex the West-Bank<sup>128</sup> into Israel. But by doing so, he needed to suppress the Palestinian resistance there which he hoped to do by destroying the PLO fighting capabilities in Lebanon. With operation Peace for Galilee he reached that objective, but at the same time he alienated huge parts of the Israeli public because of the invasion and the atrocities in the refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila.<sup>129</sup> This created a never before seen schism in the Israeli public which was not easily mended. Up until the invasion of Lebanon planned by the Likud-regime, the Zionist leaders had been cultivating an image of being peace-loving leaders who would never enter into a conflict that was not forced upon them. It was a notion of *no choice*, that the conflicts had been inevitable. However, after the massive pressure from the opposition, Begin admitted in his famous speech to the IDF Staff Colleagues on war of choice and no choice, that the Lebanon war had been a war of choice. Professor Avi Shlaim gave an accurate assessment of this speech and its consequences that I will refer to as a whole.

*“He not only admitted that the Lebanon war was a war of choice, but he claimed lightly that the Suez-war of 1956 was also a war of choice. It wasn’t imposed on Israel. And the Labor party people are hypocrites and they attacked him and said: “No, all previous wars were defensive wars, but this war was different. It was an offensive war, and you are to blame. So there was a debate. And the notion of “no alternative”, that Israel had its back to the wall and it had no alternative to stand up and fight, -that consensus collapsed. The new historiography emerged in that*

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<sup>126</sup> Webpage: Menachem Begin, Knesset. URL: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/march/26/newsid\\_2806000/2806245.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/march/26/newsid_2806000/2806245.stm) Retrieved 13.09.12

<sup>127</sup> Webpage: Jewish Virtual Library. URL : [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Zionism/Revisionist\\_Zionism.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Zionism/Revisionist_Zionism.html) retrieved 21. 09.12

<sup>128</sup> Occupied by Israel since the 1967 war.

<sup>129</sup> Flapan, S. (1987). *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*. New York, Pantheon.

*intellectual context of argument and dispute and challenging notions about the good intentions and decency of the Israeli leadership”<sup>130</sup>.*

That’s not even the whole story. Begin went further and claimed that the only difference between himself and David Ben-Gurion, was that he (Begin) was openly carrying out his policies, where Ben-Gurion used deception to hide his true intentions. According to Begin, Ben-Gurion had been planning to divide Lebanon by setting up a Christian state north of the Litani-river, and Begin was merely following in his footsteps. He referred to Ben-Gurion’s persistence in denying the Palestinians in setting up an independent state, and the policies of destruction of abandoned Palestinian villages and wiping them completely off the map, as well as the transfer-policy. These were all policies by Ben-Gurion in the interest of achieving a homogenous Jewish state.<sup>131</sup>

### *Checking Begin’s claims*

Begin’s claims to historical continuity from the Ben-Gurion era did not go unnoticed. At that time, no one was asking questions about the ethics of David Ben-Gurion’s administrations in Israel. The 1948-war was still seen as the heroic fight for survival, and most Israelis found Begin’s comments preposterous. After all, Ben-Gurion and Begin had remained enemies for the remainder of Ben-Gurion’s lifetime as they had been bitter adversaries in the conflict between the left and right wings of the Zionist movement from before the end of the mandate period. The conflict between the right wing revisionist movement led by Ze’ev Jabotinsky and Begin and Ben-Gurion’s Labor-dominated Jewish agency movement had nearly caused a civil war in the years before the establishing of the Jewish state. Begin’s comparison of his own policies in Lebanon (of which one tenth of the Israeli population had taken to the street in protest against) and Ben-Gurion’s policies during the 1948 War of Independence (which had never been subject for controversy) were mostly met with disbelief and headshakes.<sup>131</sup> However, the Pandora’s box was opened, and historians and journalists took to examining the claims in order to either disprove or

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<sup>130</sup> Shlaim, Avi. Interview. Oxford 29. may 2012.

<sup>131</sup> Flapan, S. (1987). *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*. New York, Pantheon.

confirm the claims. Some were only interested in exposing Begin's claims as lies, while other had a genuine interest in examining the evidence of Ben-Gurion's policies from this new perspective. As this coincided with the releasing of classified documents from the government offices and Ben-Gurion's own correspondence, the investigators had a rich body of sources to draw from. Whatever reasons for the investigations, all who was checking Begin's claims against the documents and available evidence had to admit that they were based on facts.

For being a hawk, Begin appears to have been an honest hawk. He had intimate knowledge of the actions of Haganah during the 1947-1949 conflict, and did not seem to have the same need as the MAPAI old guard to resort to subterfuge. Begin's Likud-party had in 1981 been instrumental in securing the release of official documents under the 30-year rule. They didn't fear more openness about the war of 1948.<sup>132</sup> Quite the opposite, it seems that more openness about the policies under Ben-Gurion was what they wanted, as it exposed the hypocrisy of their critics. This openness relating to their own policies and the releasing of government archives, where crucial catalysts for the development of the historiography of the New Historians.

### *The first Palestinian Intifada*

If it was the openness of the Likud-administration and the repercussions of the Lebanon-war that were the catalysts and facilitators of the New Historians, it was the Palestinian Intifada that propelled their fame and public interest.

During the years after the Israeli occupation of the remaining Palestinian territories after the six-day-war in 1967, the level of conflict between Israelis and Palestinians were relatively low (with the exception of some initial fighting in 1970). After the expulsion of PLO from Jordan in 1970, the organizations guerilla-fighting was mainly limited to the border between Israel and Lebanon, as well as the scenes of international airports. On the West Bank and Gaza, Palestinians and Israelis

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<sup>132</sup> Strand, Trude. "Narrativer i konflikt". "Babylon" nr. 2, 2008.

commuted back and forth relatively freely, and thousands of Palestinians found work in Israel.<sup>133</sup> This was all to change in the late 1980s.

Intifada is Arabic for *uprising/rebellion* and literary means *shaking off*. The first Intifada was a popular uprising of the Palestinians in the Israeli occupied territories that erupted in December 1987 in Gaza, and then spread to the West Bank. The Intifada developed into a Palestinian national campaign of boycott on Israeli products, general strikes, graffiti and barricades that targeted the Israeli occupation, but it was the riots and stone-throwing of the Palestinian youths against well-armed Israeli soldiers that captured the international attention.<sup>134</sup> The image of Palestinian stone throwing boys being shot by Israeli soldiers hiding behind shields and tanks effectively reversed the image of the Israeli David against the Arab Goliath. Now, it was clear who was the David of the parallel, and Israel faced a never before seen criticism for its policies of occupation from Western and indeed American news-agencies. This was mainly due to the death toll on the Palestinian side which became shockingly high. More than thousand Palestinians were killed by the Israelis, compared to a relatively low number of casualties on the Israeli side (about 140 during the years of the Intifada).<sup>135</sup>

The intifada had ramifications for the historiography of the New Historians in several aspects. It coincided with the publishing of the four central books in 1987 and 1988 as referred earlier. However the research for these books was done earlier, so the writing of the books cannot be attributed to the Intifada. However, The Intifada led to an awakening in the international society as well as in the liberal-secular communities in Israel towards the issue of the plight of the Palestinians in the occupied territories. This in turn led to an unprecedented interest in the critical historiography of Israel. Combined with the PR-skills of Benny Morris, the New Historians reached

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<sup>133</sup> Encyclopedia of the Middle East. URL: <http://www.mideastweb.org/Middle-East-Encyclopedia/intifada.htm> Retrieved 22.10.12

<sup>134</sup> BBC. History of a conflict. The Palestinian Intifada. URL: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/middle\\_east/03/v3\\_ip\\_timeline/html/1987.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/spl/hi/middle_east/03/v3_ip_timeline/html/1987.stm) Retrieved 22.10.12

<sup>135</sup> B'Tselem - The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories. [http://www.btselem.org/statistics/first\\_intifada\\_tables](http://www.btselem.org/statistics/first_intifada_tables) Retrieved 22.10.12

widespread fame and their influence spilled over the boundaries of academia, into the realms of politics.<sup>136</sup> Benny Morris, sometimes called the *Dean* of the New Historians, was as mentioned earlier called in for reservist duty on the West Bank in 1987 during the uprising, but refused and was jailed for three weeks. Morris was hence admired for his integrity and social consciousness, which only fueled the popularity of the New Historians especially abroad and amongst the Palestinians. The intifada and the pressure it created on Israel and PLO alike, was in turn one of the main catalyst for the Oslo-peace process which were put in motion in 1993.

### *Preliminary conclusions*

It is clear that the New Historians background and upbringing have influenced their writings, but it is more difficult to isolate what lied behind their willingness to go into open conflict with the authorities of their homeland over the history of 1948. However, there are some similarities in their background. Simha Flapan had intimate knowledge of the Arab societies from decades in the Mapam Arab Affairs office. This insight must have been crucial in the development of *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*. Likewise: Ilan Pappé learned Arabic during his military service, and Shlaim who also speaks Arabic, was born in Arab Iraq and thus inherited a cultural legacy which was probably more alike that of the Arabs, than of the European Jewish immigrants that dominated Israel. Although Morris is not an Arab-speaker, he had encounters with Palestinian refugees which must have influenced his thinking. The shared insight in Arab language and culture must have been important for understanding the plight of the Palestinians. I cannot understand how the New Historians could willingly provoke and be risk alienation by their homeland without having deep sympathies with the Palestinian people.

The New Historians has all since the end of the 1980s been accused for promoting a pro-Palestinian political agenda. Morris and Shlaim categorically deny having any such agenda, while Flapan openly admitted that he had. Flapan was a representative of the Israeli left-wing, which always has promoted accommodation rather than

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<sup>136</sup> Kimmerling, Baruch. "Top Israeli historian analyzes Benny Morris's shocking interview." The Electronic Intifada. URL: <http://electronicintifada.net/content/top-israeli-historian-analyzes-benny-morriss-shocking-interview/4968> Retrieved 22.10.12

confrontation towards the Palestinians and the Arab neighbor-states. Ilan Pappé's *Britain and the Arab Israeli conflict*, is an adaptation of his doctoral thesis and cannot be said to be polemical, rather the opposite: It is quite dry and formal. However, Pappé was at the time already involved in Marxist politics, and was probably influenced by many of the same political views as Flapan. Later in life he has written many polemical books and articles.

We can conclude that several events and developments came into effect in a way that opened a window for critical history-revision. The outrage over the brutality of the 1982 Lebanon-war led to a never before seen schism in society. This schism again created an audience for regime-critical history, and the opening of government archives in Israel as well as Great Britain and the USA made writing this narrative possible. Finally Prime Minister Menachem Begin's claim of historical continuity was a crucial catalyst for revising the historical perception of David Ben-Gurion and his policies.

#### **Chapter 4: (Re)writing the History of 1948**

*"A nation," suggested Czech-American social and political scientist Karl Deutsch (1912-1992), "is a group of people united by a mistaken view about the past, and a hatred of their neighbors."*

This quote has been used by the New Historian Avi Shlaim on several occasions to illustrate the problems with the "old" Zionist Historiography. In quoting such, he implies that the Zionist historiography mainly serves a nationalist agenda. It is full of myths, distorted views that needed to be corrected by real historians.<sup>137</sup> Most of these myths are related to the first Arab-Israeli conflict 1947-1949, being the heroic War of Independence for the Israelis, while known as the great *Nakba* – catastrophe to the Palestinians. As we have seen, these myths were never really challenged within the Israeli community until Menachem Begin in 1982 placed his own actions in the Lebanon-War within the continuity of the policies of David Ben-Gurion during the 1940s and 50s. The "newness" of the New Historians thus consists of exploring this

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<sup>137</sup> Shlaim, Avi. Interview. Oxford 29. May 2012.

historical continuity of aggressive Israeli policies towards the Arabs of Palestine from an Israeli perspective, and launching fierce critique of the preceding historiography.

The four books in question: *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities* by Simha Flapan (1987), *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem 1947-1949* (Cambridge, 1988) by Benny Morris; *Collusion across the Jordan, King Abdullah and the Zionist movement*. (Oxford, 1988) by Avi Shlaim and *Britain and the Arab-Israeli conflict, 1948-1951* (London, 1988) by Ilan Pappé offered new perspectives of historical developments, and were at odds with the official Zionist perceptions.

### *Myth busting*

Avi Shlaim has presented the myths and conclusions of new history in an article written several years later, which summaries the efforts of the new historians in the years after 1988:

*“\* The official version said that Britain tried to prevent the establishment of a Jewish state; the "new historians" claimed that it tried to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state.*

*\* The official version said that the Palestinians fled their homes of their own free will; the "new historians" said that the refugees were chased out or expelled.*

*\* The official version said that the balance of power was in favor of the Arabs; the "new historians" said that Israel had the advantage both in manpower and in arms.*

*\* The official version said that the Arabs had a coordinated plan to destroy Israel; the "new historians" said that the Arabs were divided.*

*\* The official version said that Arab intransigence prevented peace; the "new historians" said that Israel is primarily to blame for the dead end.”<sup>138</sup>*

However, when referring to myths in the Israeli historiography, the New Historians may or may not have specific quotes examples from the Zionist historiography to

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<sup>138</sup> Rapoport, Meron for Haaretz, (2005) “No peaceful solution” - an interview with Avi Shlaim

<http://www.haaretz.com/no-peaceful-solution-1.166621>



refer to. Flapan in *The Birth of Israel*<sup>139</sup> is careful to explain the origins of the myths, while some of the other New Historians to a larger degree tends to view the existence of historiographical myths as self-evident. However, Flapan does not prove that these myths exist, and some of the notion he lists might be somewhat outdated in retrospect, in the sense that whether or not Israelis believed in them in the late 1980s, they might not do so today. In addition to the five notions listed by Shlaim, two of Simha Flapan's myths relates to the respectively Jewish and Arab reactions to the UN-Partition Plan of 1947. That is where I will start my survey.

### Reactions to the UN Partition Plan of 1947

The causes and nature of the first Arab-Israeli war is the subject of several myths if we are to believe the New Historians. Beginning with the reactions to the 1947 UN-partition plan, Simha Flapan in *The Birth of Israel*, claims that two notions must be regarded as myths:

#### *The Zionists accepted the UN Partition Plan of 1947 as a real compromise*

*“Myth One: Zionist acceptance of the United Nations Partition Resolution of November 29, 1947, was a far reaching compromise by which the Jewish community abandoned the concept of a Jewish state in the whole of Palestine and recognized the right of the Palestinians to their own state. Israel accepted this sacrifice because it anticipated the implementation of the resolution in peace and cooperation with the Palestinians.”*<sup>140</sup>

This myth was invoked by all of the early Israeli delegates to the United Nations, and was essential in the propaganda strategy of the Zionist. As an example of establishing this notion, Flapan shows how Moshe Sharett, Israel's first foreign minister and second prime minister, would refer to the question in his speeches to the UN Palestine Commission. The rhetoric that never represented the Zionists real agenda, were adopted by the Israelis and became a notion that were widely repeated and believed. But as Flapan proves based on the writings of the Zionist leaders themselves, this notion were never true: No one in the Zionist leadership ever gave

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<sup>139</sup> Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*. New York, Pantheon.

<sup>140</sup> Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*. New York, Pantheon. (P. 8)

up their aims for securing larger parts of the Palestinian mandate than what was drawn up by the UN Partition Plan of 1947.<sup>141</sup>

Indeed, a large bulk of the Zionist movement: the right wing Revisionists, had never accepted the partition of the original mandate of Palestine in 1922. The eastern part: Transjordan, was designated to a Arab emirate (and later kingdom) for Abdullah, at the same time as Iraq was established as a kingdom for his brother Feisal. They kept the symbol of the original mandate area on their banners, and called the acceptance of this partition by the rest of the Zionist movement for “*a betrayal of Zionism and the possibility of developing the country (...) a failure causing great damage.*”<sup>142</sup>

Flapan also cites David Ben-Gurion's war diaries in which it is clear that the acceptance of the Partition Resolution was only a tactical maneuver:

*“Every school child knows that there is no such thing in history as a final arrangement – not with regard to regime, not with regard to borders, and not with regard to international agreements. History, like nature, is full of alteration and change.”*<sup>143</sup>

David Ben-Gurion, was more than anything else a pragmatist, and as it turned out an excellent tactician. He further shows how all parts of the Zionist movement, including the leading MAPAI-party accepted the Partition Resolution for tactical reasons, while the revisionist Zionists never accepted it in any way. Flapan thus clearly regards the notion that the Zionists acceptance of the Partition Plan of 1947 was a real compromise as mythical.<sup>144</sup>

### *Arab refusal of the Partition Scheme*

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<sup>141</sup> See David Ben-Gurion's War Diaries, December 3. 1947, referred in Flapan, Simha. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*. New York, Pantheon.

<sup>142</sup> Referred in Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*. New York, Pantheon. (P. 18)

<sup>143</sup> Cited in Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*. New York, Pantheon. (P. 13)

<sup>144</sup> Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*. New York, Pantheon. (P. 52)

*“Myth two: The Palestinian Arabs totally rejected partition and responded to the call of the mufti of Jerusalem to launch an all-out war on the Jewish state, forcing the Jews to depend on a military solution.”*<sup>145</sup>

Flapan suggests that this is not true. The Arabs in Palestine and the neighboring countries were far from a homogenous group, and in fact many Palestinian leaders though they regarded the Partition Scheme as unjust and illegitimate, wanted to reach a *modus vivendi* with the Jews through the implementation of the UN Resolution.<sup>146</sup> The Arab leadership had been divided by the British between two rival clans of semi-feudal notables, the Husseinis and the Nashashibis. The former secured the office of mufti of Jerusalem, an office that had through the maneuvers of the late mufti accumulated authority and become a national ruler role. The Nashashibis were appointed majors of Jerusalem.<sup>147</sup>

The Husseinis and Nashashibis managed to join together with other families of notables in the Arab Higher Committee in 1936 on the eve of the general strike that was to turn in to the Arab Revolt. However, the Nashashibis begun the feel the pressure from landowners who feared that they would lose their citrus harvests, and issued a formal appeal to put an end to the strike and disorders. Later, after the announcement of the British partition plan by the Peel commission, the mufti called for a continuance of the revolt while the Nashishibis withdrew. The Nashishibis were more moderate and wanted to negotiate with the British and the Zionists.<sup>148</sup>

The Arab Revolt which lasted until 1939 caused severe casualties amongst the British, Jews and Arabs alike. It ended with the brutal crack-down on the Arab leadership by the British military forces supported by the Haganah. The Arab Higher Committee was declared illegal, and their leaders were exiled. The mufti however, managed to escape to Damascus.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*. New York, Pantheon. (P. 55)

<sup>146</sup> Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*. New York, Pantheon. (P. 58)

<sup>147</sup> Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*. New York, Pantheon. (P. 63)

<sup>148</sup> Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*. New York, Pantheon. (P. 63)

<sup>149</sup> Cleveland, W. (2004). *A History of the Modern Middle East*, Westview press, Oxford (p. 259)

Later, in 1943 communist sentiments were on the rise in the Arab communities due to the Soviet success on the eastern front in Europe. Also, the Istiqlal, a nationalist political party that had opposed the Ottoman-backed leadership of the Husseinis and Nashashibis during the 1920s were on the rise. This led to a further polarization of the Palestinian community, and in 1945 the Istiqlal together with the Nashashibis and the communists left the now Husseinis dominated AHC altogether and formed a counter organization: *The Arab Higher Front*. Some of the leaders of the new organization advocated a joint military effort alongside the Jews to oust the British.<sup>150</sup> This shows the level of rivalry amongst the parties and important families of the Arabs in Palestine.

By 1947, the Husseinis managed to bring the Arab Higher Front in under their wings in the fourth Arab Higher Committee. However, this union was based on intimidation and threats, and many who bowed to the Mufti were really his adversaries. However, the AHC and the Husseinis had the support of most, but not all Palestinians. A boycott of Jewish merchandise was brutally however unsuccessfully enforced, and trade union fronts who advocated cooperation with the Jews were assassinated.<sup>151</sup> When the UN Commission for Palestine presented the Partition Plan in 1947, most Arab parties rejected it on the basis that they would not accept to be left as a minority within a Jewish state with no right to self-determination. But that does not mean that the Arab communities were united behind their mufti in his call for jihad against the Jews. Flapan utterly rejects this notion:

“The political parties were deeply divided and shared no common platform. The masses did not exert any pressure and were unwilling to engage in a jihad. When the AHC asked the senior officials to take over the administration of the Arab areas from the British with the termination of the Mandate, there was no response. Most of them preferred to leave their jobs and even go abroad until the storm abated.”<sup>152</sup>

Summing up, Flapan rejects the story of the Zionist officials that Israel accepted the Partition Plan as a real compromise, and that the Palestinian Arabs utterly rejected it

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150 Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*. New York, Pantheon. (P. 66)

<sup>151</sup> Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*. New York, Pantheon. (P. 66)

<sup>152</sup> Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*. New York, Pantheon. (P. 78)

and prepared for war. The great divides within the Palestinian community, and the lack of leadership left the Palestinian population in a state of apathetic defenselessness. The general support that the AHC mobilized during the Arab Revolt in the 1930s were nowhere near reproduced by the end of the mandate period. There never was a monolithic fanatical jihad on the Jewish communities by the Palestinian Arabs. Flapan also points out that the Zionists had ample opportunity to cooperate with the moderate forces amongst the Palestinians if they really wanted the partition plan implemented. Instead, the ideology of expansionism prevailed, and the scheme of securing most Palestine for a Jewish state became a success, however at a costly price for Palestinians and Jews alike.<sup>153</sup>

### *British policies*

The first myth was never amongst those listed by Flapan in *The Birth of Israel*, but has been formulated by Avi Shlaim as the question of British policies has been central in the historiography of himself and Ilan Pappé. The myth can be formulated as such: Great Britain's policies throughout the mandate period were aimed at preventing the establishment of a Jewish state.<sup>154</sup> According to Shlaim, this was not so. Rather the British policies served to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state through its collaboration with the regime of King Abdullah of Jordan:

*"A subsidiary thesis is that, by secretly endorsing Abdullah's plan to enlarge his kingdom, Britain became an accomplice in the Hashemite-Zionist collusion to frustrate the United Nations partition resolution of 29 November 1947 and to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian Arab state."*<sup>155</sup>

### *The Peel Commission*

Shlaim explains that it was the Arab revolt in 1936 – 39 that was the catalyst for the development of British policies leading to partition of Palestine. In an effort to

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<sup>153</sup> Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*. New York, Pantheon. (P. 79)

<sup>154</sup> Rapoport, Meron for Haaretz, (2005) *No peaceful solution* - an interview with Avi Shlaim

<http://www.haaretz.com/no-peaceful-solution-1.166621>

<sup>155</sup> Shlaim, A. (1988): *Collusion across the Jordan* (...), New York, Columbia University Press, (P. 1)

examine the causes of the revolt and what was needed to solve the situation, a Royal Commission was established, headed by Earl Peel. The Commission traveled to Palestine to receive the grievances of all parties. King Abdullah of Jordan exerted his influence over the Arabs of Palestine to stop the revolt and meet with the Commission. The reasons for the revolt were the ever increasing Jewish immigration and the question of land purchase. The Jews were reluctant to proclaim their intentions, but the Arabs feared that the Jews were aiming for independence for a Jewish state in Palestine.<sup>156</sup>

During the investigation, the members of the Commission began to think that the only viable solution to the fundamental conflicts between Jews and Arabs was to partition the land. This notion was indirectly nurtured by the Zionist leaders who had come to realize that the establishment of a Jewish state, even a small one, would be of immense significance, and only be the beginning of the Jewish national legacy. Other solutions such as federalism or a canton system were discarded. King Abdullah, who travelled to Palestine to meet with the Commission, gave the impression that though he outspokenly never could endorse partition, he would be happy to expand his kingdom into the areas of western Palestine allocated to the Arab partition. Members of the Commission were impressed with Abdullah after meeting him, and preferred Hashemite leadership along with the Nashashibi National Defense Party over the leadership of the Husseini mufti of Jerusalem.<sup>157</sup>

Thus, the Peel Commission landed on partition, but with the undisclosed pretext of Hashemite takeover of the Arab partition at the expense of an independent Palestinian state. This becomes clear as King Abdullah on the occasion of King George coronation festival had prepared a gift of a golden dagger to King George where the inscription had underwent some interesting changes. First it was ordered from the Jeweler to say: *From the Emir of Transjordan*, but later it was changed to

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<sup>156</sup> Shlaim, A. (1988): *Collusion across the Jordan (...)*, New York, Colombia University Press, (P. 57)

<sup>157</sup> Shlaim, A. (1988): *Collusion across the Jordan (...)*, New York, Colombia University Press, (P. 59)

*the Ruler of Transjordan lands*. Clearly he had been consulted by the British about the real plans for partition.<sup>158</sup>

Shlaim thoroughly shows how Britain despite Bevin's critique of the Zionists and the White Paper, did not really try to prevent the establishment of a Jewish state. In fact, through the Peel Commission Partition Plan, they endorsed the establishment of a Jewish state. However, Bevin's reputation as an anti-Semite and the images of Jewish refugee ships being turned away from the shores of Palestine were exploited in the propaganda efforts of the Zionists. The image of British hostility towards the Jewish nation festered, and prevailed in Israeli mentality throughout the decades. Even today it prevails, despite the existence of the historiography of the New Historians.

### *Pappé on British Policies*

As I have already explained, Ilan Pappé's doctoral dissertation was the inspiration for Shlaim's interest in the Zionist-Hashemite relations before, during and after the first Arab-Israeli conflict. However, Pappé did not edit his dissertation into a book-publication until 1988, the same year as Shlaim had finished his *Collusion Across the Jordan*. The book published by St. Martins' Press, New York, is a typical adaptation of a doctoral thesis in that it is detailed, theoretical and not a very easy read. Its main themes are that Britain's policies in the Middle East were a function of two main features: Its close alliance with the Hashemite dynasty of Transjordan, and its otherwise pragmatic adaptability to developments in the area. A necessary adaptability one might say, faced with a rapidly changing situation on the ground and no clear strategy or indeed leadership from the foreign office.<sup>159</sup> Ilan Pappé himself claims that he in this book was debunking one of Israel's foundational myths: that in 1948 Britain was the enemy of Zionism and Israel. Pappé discards this notion and goes further in showing how Britain played a major role in allowing the Zionist

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<sup>158</sup> Shlaim, A. (1988): *Collusion across the Jordan* (...), New York, Columbia University Press, (P. 61)

<sup>159</sup> Pappé, I. (1988): *Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948-1951*. New York, St. Martin's Press.

movement to found a state in Palestine through the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians.<sup>160</sup>

Pappé's project was a research of (at that date) recently opened British archive material, in addition to Israeli and American archives, regarding British policies during the end of the mandate. The first part of the book is a survey of the Foreign Offices policies towards the Middle East, or rather the lack of a consistent policy. Pappé claims the nature of the rapid changes in the Middle Eastern region, forced the British officials to adapt to every changing circumstance and to accept every *fait accompli* whether or not they were anti-British in effect, thereby forcing them to change their policies to the shifting circumstances. This led to a development of a pragmatic, if not opportunistic foreign policy, rather than one led by a consistent strategy. In this environment, the different inclinations and mindset of the policymakers were important to understand, as the individual's room to maneuver was wider within this *ad hoc* policy.<sup>161</sup>

### **The Palestinian refugee problem**

The most controversial myth that the New Historians have dealt with, relates to the Palestinian Refugee Problem. In a massive propaganda effort after the war of independence, the Israelis tried to convince whoever would listen that the Palestinian fled on their own accord, meaning that they were not chased or expelled by the Jews. It became so important to maintain the Israeli self-image of a peace-loving nation of refugees that schoolbooks were written with no reference to the transfer of Palestinians from the area that became the state of Israel. Over the years, the new generations of Israelis were raised without being aware of the Arab legacy of the land they were living in, as was the case for the New Historian Ilan Pappé.<sup>162</sup> Not only were they saying that the Arabs had left voluntarily, but they even denied that the Arabs had been there in the first place. History fraud was committed on a large scale

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<sup>160</sup> Pappé, I. (2010): *Out of the frame, the struggle for academic freedom in Israel*. London, Pluto Press.

<sup>161</sup> Pappé, I. (1988): *Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948-1951*. New York, St. Martin's Press.

<sup>162</sup> Pappé, I. (2010): *Out of the frame, the struggle for academic freedom in Israel*. Pluto Press. (P. 13)



with the total destruction of Arab villages, and even erasing their names from the map.<sup>163</sup>

This was to change in the late 1980s and 1990s. By the mid-1990s, schoolbooks were rewritten in order to give the children an understanding of the plight of the Palestinians who were made to leave during the Nakba.<sup>164</sup> Benny Morris' *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* was immensely important in that matter. Never before had there been written a comprehensive account of the forced expulsions, massacres and destructions of Arab villages during the first Arab-Israeli conflict.

However, Simha Flapan had a year earlier attempted to debunk the same myth:

*“Myth three: The Flight of the Palestinians from the country, both before and after the establishment of the state of Israel, came in response to a call by the Arab leadership to leave temporarily, in order to return with the victorious Arab armies. They fled despite the efforts of the Jewish leadership to persuade them to stay.”*<sup>165</sup>

Flapan rejects these notions totally. There was no call from the AHC ushering the Arab population to flee to give way for the Arab invading armies. In fact, the AHC attempted the best they could to make the Arabs stay and fight. Leaving homes to give way for invading Arab armies makes no sense at all. The Arab armies were poorly trained and had logistical difficulties. They needed the support of the local Arabs and their homes for shelter, food, information and fuel. Flapan supports these arguments by referring to the newly opened military and state archives, the same ones that Benny Morris were going through in the same period.<sup>166</sup> However, much of what Morris bases his later bibliography on, and indeed the revised version of his first book: *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* were based on archive

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<sup>163</sup> Morris, B. (2004): *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. (Map 3)

<sup>164</sup> Shlaim, Avi. *The Debate About 1948*. Article in the International Journal of Middle East Studies. 27:3, 1995, 287-304

<sup>165</sup> Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myth and Realities*. New York, Pantheon Books.(P. 9)

<sup>166</sup> Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myth and Realities*. New York, Pantheon Books.(P. 85)

material that was not yet released by the time Flapan's *The Birth of Israel: Myths and Realities* was published.<sup>167</sup>

The notion of an Arab *order from above* served the Israelis propaganda effort in the years to come. Giving the impression of such an order, Flapan attributes to the strategic thinking of the Zionists leadership. They often transcribed portions of speeches from AHC representatives but distorted the meanings of the citations so that it would seem that the Arab leaders pleaded for the Palestinians to flee. Quite the opposite: There are many examples of Arab leaders issuing orders to stop the general flight and to convince the men of fighting age to stay and fight. In addition: neighboring countries in some cases took in fleeing women and children, but turned away men of fighting age. Arab radio broadcasts in Ramallah and Jerusalem broadcasted orders from the AHC to stop the mass flight from Jerusalem and its vicinities.<sup>168</sup>

Flapan also refers to plan *dalet*, (Hebrew letter D), which was the military operation plan for the securing of all areas designated to a Jewish state by the UN Partition Resolution. Its notoriety comes from the orders of expelling all Arab citizens in villages and towns that resisted military takeover by the Haganah, as well as destroying all Arab villages within proximity to Haganah installations in order to prevent their use by Arab irregulars as base of operations against the Jewish forces. The inhabitants of these villages were to be expelled to points outside the borders of the state.<sup>169</sup> Most of the Palestinian villages on the coastal plain, as well as along the Tel Aviv/Jaffa – Jerusalem corridor were to be destroyed in accordance with this plan.

### *Benny Morris and the Refugee Problem*

Benny Morris' *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* was published in 1988, and is the subject of this book. However, the book was revised in 2004, and republished under the name: *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*.

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<sup>167</sup> Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myth and Realities*. New York, Pantheon Books.(P. 88)

<sup>168</sup> Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myth and Realities*. New York, Pantheon Books.(P. 87)

<sup>169</sup> Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myth and Realities*. New York, Pantheon Books.(P. 93)

The records of the expulsions of the villages remain mostly unchanged, and it is the revised version I will refer from. The original work is a comprehensive study of the operations of the Haganah and their part in the flight of the Palestinian refugees. Morris broke totally new ground as he uncovered atrocities on a large scale, including shelling of civilian villages, acts of massacre, rape and forced expulsions.<sup>170</sup> The scope of the *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* is so wide, that I will have to give just an example of the episodes that Morris describes in detail. The operation in question is important as it was a turning point in the strategies of forced expulsions, and therefore significant in the later debate about ethnic cleansing in Palestine.

### *Operation Nahshon*

In the part of *The Birth* in question, Morris gives a survey of the operations by the Haganah and Irgun militia in the Tel Aviv/Jaffa – Jerusalem corridor. By March 1948, the Jewish inhabitants of Jerusalem were under siege, and the supply route along the Jaffa-road was cut off due to attacks from Arab militiamen. The 100.000 Jewish residents of Jerusalem were in dire need of food and fuel, and the Jewish command decided that the Haganah's first priority would be to secure the road to Jerusalem. In doing so, the Haganah changed strategy from defensively *policing* convoys, to offensively conquering and holding the territories along the route.<sup>171</sup>

The orders given for the operation *Nahshon* were to treat all the villages along the route as enemy assembly or jump-off bases for the attacks on the convoys. The specifics of the existing plan *dalet* which had precedence in this operation, was that all villages that was offering resistance was to be destroyed, and their inhabitants expelled. However, villages that were not resisting were to be left intact. These provisions would not be followed in the course of the operation, and the consequences for the Arab villages were to be severe. In the case of British

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<sup>170</sup> Ari Shavit. *Survival of the Fittest, an interview with Benny Morris*. Haaretz, 2004. URL: <http://www.haaretz.com/survival-of-the-fittest-1.61345> Retrieved 11.10.12

<sup>171</sup> Morris, B. (2004): *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. (P. 233).

intervention the forces of the Haganah should use delaying tactics, but ultimately – the orders were to be seen through.<sup>172</sup>

Operation Nahshon came in effect with the unopposed conquest of al Qastal in the beginning of April. The village had been involved in hostilities along the road, and was attacked by a battalion from *Palmach*, the elite division of the Haganah. Almost all of the villagers fled in fear from the approaching Jewish units. In accordance to plan *dalet*, the village was not to be destroyed as it had not offered resistance. The commander at the site protested against the order, as blowing up the houses would deny it to the Arabs as a base of operations for new attacks against the convoys. Leaving it intact would make defense of the place difficult. However, the buildings were left intact, and indeed the village was a week later retaken by Arab irregulars. The “mistake” of not razing the buildings was rectified the next day, following re-conquest by Palmach-forces. All buildings not needed for defense were blown up.<sup>173</sup>

The lesson learned was to have consequences for the other Arab villages along the route. In Qaluniya; the next village that was taken, 44 houses were demolished by explosives. By the 10<sup>th</sup> of April, the vagueness of the operation-orders was removed. Haganah headquarters now called for the *liquidation* of villages. Terminology such as *cleansing operations* was also employed. The battalions were given specific orders to attack and destroy villages, and to expel their inhabitants. Such specific orders were given for the villages of al Qubeib, Aqir, Biddu, Beit Surik, Beit Ikxa, Beit Mahsir, Suba, Ramle, Beit Jiz, Sejad, Saris and Khulda.<sup>174</sup>

The plan *dalet*'s provisions of leaving intact villages that were not offering resistance were now in effect replaced by the orders of permanently cleansing the area along the Tel Aviv-Jaffa corridor for Arab presence. Morris explains this as necessity of war,

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<sup>172</sup> Morris, B. (2004): *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. (P. 234).

<sup>173</sup> Morris, B. (2004): *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. (P. 234).

<sup>174</sup> Morris, B. (2004): *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. (P. 235).

the lesson learned from al Qastal that abandoned and intact villages would soon be retaken and used as hostile bases of operation.<sup>175</sup> However, the combination of the operation-orders to treat all villages along the route as enemy assembly or jump-off bases, combined with the intentions in plan *dalet* to destroy all villages that offered resistance can be interpreted in other ways as well. One of main points of critique against Morris, is that he fails to acknowledge the existence of a pre-planned intention to cleanse the land designated for the Jewish state for its Arab presence. The idea that the combination of the orders in plan *dalet* and the specific instruction to treat all villages as enemy bases, in fact meant that the operation Nahshon from the beginning was planned as a cleansing operation, is not far-fetched. The effect of the operation is known. The Arab villagers in the Tel-Aviv/Jaffa – Jerusalem corridor were chased out, and their homes destroyed.<sup>176</sup>

### *Ilan Pappé and the British angle*

Ilan Pappé is well known for addressing the Palestine refugee problem in several books, most notably in *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (One World, 2006). However, the book in question in this overview of the early historiography of the New Historians; *Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict 1948-51* (St. Martin's Press, 1988) is all about Britain's role in the conflict.

Pappé has dedicated a whole chapter of his book to this question. Namely: *British Policy towards the Refugee Problem*. In this chapter he offers two main approaches to understanding this policy. The first is what he calls the *Palestine Syndrome*. By syndrome he means the inclination of British officials to try to avoid being entangled in the conflicts regarding the refugee problem. By the end of the mandate, the British administration of Palestine had become a costly affair, both in terms of human and economic losses. Their efforts of retaining neutrality in the conflict between Jews and

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<sup>175</sup> Morris, B. (2004): *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. (P. 236).

<sup>176</sup> Morris, B. (2004): *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (P. 236).

Arabs ended in the alienation of both groups. The British did not want any more responsibility for the former mandate and its refugees. However, as the refugee problem very much became a problem for the British' protégé across the Jordan: The Hashemite King Abdullah, Britain had to maintain some involvement in order to maintain their interest in Jordan and in the Middle East as a whole. These two conflicting inclinations were to influence British policies towards the refugee problem in the years to come.<sup>177</sup>

While the British shunned direct involvement in the discussion of resolving the refugee problem, the new emerging superpower: USA and its diplomats were eager to enter the scene. Having no real experience in dealing with the region, they developed a plan to solve the refugee problem with economic incentives. Robert McGhee, the State Department's refugee advisor, developed a scheme for a *Marshall plan for the Middle East*. Economic development and reaching a higher standard of life should become the bulwark against communist influence and infiltration. However, providing an economic solution to a political problem would not suffice, and Pappé attributes much of the following plight of the Palestinians to this mistake.<sup>178</sup>

The Palestinian refugee problem was by the British viewed as one of several refugee problems that followed in the wake of the Second World War. The scope of the refugee problem following the Korean War not much later overshadowed the Palestinian problem. The attitude towards the responsibility for creating the problem was expressed by Ernest Bevin, the British Foreign Secretary who blamed the refugee problem on the Jews. In 1950, The Foreign Office attributed the mass exodus of the Palestinians to the *not unnatural belief* that they would be *exterminated* if they were to stay in their villages. But they also blamed the AHC (Arab Higher Committee) for encouraging the exodus. Finally, being the pragmatist that they were,

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<sup>177</sup> Pappé, I. (1998): *Britain and the Arab-Israeli conflict, 1948-51*. St. Martin's Press, New York. (P. 124).

<sup>178</sup> Pappé, I. (1998): *Britain and the Arab-Israeli conflict, 1948-51*. St. Martin's Press, New York. (P. 125).

the British accepted responsibility themselves for being part in causing the problem.<sup>179</sup>

In conclusion: *Britain and the Arab Israeli Conflict, 1948-51* was not primarily intended as an attack on the myth regarding the origin of the Palestinian Refugee Problem. But in surveying the British policies and British notions about the Jew's responsibility for expelling the refugees, it is clear that this book nuances the picture. Together, it can be said that the works of the New Historians totally demolishes the myth referred by Flapan.

### **The balance of power**

The myth that the Jewish victory in the first Arab-Israeli conflict was as David's fight against Goliath were to become a widely spread and popular myth in the Israeli historiography. The notion of numerical inferiority was to be exaggerated to the point that especially pro-Israeli Christians around the world were to become convinced that the Jewish victory was an intervention by God, and the establishment of the nation of Israel in the Holy Land a fulfillment of the ancient-old prophecies in the Old Testament. The victory against all odds was to be seen as the proof that the establishment of the Jewish state was the will of God by both by Christians and Jews alike.

The question of the balance of power was never amongst the main thesis in the early books of the New Historians Morris, Pappé and Shlaim. Rather the debunking of this myth came as byproduct of the New Historians project. However, Simha Flapan dedicated a chapter to the debunking of this very popular notion:

*"Myth six: The tiny, newborn state of Israel faced the onslaught of the Arab armies as David faced Goliath: a numerically inferior, poorly armed people in danger of being overrun by a military Giant."*<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Pappé, I. (1998): *Britain and the Arab-Israeli conflict, 1948-51*. St. Martin's Press, New York. (P. 127).

<sup>180</sup> Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities.*, New York, Pantheon Books.(P. 10)

In most wars, the outcome of hostilities can be predicted based on several key factors. Among these are number of armed troops, the numbers of machine guns and heavy machine guns as well as mortars and other field guns, the number of tanks, aircrafts and armored vehicles. Also important are the level of training for the soldiers and their officers, the moral of the troops and the strategies of their commanders. Flapan argues that with the exception of the first few weeks after the announcement of independence, Israel had the advantage in all these key factors, and that all through the conflict; the forces of Israel were never outnumbered by invading Arab forces. He also argues that the outcome was never a miracle, but was predicted by the Zionist leaders, as well as British observers.<sup>181</sup>

However, it is not a myth that the victory in the *War of Independence* came at a price. More than 6000 Israeli soldiers and civilians died in the conflict, equaling almost 1 % of the total Jewish population in Palestine. It is also true that in the first weeks after the declaration of Independence in May 1948, Israeli forces was on the defensive and had their hands full defending the Jewish settlements. In the initial phase, Haganah/IDF lacked sufficient arms, having only rifles for approximately 40 % of the mobilized fighting force. What the myths often fails to mention, is that Israel had already purchased vast amounts of weapons and only awaited their delivery. By the end of May, these weapons were arriving in the ports and on the airfields of Israel. One single airlift from Czechoslovakia on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May carried 10,000 rifles and more than 3000 machineguns along with other kinds of arms and ammunition. With this delivery alone, the IDF could muster between 25,000 and 30,000 armed men in the defense of the nation. If you were to count all armed personnel of the Kibbutz-defenses and the members of the Irgun and Stern-gang, the numbers would be even higher. By mid-June the IDF numbered 41,000 and were still mobilizing. By December 1948, the number of Israeli troops reached its peak at 96,441 men and women at arms. The invading Arabs on the other hand, probably never counted more than 24.000 fighting men, including the Arabs of Palestine taking part in the fighting.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*, New York, Pantheon Books.(P. 190)

<sup>182</sup> Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*, New York, Pantheon Books.(P. 196)



Flapan also put emphasis on that the main bulk of Jewish casualties did not come as a part of the defensive war against the invading Arab armies, but rather in the operations following Israel gaining the upper hand as a result of arms-shipment from Europe. From that point on, the Jews were on the offensive and were actively attacking Arab villages.

*“More Israeli soldiers died while attacking than defending against attacks from Palestinians and Arab armies – 2409 as opposed to 1947. The number of Israelis killed outside the borders of the state designated by the UN was 1581; the number killed in the areas outside these borders was 2759.”*<sup>183</sup>

Flapan claimed that it was a myth that the Israelis died while defending their homes and territories. The numbers shows how the larger bulk of casualties came from offensive operations where the Israelis were fighting Arabs defending *their* homes. This perspective was a new and controversial one.<sup>184</sup>

#### *Ilan Pappé and British premonitions*

As I mentioned earlier, British observers understood before the outbreak of the Arab-Israeli war in May 1948 that the Israelis was in a good position to counter the attack of the invading Armies. Ilan Pappé writes in his book: *Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict 1948-51* that although the Chiefs of Staffs Committee for the British forces in the Middle East had failed to predict the Jews success in the inter-communal war for the mixed towns of Jaffa, Haifa, Tiberias and Sefa, they could quite precisely predict the outcome of the war between the Jewish forces and invading Arab armies. This was due to the information given them by Glubb Pasha, the British commander of the Jordan Arab Legion. In May 1948 both the Chief of Staffs and the Eastern Department of the Foreign Office recognized Jewish military superiority in Palestine, and expected the Jews to only get stronger and better equipped over time. The main advantage of the newborn Jewish state according to the British observers was the establishing of an embryo state prior to the end of the mandate. This brought the Jews in a favorable position as it enabled them to establish central control over the

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<sup>183</sup> Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*, New York, Pantheon Books.(P. 199)

<sup>184</sup> Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*, New York, Pantheon Books.(P. 199)

Jewish community, compulsory military service, and a ban on foreign travel. The Palestinians were in the opposite position. No strong central government, only voluntary and mostly rag-tag fighting forces, and most importantly – a population where many of the leaders and notables had the opportunity to flee, and indeed did flee by the thousands at the first start of fighting.<sup>185</sup>

In conclusion: Flapan and Pappé shows how the Jewish victory in the first Arab-Israeli war in 1948-1949 was not the result of divine intervention, nor a David's fight against Goliath. Rather, the victory was a predictable outcome when considering the number of forces deployed by each side, and not least: most of Israeli casualties came as a result of offensive operations outside the areas designated to the Israeli state by the UN.

### *Arab unity*

The notion of unison between the Arab leaders in their fanatical quest of throwing the Jews on the sea is also a popular and widespread one. The debunking of this myth is one of the main themes of Pappé and Shlaim's historiography. Flapan is also concerned with the notion:

*“Myth four: All of the Arab states, unified in their determination to destroy the newborn Jewish state, joined together on May 15, 1948, to invade Palestine and expel its Jewish inhabitants.”<sup>186</sup>*

### *Flapan's version*

To continue with Flapan who states that, this myth in contradiction to some of the other, has been kept alive; not only by Jewish propagandist, but also the Arabs themselves. This has prolonged its survival, defying the overwhelming body of evidence that contradicts the notion. Flapan claims that the pompous rhetoric surrounding the Arab nation's part-taking in the 1948 war, was mostly a cover for their lacking abilities to coordinate common action. The Syrian-Egypt axis opposed

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<sup>185</sup> Pappé, I. (1998): *Britain and the Arab-Israeli conflict, 1948-51*. St. Martin's Press, New York. (P. 23).

<sup>186</sup> Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*, New York, Pantheon Books.(P. 120)

the Hashemites of Jordan and Iraq, and the distrust was mutual. The mufti of Jerusalem wanted only volunteers, and was opposed to any regular army entering Palestine. Despite the distrust, of course all the Arab regimes opposed a Jewish state, and further Jewish immigration.<sup>187</sup>

Flapan shows how the Arab nations at the time were fragile and conflict ridden. Egypt, struggling with poverty and underdevelopment and an unpopular King. Syria, taking its first steps towards independence, ridden by sectarian conflicts and *coups d'état's* and fearing King Abdulla's ambitions of ruling Greater Syria. Lebanon, dominated by its Christian minority who were interested in seeing the creation of another non-Muslim state in the Middle East. Iraq: troubled by riots and unrest following the Hashemite King's signing of the Anglo-Iraqi treaty restoring economic and military privileges to Britain. Saudi Arabia: having to withhold its mostly camel riding troops for the securing of the southern borders, fearing the spread of unrest in Yemen. Lastly Jordan, home to the best Arab fighting force: The Arab Legion, whose ruler Abdullah had engaged in secret talks with the Zionists over partitioning Palestine between himself and the Jews, and which military commanders were British, having orders to avoid direct confrontation with the Jews.<sup>188</sup> None were prepared to engage in an all-out-war with the Yishuv. Only the rhetoric matched their vicious reputation attributed to them in the Zionist narrative.

### *Shlaim's collusion*

The main theme in Avi Shlaim's *Collusion across the Jordan* (1988), is the lack of unison between the Arab leaders, and especially regarding the Hashemite ruler of Jordan; Abdullah. In Shlaim's own words:

*"This book tells the story of the unusual and highly secret relationship between Abdullah, The Hashemite ruler of Jordan, and the Zionist movement. Spanning three eventful decades, from the appointment of Abdullah as emir in Transjordan in 1921 to his assassination in 1951, it focuses in particular on the clandestine diplomacy that led to the partition of Palestine between the two sides and left the Palestine Arabs*

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<sup>187</sup> Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*, New York, Pantheon Books.(P. 122)

<sup>188</sup> Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*, New York, Pantheon Books.(P. 124)

*without a homeland. The central thesis is that in 1947 an explicit agreement was reached between the Hashemites and the Zionists on the carving up of Palestine following the termination of the British mandate, and that this agreement laid the foundation for mutual restraint during 1948 and for the continuing collaboration in the aftermath of the war.*"<sup>189</sup>

Shlaim shows how fragmented the Arab regimes were in explaining the nature of Abdullah of Jordan's agreements with the Zionists prior to the 1948 war. There never was a monolithic Arab bloc, united in common hostility and fanatical determination to wipe Israel of the map. Rather, the Arab leaders were always divided in the strategy for dealing with the Zionists, and indeed one of them: King Abdulla preferred accommodation instead of confrontation. It was the role of the mufti of Jerusalem as a common enemy that united the Zionist and the Abdullah.<sup>190</sup> The latter had aspirations for widening his kingdom, and the mufti's nationalist movement was in the way. For the Zionist, the mufti who had collaborated with Hitler during the Second World War had become the arch-enemy. This also contributed to the failure of the Palestinian option in the aftermath of the war.<sup>191</sup>

Shlaim claims that the notion of Arab unity is a casualty of his studies. This notion, so dear to all Arab nationalists, is simply not comprehensible according to the British-Jewish scholar. Shlaim's book is a case study in inter-Arab conflict, rivalry and intrigue. Rather than being able to coordinate common strategy towards dealing with the Zionist-challenge, the Arab nations have hidden self-serving national policies behind a guise of aggressive rhetoric. As an example, Abdulla's positioning prior to the hostilities in 1948 was at odds with the pan-Arabic ambitions, serving only his own narrow agendas at the cost of Palestinian nationhood.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Shlaim, A. (1988): *Collusion across the Jordan* (...), New York, Columbia University Press. (P. 1)

<sup>190</sup> Shlaim, A. (1988): *Collusion across the Jordan* (...), New York, Columbia University Press. (P. 19)

<sup>191</sup> Shlaim, A. (1988): *Collusion across the Jordan* (...), New York, Columbia University Press. (P. 489)

<sup>192</sup> Shlaim, A. (1988): *Collusion across the Jordan* (...), New York, Columbia University Press. (P. 19)

Ilan Pappé's work on the British relations towards the Arab-Israeli conflict preceded the *Collusion across the Jordan* by Avi Shlaim, and was overshadowed by Shlaim's work in both detail and scope on the issue of Arab unity. I will therefore not cite Pappé in regard to this question. However, I have previously showed how Shlaim gives credit to Pappé for doing the pioneering work on this issue. In conclusion: The message of the New Historians is that the notion of a monolithic Arab world rising in unison to war in a coordinated effort to destroy the Jewish state and throw the Jews to the sea must be abandoned. Rather, the Arabs were ridden by internal problems and conflicts, they were distrustful of each other and their military efforts were uncoordinated and half-hearted at best. Most notable: One of the Arab leaders, King Abdullah of the Jordan, colluded with the Zionist to constrain their forces and partition the mandate of Palestine between themselves.

### **Futile peace attempts**

Israel's present relations to its Arabs neighbors are still troubled. Lebanon and Israel are still officially at war, the cease-fire agreement stemming from 2006. Even today, almost 30-years after the Yom-Kippur, Israel has not yet secured a peace-agreement with its neighbor Syria and is still occupying the Golan Heights, captured from Syria in the six-day-war in 1967. In addition, no agreement with the Palestinians over the occupied territories of the West-Bank and Gaza has been finalized. Egypt however managed to secure peace with Israel in 1978-79, while the Israel-Jordan peace treaty was signed as late as 1994.

Israeli spokespersons have all since 1948 tried to place the blame for the lack of peace-treaties on Arab intransigence. This rhetoric developed into myth as the message over the years was repeated. Simha Flapan formulated this myth in *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities* (1987):

*"Myth Seven: Israel's hand has always been extended in peace, but since no Arab leaders have ever recognized Israel's right to exist, there has never been anyone to talk to."*<sup>193</sup>

Flapan continues:

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<sup>193</sup> Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*, New York, Pantheon Books.(P. 10)

“On the contrary, from the end of World War II to 1952, Israel turned down successive proposals made by Arab states and by neutral mediators that might have brought about an accommodation.”<sup>194</sup>

Avi Shlaim has in *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* also decisively stated that this notion is groundless. Over the 573 pages of the book, he has surveyed the history of the Israelis contacts with its Arab neighbors. Based on archive research he has concluded that the Arabs have repeatedly outstretched a hand to peace, and Israel has always rejected it.<sup>195</sup> Different excuses have been presented, but the real reasons have always been an unwillingness to accept territorial compromise.

However, *The Iron Wall* (...) has not been a subject of this thesis. *The Collusion across the Jordan* (...) on the other hand is. This book has a more narrow scope, and explores the nature of the relations between Israel and Jordan. It has a whole chapter dedicated to the questions of futile peace attempts, named: *The Elusive Peace Treaty*. First and foremost, it is important to note that there have been many rounds of direct negotiations between Israel and Jordan, as some people still believe that Israel only met uncompromising hostility in the wake of the 1948 war. These direct negotiations got under way in November 1951, but were unsuccessful.<sup>196</sup>

Secondly, Shlaim explains the pros and cons of a peace settlement seen from both Israeli and Jordanian eyes. Both countries had suffered the economic consequences of the 1948-war, and needed peace for economic development. Jordan had lost its access to the shipping port of Haifa, and the alternatives of using either Beirut or Akaba were disadvantageous. Israel also faced economic challenges. The cost of a large standing army was a heavy toll on Israeli finances, as well as the ever increasing immigrants needed housing and employment. Israel would profit from

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<sup>194</sup> Flapan, S. (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*, New York, Pantheon Books.(P. 10)

<sup>195</sup> Rapoport, Meron. *No peaceful solution*. An interview with Avi Slaim in Haaretz August 2005. URL: <http://www.haaretz.com/no-peaceful-solution-1.166621> Retrieved 11.10.12

<sup>196</sup> Shlaim, A. (1988): *Collusion across the Jordan* (...), New York, Colombia University Press. (P. 511)

having access to the markets of both banks of the Jordan for commercializing its produce.<sup>197</sup>

King Abdullah, ever a pragmatist also considered a peace-treaty as a potential forerunner to a future alliance with Israel who had become the greatest military power of the Middle East. This might have solidified his position as sovereign ruler of Jordan and even promoted his dreams of ruling Greater Syria as he then would have much more room to maneuver *vis-à-vis* the regimes of Syria and Egypt. For Israel, a peace-treaty would be strategic as it would allow demobilization along a long and unnatural border and the reduction of its disproportionate large armed forces.<sup>198</sup>

However, there were conflicting interests as well: Israel was reluctant to accept Jordan's annexation of the West Bank, as they saw it as the return of British interests to Palestine. In addition, while Abdullah was a pragmatist and realist, he faced a strong internal opposition to his quest of normalizing relations to the Zionist state. This meant that he approached to issue of peace-negotiation with Israel with caution and ambiguity.<sup>199</sup>

Shlaim writes that by the end of 1949, the Israelis were eager to reach an agreement by the annual meeting of UN General Assembly. The problem was the vast scope of issues that needed to be considered, and the concessions required from Israel.

*"The Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett estimated at the outset that they could reach a separate agreement with Jordan if they were prepared to make substantial concessions."*<sup>200</sup>

However:

*"The Israeli government's latitude for making concessions was restricted by various domestic considerations. It was known that the government was reluctant to extend official recognition to the annexation of the West Bank by Jordan and that it did not*

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<sup>197</sup> Shlaim, A. (1988): *Collusion across the Jordan* (...), New York, Colombia University Press. (P. 513)

<sup>198</sup> Shlaim, A. (1988): *Collusion across the Jordan* (...), New York, Colombia University Press. (P. 514)

<sup>199</sup> Shlaim, A. (1988): *Collusion across the Jordan* (...), New York, Colombia University Press. (P. 514)

<sup>200</sup> Shlaim, A. (1988): *Collusion across the Jordan* (...), New York, Colombia University Press. (P. 518)

want to go down in history as the body that officially waived the claim to any part of the Land of Israel. There was also opposition from the left-wing parties, Mapam and the Communists, to negotiations with Jordan because they regarded King Abdullah as a British puppet, and from the internationalist Herut party, which claimed Israeli sovereignty over all of Palestine.<sup>201</sup>

The negotiations were ultimately unsuccessful. Nevertheless, Abdullah went ahead with his scheme of annexing the West Bank, and suppressed the Palestinian national movement. This led to his assassination by the hands of Palestinian nationalists under a visit to Jerusalem in 1951.<sup>202</sup> This ended the attempts of accommodation between the countries. A final peace treaty between the two countries was not finalized until 1994.

### *Common threads throughout the New Historiography*

In addition to the debunking of myths, another common thread in the New Historiography is the critique of David Ben-Gurion. Previous historiography has portrayed the first prime minister of Israel as a representative of the consensus among the civilian and military elites, while the New Historians says that David Ben-Gurion rather than representing a consensus was the driving force behind Israel's policies in 1948. In particular: the policy of expelling the Palestinians.<sup>203</sup>

## **The Methodology of the New Historians, and ideological debate**

### *A revisionist project?*

The term *New Historians* stuck in part as a refusal of the *New Historians* themselves to being labeled as revisionist historians, as was a common description by their critics. The term *revisionist* had some bad connotations, especially in an Israeli/Jewish setting, as it was more commonly connected to the right-wing Revisionist Movement in Zionism. Also in western historiography, revisionism has been connected to attempts to question the causes for the Second World War, and

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<sup>201</sup> Shlaim, A. (1988): *Collusion across the Jordan* (...), New York, Colombia University Press. (P. 519)

<sup>202</sup> Shlaim, A. (1988): *Collusion across the Jordan* (...), New York, Colombia University Press. (P. 605)

<sup>203</sup> Shlaim Avi: "The Debate About 1948". "International Journal of Middle East Studies," 27:3, 1995, 287-304.



indeed Holocaust denial.<sup>204</sup> Also, in order to write revisionist history, Morris states, there must be an existing historiography to revise:

*“(...) but this is not really the case. Israel’s old historians, by and large, were not really historians and did not produce real history. In reality, they were chroniclers (...) They worked from interviews and memoirs, and often from memories. They had neither the mind-set nor the materials to write real history. To call the new history “revisionist” would, by implication, ascribe too much merit to the old history.”*<sup>205</sup>

Professor Yehoshua Porath of the Hebrew University seemingly agreed, but rather than contrasting Old Historiography to New Historiography, he suggested that it would be more accurate (and perhaps slightly less offensive) to describe the historiography of Morris, Shlaim and Pappé as plain History opposed to the Pre-History writing of the Zionist historiography from the preceding decades.<sup>206</sup> Though Morris didn’t oppose this suggestion, it probably came too late as the term “New Historians/Historiography” already was incorporated in the debate.

However, according to the historiographer of Israel, Derek J. Penslar of the University of Toronto Canada, Morris views on Israeli historiography is somewhat distorted. Morris establishes a sharp schism between a generation of nation builders who were adult participants in the events of 1948, and the younger self-critical, doubting Israeli historians of his own generation. In this he ignores the establishment of the study of Zionism and the Yishuv as a serious academic discipline, and the historiography it produced during the late 1960s through the early 1980s. The significance of the historiography of the revised labor-Zionist historians such as Anita Shapira and Israel Kolatt is conveniently conjured away in Morris definitions.<sup>207</sup>

*“Israeli historiography is admittedly a young creature, but it was not born with the emergence of the new history in the mid-1980s. Rather, (...) the “new history” represents a continuation of and response to the generation of Yishuv scholars who*

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<sup>204</sup> Stauber, R. "From Revisionism to Holocaust Denial - David Irving as a Case Study" H-Antisemitism: Occasional Papers (2000) <http://www.h-net.org/~antis/papers/stauber/stauber.print.html>

<sup>205</sup> Morris, B. (1990): *1948 and after*. Oxford, Clarendon Press. (p. 6)

<sup>206</sup> Morris, B. (1990): *1948 and after*. Oxford, Clarendon Press. (p. 27-28)

<sup>207</sup> Penslar, D. J. (2007). *Israel in History*, New York. Routledge,

*came of age during the early 1970s. The new history is part of an ongoing process of innovation – innovation which began before the advent of this new cohort and which goes on outside of it.*<sup>208</sup>

Morris suggestion that all preceding historiography is worthless as sound history therefore must be put to question. Previous Israeli historiography might have a pro-Zionist bias, but it is still history produced in international acclaimed academic institutions. If we were to interpret Morris' remarks about earlier historiography as limited to the previous historiography of the first Arab-Israeli conflict, we would be closer to the mark, as the revised Labor-Zionist historiography of the 1970s is mainly focused on the history of the pre-independence Yishuv communities, and the quality of their historiography of 1948 is questionable due to bias. However, the historiography of the New Historians can be labeled as a revisionist project, and indeed shares resemblance with different revisionist projects that's going on in Europe and in the United States.

### *Post-Zionism*

For many Zionists, the New Historians are the intellectual heirs of anti-Zionism.<sup>209</sup> Any criticism of the Zionist project and the Zionist leadership have been perceived as an attack on Israel itself and in turn the entire body of Jews (anti-Semitism). This can explain why the New Historians have been accused of being self-hating-Jews or even treacherous, as some Zionists believe that Zionism is the only righteous road to walk for a Jew, and that political Zionism was the salvation of the international Jewry. What is certain is that the New Historiography is very critical to the official Zionist narratives of the 1948 conflict, which in turn can be (and evidently has been) interpreted as a critique of the Zionist project as a whole. The New Historians are not the first Jews to be critical about Zionism and its narratives. All the way back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, European Jews took a stand against Herzl's Zionism and declared themselves as Anti-Zionists.<sup>210</sup> Today, certain groups of ultra-orthodox Jews oppose

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<sup>208</sup> Penslar, Derek J. (2007). *Israel in History*, New York. Routledge,

<sup>209</sup> Livnar, Limor: "Post-Zionism and Israeli Politics." *The Middle East Forum* in New York, August 17<sup>th</sup> 2000. URL: <http://www.meforum.org/185/post-zionism-and-israeli-politics> retrieved 24.09.12

<sup>210</sup> Zangwill, Israel (1905). Mr. Lucien Wolf on "The Zionist Peril". *Jewish Quarterly Review*.

the state of Israel, as they claim it is against the Thora for the Jews to have a state. One such anti-Zionists organization based in Jerusalem called Neturei Karta protests against the Zionist state with posters, called *Pashkavils*. One such poster reads: *For the holiness of Jerusalem, we choose Arab rule.*<sup>211</sup> A less radical version of opposition to Zionism is what can be called Post-Zionism. Post-Zionists do not necessarily oppose the idea of a Jewish state. Instead they claim that Zionism has fulfilled its role, and hence are obsolete as a political ideology for modern day Israelis. Instead, Post-Zionists wants to build a liberal state with equal rights for Jews and Arabs alike, and put an end to the hawkish policies towards the Palestinians under Israeli occupation. Whether or not they advocate one-state or two-state solutions, Post-Zionists demand an end to occupation and a normalization of Israeli relations to its Arab neighbors.<sup>212</sup>

The group of New Historians to whom this thesis is dedicated, is not a homogenous group with consistent views. Rather they are a diverse group with different backgrounds, experiences and agendas. Some of them would probably feel comfortable with carrying a post-Zionist label or even Anti-Zionist, while Benny Morris is a self-declared Zionist.

### *Positivism and the use of oral sources*

One of the main discrepancies between the new historians, are the selection of sources. Benny Morris is a self-acclaimed positivist, which in the field of history relates to the exclusive use of written documents, preferably state and army documents.<sup>213</sup> He argues for his views in the introduction to *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, Revisited*:

*"I believe in the value of documents. While contemporary documents may misinform, distort, omit or lie, they do so, in my experience, far less than interviewees recalling highly controversial events some 40-50 years ago. My limited experience with such*

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<sup>211</sup> Video: *The Anti-Zionist Jews of Jerusalem*. URL: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kTmw9F9f-2c> retrieved 24.09.12

<sup>212</sup> Livnar, Limor: "Post-Zionism and Israeli Politics." The Middle East Forum in New York, August 17<sup>th</sup> 2000. URL: <http://www.meforum.org/185/post-zionism-and-israeli-politics> retrieved 24.09.12

<sup>213</sup> Shlaim, Avi. Interview. Oxford 29. may 2012.

*interviews revealed enormous gaps of memory and terrible distortion and selectivity born of “adopted” and “rediscovered” memories, ideological certainties and commitments and political agendas. I have found interviews occasionally of use in providing “colour” and in reconstructing a picture of prevailing conditions and, sometimes, feelings. But not in establishing “facts”.*<sup>214</sup>

His positivist views are not supported by his colleagues amongst the new historians, which relies on intensive use of oral sources.<sup>215</sup> Ilan Pappé, in his book: *Out of the Frame. The struggle for academic freedom in Israel*, points out the double standards within the Israeli academic community regarding the use of oral sources. The institutions of the *Yad Vashem* (Hebrew: יד ושם literally means: *a memorial and a name*) which main focus is to collect documentation and testimonies about the holocaust, relies heavily on the use of oral testimonies from holocaust survivors. These are in Israel viewed as almost infallible sources to the history of the holocaust, even when conflicting with Nazi documentation. The testimonies are utilized as the main instrument against holocaust-denial, and the Oral History Section of the Yad Washem are actively trying to reach all holocaust survival in Israel and elsewhere to tape their testimonies.<sup>216</sup> However, the traditional Zionist narrative tends to disregard Palestinian testimonies as worthless in the writing of the history of the 1947-1949 events.<sup>217</sup>

Benny Morris also disregards to a large extent the oral history of the Palestinian diaspora, while based on military records, dispassionately writing detailed accounts of massacres and expulsions of Palestinians by the hands of the Jews. His positivist approach has thus earned him both criticism and respect. Avi Shlaim, a colleague and fellow New Historian, was having an argument with Morris in the aftermath of the

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<sup>214</sup> Morris, B. (2004): *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, Revisited*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. (p. 4)

<sup>215</sup> Pappé, I. (2010). *Out of the frame, the struggle for academic freedom in Israel*. London, Pluto Press.

<sup>216</sup> Webpage. "About the Yad Vashem archives, Testimonies. ". URL: [http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/about/archive/about\\_archive\\_survivors.asp](http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/about/archive/about_archive_survivors.asp). Retrieved 03.06.2012, 2012

<sup>217</sup> Pappé, I. (2010). *Out of the frame, the struggle for academic freedom in Israel*. London, Pluto Press.

Al Aqsa uprising in 2000, as Morris took a drastic turn to the right in Israeli politics, publishing articles in newspapers titled “*the Arabs are to blame*” and so on. The following are a passage from the interview I conducted with professor Shlaim in May 2012:

*“The problems started after he suddenly and radically changed his views about the Arab- Palestinian conflict, and put all the blame on the Palestinians. I thought it was shocking, because he was a positivistic historian. He believes only in written records and he doesn’t believe in interviews. I use oral history intensively. Not as a substitute, but as a supplement to the written records. But he is much more of a purist. Only official documents, only written records count. All of a sudden, he makes all this sweeping statements: “All Palestinians are liars”, “All Palestinian leaders are liars”. “Arafat is a liar”. “When they signed the Oslo-agreement, they didn’t really mean it, it is part of the theory of stages. By stages they’ll eliminate the state of Israel, and this an interstacial conflict.” That was when we had an intellectual argument. (...) I don’t like his views because they are not based on evidence. He has no evidence for his new right wing views.”<sup>218</sup>*

Another main point of criticism against Morris is the fact that he does not speak Arabic, and therefore must rely solely on the Israeli descriptions of events, which is problematic. The trends of historiography around the world are shifting in the favor of oral history, especially in the United States with the establishment of centers for studies in oral history.<sup>219</sup> The tradition of relying on oral testimonies from holocaust survivors would also be well known by Morris. Therefore one can only speculate about the reasons for Morris' steadfastness on the positivist agenda while dealing with the history of the *Nakba*, while leaving the purist, positivist viewpoint altogether when he is commenting on the present conflict with the Palestinians. However, as the state archives of the Arab nations at large are closed, a positivist approach might be convenient if one wish to avoid further criticism about lacking language-skills. By avoiding the oral history, Morris is mainly left with the sources of the Israeli, British and American archives, which he has studied intensively.

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218 Shlaim, Avi. Interview. Oxford 29. May 2012.

219 Kilstrom, J. F. “Oral History.” (2011) URL: <http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~kihlstrm/oralhistory.htm>

## Chapter 5: Concessions, controversy and criticism.

This chapter is an attempt to answer my research question: Why did the New Historiography cause such fierce reactions? In this chapter I will also tell the story of the personal repercussions experienced by Morris and Pappé in the wake of their critical view at Israeli history. First: the story of Benny Morris from where we left him after the publishing of *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* in 1988.

### What's eating Benny Morris?

#### *Personal repercussions*

Benny Morris, being an Israeli citizen, did reservist duty during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. He did reservist duty again in 1986, but in 1988 amidst the controversy of his book he was called in for duty on the West Bank during the First Intifada. He then refused, seeing the Intifada as a legitimate uprising against Israeli occupation and was jailed for three weeks.<sup>220</sup> In the aftermath of the New Historiography, Benny Morris became an ardent supporter of the Oslo-Peace process, and his works provided arguments for the Palestinian side and helped the two sides to approach a common perception of the origins of the Palestinian Refugee Problem. However, as a direct consequence following the controversy of his book *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, Benny Morris was left unemployed for several years, refused by the Israeli academic institutions. This lasted until the personal intervention by Israeli President Ezer Weismann which gave him a position at Be'er Sheva University in 1997.<sup>221</sup> This was despite the fact that he had written several books published by renowned academic institutions like Cambridge

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<sup>220</sup> Wilson, Scott.: "Israel Revisited." The Washington Post March 11th, 2007. URL: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/10/AR2007031001496\\_pf.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/10/AR2007031001496_pf.html) Retrieved 07.10.12

<sup>221</sup> Benny Morris: "The 1948 War Was an Islamic Holy War" in the Middle East Quarterly, summer 2010, volume XVII, # 3. URL: <http://www.meforum.org/2769/benny-morris-1948-islamic-holy-war> Retrieved: 13.11.12

University Press,<sup>222</sup> and were given references from notable scholars such as Avi Shlaim at the University of Oxford.<sup>223</sup>

### *The ideological reorientation of Benny Morris*

Morris' project of exposing the atrocities of the IDF during the first Arab-Israeli conflict, led the left-wing historians and commentators to believe that Morris also belonged firmly in the post-Zionistic camp. However, after the collapse of the Oslo Peace Process and during the violent second Palestinian Intifada, Morris underwent an ideological transformation. He started blaming the entire conflict on the Arabs, and re-interpreted the history of the Palestinian resistance as an Islamic jihadist movement which had the total annihilation of Israel as its goal. He re-interpreted his own findings into a neo-Zionistic<sup>224</sup> framework, and justified the cleansing operations during the 1947-1949 conflict as necessary for the establishment of the Jewish state.

In a 2004 interview in Haaretz,<sup>225</sup> where Morris states that David Ben-Gurion was a 'transferist', he also argues that Ben-Gurion should have pushed further in 1949 and strived for cleansing the whole of the Palestinian mandate for Arabs, including the West Bank and Gaza. The most controversial part of the interview is still his prophecies of the necessity of a second Nakba to solve the Israeli issues with the Israeli-Arabs and the Palestinians on the West-Bank and Gaza once and for all. He foresees that such a policy might become feasible in the event of a future major conflict between Israel and Iran.<sup>225</sup> In the same interview, he explains his own conversion:

*"My turning point began after 2000. I wasn't a great optimist even before that. True, I always voted Labor or Meretz or Sheli [a dovish party of the late 1970s], and in 1988 I refused to serve in the territories and was jailed for it, but I always doubted the*

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<sup>222</sup> Morris, B. (2004): *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>223</sup> Shlaim, Avi. Interview. Oxford 29. may 2012.

<sup>224</sup> Neo-Zionism is a kind of revival of the Revisionist Zionism of Ze'ev Jabotinsky, and advocates the creation of Greater Israel in the whole of the Palestinian Mandate and beyond.

<sup>225</sup> Ari Shavit. "Survival of the Fittest, an interview with Benny Morris". Haaretz, 2004. URL: <http://www.haaretz.com/survival-of-the-fittest-1.61345> Retrieved 11.10.12

*intentions of the Palestinians. The events of Camp David and what followed in their wake turned the doubt into certainty. When the Palestinians rejected the proposal of [Prime Minister Ehud] Barak in July 2000 and the Clinton proposal in December 2000, I understood that they are unwilling to accept the two-state solution. They want it all. Lod and Acre and Jaffa.»*<sup>226</sup>

New Historians Ilan Pappé and Avi Shlaim have described the manner of Morris' defection from the post-Zionistic project as pathological. Shlaim has said it was "a psychological process - the suicide bombings, the violence - that sent him off the rails."

"There are two Benny Morris'es," he says. "There is the first-rate archival historian whose work is of utmost importance in understanding the Israeli-Arab conflict. And there is the third-rate political analyst who has little understanding of what is driving the modern conflict."<sup>227</sup>

In the aftermath of Morris' defection, the critics of the New Historians have had a field day. Even Government sponsored institutions such as the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs has lashed out on the New Historiography based on the shift in Morris' views. They exploit Morris' admissions for ignoring certain sources and angles as proof that the entire New Historiography is a hoax, issued by anti-Zionists with a political agenda.<sup>228</sup> It is thus a fair assessment that Morris' defection has hurt the perception of the New Historiography significantly, mostly so in Israel. He remains a controversial figure, both within the collegium of the new historians for his justification of the atrocities during the Nakba, as well as his dystopian political analysis.<sup>229</sup> In the Israeli scholarship his historical research and especially the notion of the policy of

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226 Ari Shavit. "Survival of the Fittest, an interview with Benny Morris." Haaretz, 2004. URL: <http://www.haaretz.com/survival-of-the-fittest-1.61345> Retrieved 11.10.12

227 Wilson, Scott. "Israel Revisited." Interview with Benny Morris in the Washington Post, March 11th, 2007. URL: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/03/10/AR2007031001496.html> Retrieved 11.10.12

228 Beker, Avi. "Exposing how post-Zionists manipulate History." 2010. URL: <http://www.think-israel.org/beker.postzionistsmanipulatehistory.html>. Retrieved: 11.10.12

229 Shlaim, Avi. "Interview." Oxford 29. may 2012.



transfer is still disputed.<sup>230</sup>

Benny Morris has produced several books during his career. These include: *One State, Two States: Resolving the Israel/Palestine Conflict* (Yale University Press, 2010), *1948* (Yale University Press, 2008), *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), *Righteous Victims: A history of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-1998* (Vintage, 2002), *Israel's Border Wars, 1949-1954* (Oxford University Press, 1997), *1948 and after* (Oxford University Press, 1990), *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* (Cambridge University Press, 1988)

### **Ilan Pappé, controversy and exile**

Upon finishing his dissertation, Pappé went back to Haifa to a position as senior lecturer in the department of Middle Eastern History and the Department of Political Science in Haifa University, a position he held until 2006. At the very start of his career, he held a course in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. There he met an older student named Teddy Katz. He was a real Kibbutznic<sup>231</sup>, and saw the study of history as just another way of contributing to his community. Being in no hurry, the older student developed over the years a master thesis on the history of the Arab villages that was captured by the Israelis in 1948 along what today is the highway nr. 2 between Tel Aviv and Haifa. The thesis passed at the University and received a 97% score. One of the chapters in the thesis dealt with the Arab village of Tantura, which was occupied by Jewish forces on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May 1948. From the evidence that he collected, Katz concluded that a large number of villagers were killed during the occupation, possible up to 225. 20 had died during the attack, while the remaining were killed after the village had surrendered, being unarmed. However, he did not use the word "massacre" in his thesis.<sup>232</sup>

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230 See Karsh E. (1997): *Fabricating Israeli History*. London, Frank Cass.

<sup>231</sup> A member of a Kibbutz. Kibbutz: a collective farm or settlement owned by its members in modern Israel; children are reared collectively. The stereotype kibbutznic is a hard-working, left-leaning Israeli. - A socialist pioneer.

<sup>232</sup> Pappé, I. (2010): *Out of the frame, the struggle for academic freedom in Israel*. London, Pluto Press. (p. 71-73)

By 2000, the thesis was discovered by a local journalist who wrote an essay based on the thesis. This spurred public attention, and journalists started asking questions to the now aging members of the Alexandroni Brigade which was the unit of the Haganah that had attacked Tantura and the neighboring villages. But rather than the usual questions about heroism, they were now asked questions about expulsion and massacre. The veterans of the Alexandroni brigade then decided to sue Katz for 1 million shekel<sup>233</sup> for libel. Katz beseeched the University for support, but the University administration refused to accept any responsibility for his research. Pappé, although not having been Katz supervisor, decided to involve himself and publically supported Katz. He investigated the evidence collected by Katz and concluded that they were solid enough to support the claims of killings of the unarmed villagers of Tantura. By then the second intifada erupted, and both the court case and the proceedings at the Haifa University took place in the much hardened atmosphere of the intifada. Leading up to the trial, Katz received death threats, and underway he recanted under pressure the allegations of killings in Tantura, then later reaffirmed them. However, the judge did not accept the retraction of the “confession”, and closed the case. The University of Haifa thus established a special commission that after investigating the evidence declared that the master thesis, which not long since had received a top score, was a result of falsification and disqualified Katz’ MA. Later attempts by Katz to resubmit his thesis without the misquotations found by the commissions were also turned down.<sup>234</sup>

Ilan Pappé, being outraged by the University’s treatment of Katz, started to investigate deeper into the material of the attack on Tantura, and wrote several articles based on these investigations where he was much more categorical than Katz on the issue of massacre in Tantura by the Alexandroni brigade. However, the veterans did not sue him for libel, ‘probably fearing that Pappé would turn the court case into an arena for exposing the war crimes of 1948. In the wake of the Katz-controversy and the brutality of the Israeli response to the intifada, Pappé stepped up

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<sup>233</sup> Equals about 1,5 million kroner or 150.000 £.

<sup>234</sup> Pappé, I. (2010): *Out of the frame, the struggle for academic freedom in Israel*. London, Pluto Press (p. 73 – 75)

his social activism, calling for solidarity with the victims. He thus was seen as a traitor, and became isolated at the University of Haifa. Colleagues would stop talking to him, and invitations to seminars and conferences were cancelled. Seminars he would arrange himself would be sabotaged by the University administration which denied access to the auditoriums. Finally, as a response to the explicit criticism by Pappé, the faculty administrators banned Pappé from all events under the faculty's auspices. It culminated in 2002, when Pappé was called to stand before a disciplinary court at the University. The prosecution wanted him dismissed from the University because of his position on the Katz-controversy. His criticism of the University's handling of the case was not within the freedom of speech, but: "*non-collegial, unethical and immoral conduct, lies, bad-mouthing and impudence.*"<sup>235</sup>

Not long before, Pappé had signed a petition for academic boycott of Israel. This became a central part of the accusation of the disciplinary court:

*"Dr Pappé has recently called for a boycott of Israeli academia. His actions threaten all members of the academic community, especially junior faculty, because a boycott will limit access to research grants and affect publication opportunities in scientific journals. Given Dr Pappé's embracement of the boycott of Israeli academia, one may wonder why he doesn't excommunicate himself from the university that he has urged boycotting."*<sup>236</sup>

Ilan Pappé thus wrote an appeal to his friends in academia to protest against the McCartyism of the University of Haifa, and scholars all over Europe and the USA mobilized in his support. One of those who reacted was Avi Shlaim. I will here refer much of his letter to the administration of the University of Haifa as it is important not only to understand this case, but also gives insight in the role of Avi Shlaim in this debate and his views on the developments of the academia of Israel during the al Aqsa Intifada:

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<sup>235</sup> Pappé, I. (2010): *Out of the frame, the struggle for academic freedom in Israel*. London, Pluto Press. (p. 92-93)

<sup>236</sup> Pappé, I. (2010): *Out of the frame, the struggle for academic freedom in Israel*. London, Pluto Press. (p. 95-96)

*“I write to you this open letter to urge you in the strongest possible terms to drop the charges that has been pressed against Dr. Ilan Pappé. These charges are a blatant violation of Dr. Pappé’s right to academic freedom and it is your duty, as Rector of Haifa University to uphold his right. Israel rightly prides itself on being a democracy and democracy entails freedom of expression, including the right to criticize an academic institution of which one is a member. The attack on this right in the case of Dr. Pappé is therefore a matter of the greatest concern to the entire international community of scholars. What is at stake here is not just the future of one academic but the reputations of the University of Haifa. Most of the charges against Dr. Pappé arise out of the position he took in the Teddy Katz affair. I happen to agree with Dr. Pappé’s criticism of the handling of this complex affair by the university authorities. But whatever one’s view might be about the merits of the case, Dr. Pappé’s right to air his opinions, outside as well as inside the university, is surely beyond question. Frankly it is difficult to avoid the impression that the charges against Dr. Pappé are politically motivated. The timing of these charges reinforces these suspicions. Teddy Katz’s trial took place in December 2000 and the remarks for which Dr. Pappé is being prosecuted were made, for the most part, 12-18 months ago. Is it possible that Dr. Pappé’s enemies inside the University of Haifa are trying to exploit the lurch to the right in Israeli society in order to hound him out? (...)*

*As an outsider, it seems to me that Dr. Pappé has not received the credit he deserves for the outstandingly original and important contribution he has made to the study of the Arab-Israeli conflict. He is widely known in the world as one of the leading scholars in the field and he is very highly regarded. There is a huge gap between his high international standing and his lowly status as a senior lecturer at Haifa. In most universities, he would be a strong candidate for a professorship. (...) I urge you not to give in to the totalitarian temptation of some of your senior colleagues. It is in times like this that real leadership is needed to uphold the values of freedom of expression, pluralism, and tolerance that are so crucial to our profession.<sup>237</sup>*

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<sup>237</sup> Part of a letter from Avi Shlaim to the Rector at the University of Haifa. Referred in Pappé, I. (2010): *Out of the frame, the struggle for academic freedom in Israel*. London, Pluto Press. (p. 102-103)

As a result of the letters from scholars who had written in support of Pappé, the University dropped the trail. However, over the years, the cost of isolation as well as numerous death threats and harassment at his home led to Pappé accepting a professorship at the University of Exeter, UK. He thus was all but forced into exile.

Ilan Pappé remains a prominent social activist, and an ardent critic of Israel's policies towards the Palestinians. He is affiliated with left-wing MAPAM-party, and advocates One-state solution for Palestine.<sup>238</sup> Thus Pappé is a popular lecturer for left-wing political groups especially in Europe. He advocates the BDS-campaign (boycott, sanctions and divestments) on Israel and has toured academic institutions all over the Western World to speak for the notion of academic boycott. In the later years, his books have been written in a more polemic tone, and contains very political content. In 2013, he is due to come out with a comparative work about the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and South-African apartheid policies: *Peoples Apart: Israel, South Africa and the Apartheid Question* (I. B. Tauris, 2013).

Pappé is at present a professor at the Institute of Arab and Islamic studies at the University of Exeter, UK. While still at the University of Haifa, He founded and directed the Academic Institute for Peace in Givat Haviva in Israel between 1992 and 2000 and was the Chair of the Emil Tuma Institute for Palestine Studies in Haifa between 2000 and 2006.<sup>239</sup> Ilan Pappé has during his career published more than a dozen books<sup>240</sup>, and a range of articles<sup>241</sup>. His books include: *The Rise and Fall of a Palestinian Dynasty: The Husaynis, 1700-1948* (University of California Press, 2011), *Out of the frame, the struggle for academic freedom in Israel* (Pluto Press, London and New York 2010), *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (One world, Oxford 2006), *The Modern Middle East* (Routledge, 2005), *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004), *The Making of the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1947-1951* (I. B. Tauris, 1994), and *Britain and the Arab-Israeli Conflict 1948-51* (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1988).

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<sup>238</sup> Pappé, I. (2010): *Out of the frame, the struggle for academic freedom in Israel*. London, Pluto Press.

<sup>239</sup> University of Exeter, staff page: <http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/iaais/staff/pappe/>

<sup>240</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ilan\\_Papp%C3%A9#Books](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ilan_Papp%C3%A9#Books)

<sup>241</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ilan\\_Papp%C3%A9#Articles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ilan_Papp%C3%A9#Articles)

## Avi Shlaim answers the critics

Though he has avoided controversies about his own person, he has not shunned from heading into the crossfire of historical and political debate. Although they don't see eye to eye on the question of academic boycott, Shlaim has fiercely defended Ilan Pappé from the prosecution of the University of Haifa during the Katz-controversy.<sup>242</sup> He has also spoken out in support American scholar Norman Finckelstein after his difficulties with attaining professorship following the campaign of Harvard Law professor and author of the polemic *The Case for Israel* Alan Dershowitz.<sup>243</sup> Neither has he shunned from speaking out against Israeli policies towards the Palestinians,<sup>245</sup> nor the American support for this policies for that matter.<sup>244</sup> Shlaim's position on the Arab-Israeli conflict is a principled one:

*"I write as someone who served loyally in the Israeli army in the mid-1960s and who has never questioned the legitimacy of the state of Israel within its pre-1967 borders. What I utterly reject is the Zionist colonial project beyond the Green Line."*<sup>245</sup>

## *Fabricating Israeli History*

Critics have attacked the New Historians on the very base of their project: The formulation of the myths within the Israeli historiography itself. Efraim Karsh, Professor and Director of the Mediterranean Studies Program at King's College, University of London, challenges the formulation of the myths as a whole. In *Fabricating Israeli History: The New Historians* (Frank Cass, 1997), he claims that the New Historiography is "old merchandise repacked".<sup>246</sup> That the New Historians were just reproducing claims and explanations that were already given by preceding

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<sup>242</sup> Pappé, I. (2010): *Out of the frame, the struggle for academic freedom in Israel*. London, Pluto Press.

<sup>243</sup> Shlaim, Avi (2009) *Israel and Palestine*. Verso, London.

<sup>244</sup> Atapattu, Don. *An interview with Middle East Scholar Avi Shlaim* in Nation. URL: <http://www.thenation.com/article/interview-middle-east-scholar-avi-shlaim#> Retrieved 19.10.12

<sup>245</sup> Shlaim, Avi. *How Israel brought Gaza to the brink of humanitarian catastrophe*. Article in the Guardian. 07.01.2009. URL: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/jan/07/gaza-israel-palestine> Retrieved 19.10.12

<sup>246</sup> Karsh, Efraim (1997, 2000) *Fabricating Israeli History: The New Historians* (Frank Cass, London) (p. 16)

writers and historians years before, and that their representation of events were already known in advance, thus the myths does not really exist.

As one of the fiercest critics of the New Historians, Karsh has himself been overwhelmingly criticized. Judging by book-reviews, it seems that most historians as well as the New Historians regard Karsh's arguments as distorted. His arguments against the existence of myths are far-fetched. It is true that much of the representations given by the New Historians have been preceded by previous writers. But what Karsh fails to mention is that these writers either belong to marginalized groups and thereby were never widespread received by the Israeli (nor international mainstream western) public, nor did they have the archival material to back their claims up. The main weakness in Karsh arguments however, have been laid out by Avi Shlam:

*"Evidently, Karsh wants to have it both ways. On the one hand he says that my interpretation is old, familiar, and unoriginal, and that I have hardly broken new ground. On the other hand, he takes me to task for this interpretation. But surely what matters is not whether the interpretation I advance is old or new, original or unoriginal, pervasive or peripheral, but whether it is sound or not."*<sup>247</sup>

Efraim Karsh in an article in *The Middle East quarterly* in September 1996 claims that Shlaim debunks his own argument in his conclusion of *The Collusion*:<sup>248</sup>

*"Britain was careful not to get involved in active collusion with Abdullah in frustrating the United Nations partition scheme and gave only implicit agreement to Abdullah's plan. The point of the agreement was not to prevent the birth of a Palestinian state, since by that time it was clear that the Palestinian leaders were not prepared to set up a state in part of Palestine, but to prevent the Jews from occupying the whole of Palestine. One thing was clear in any case and that is that Britain had no intention of*

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<sup>247</sup> Shlaim, Avi. Article: *A totalitarian concept of history*. *Middle East Quarterly*. September 1996. URL: <http://www.meforum.org/92/a-totalitarian-concept-of-history> Retrieved 02.11.12

<sup>248</sup> Karsh, Efraim. *Historical Fictions*. Article in the *Middle East Quarterly*, September 1996. URL: <http://www.meforum.org/93/historical-fictions> Retrieved 28.10.12

*preventing the birth of a Jewish state.*” (The last sentence was omitted in Karsh’s quotation.)<sup>249</sup>

These arguments may seem to contradict each other at first glance, but Karsh does not seem to understand that while the British did not want to actively participate in the collusion, they still can be counted as accomplices of the same collusion on the grounds of the endorsement of Abdullah’s plan to occupy the Arab-designated parts of the mandate.

When interviewing Shlaim in May 2012, I asked him why the new historiography was so controversial in Israel:

*Shlaim: “I often ask my selves, why are critics so angry? Because there has been many historical arguments before, but they are rarely so emotionally charged. The question is: “Why are the old historians so hot under the collar”? I think the answer lies in the politics of identity. Not in the realm of collegueship, evidence and documents, but in the realm of the politics of identity, in other words: self-image.*

*The image is of a liberal, decent and democratic Israeli society. Above all peace-loving, really dedicated to making peace, confronting a fanatical and deeply hostile Arab world. Theirs is the image of the victims. This is in the context of the holocaust. Three year before this ordeal, six million Jews were annihilated in the center of Christian Europe. That was the huge psychological burden to have to cope with. The new ordeal of the war with the Arabs has to be seen, and was experienced at the time against the background of their very recent history.”<sup>250</sup>*

The narrative of the New Historians provokes the Israelis, as it attacks their very self-image. On the subject of the criticism from the Yishuv-historians such as Anita Shapira, Shlaim had the following comment:

*“It’s what Sigmund Froyd called: “The narcissism of the little difference”. I’ll explain: Take Anita Shapira: The professor of history of Tel Aviv. She’s sometimes called the princess of Zionism. She’s of the establishment. She wrote a book: “Land and Power.*

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<sup>249</sup> Shlaim, A. (1988): *Collusion across the Jordan* (...), New York, Colombia University Press. (P. 618)

<sup>250</sup> Shlaim, Avi. Interview Oxford 29. May 2012



*The Zionist Resort to force. 1881 – 1948.” So she is a traditional historian. (...) She wrote a critique of our books, Benny Morris and mine, in the New Republic. It was very hysterical, a very virulent report. And I wondered: “Why is she so angry?” And why is she misrepresenting our arguments, and didn’t concede that we had a lot of new and relevant evidence that we brought to bear. I didn’t know. Then one friend who knows her told me that it is because she regards her selves as a critique of the old historiography, of the Mapai version of the birth of Israel. Because she moved two millimeters from the intellectual mainstream. –She- did the revision, and there was no need for us to come to do any further revisions. So she thought our work was an attack on her and what we were doing was totally unnecessary, because she already had the balanced view and didn’t accept all the myths. But I think she does live in a world of her own. She is completely cut off from the reality of Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians.”<sup>251</sup>*

Interestingly, Shlaim believes that the generation of Yishiv-historians, which I have called revisionist-Zionists historians earlier in this thesis are angry at the New Historians for claiming the role of the revisionists.

Shlaim has spoken out for the need of a synthesis of Israeli Historiography that unites the perspectives of the Zionist historiography with that of the New Historians.

Shlaim’s books include: *Israel and Palestine: Reappraisals, Revisions, Refutations* (2009), *Lion of Jordan: The Life of King Hussein in War and Peace* (2007), *The Iron Wall, Israel and the Arab World* (2001), *The Cold War and the Middle East* (co-editor, 1997), *War and Peace in the Middle East: A Concise History* (1995), and *Collusion Across the Jordan: King Abdulla and the Zionist Movement* (1988).

## **The Oslo peace-process**

The New Historians, and especially Benny Morris’ *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, have been accredited with laying the grounds for the Oslo Peace Process. Although important for the establishing of a common understanding of the

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<sup>251</sup> Shlaim, Avi. Interview Oxford 29. May 2012

origins of the refugee problem, the importance of the New Historian for the initial process might be somewhat overrated.<sup>252</sup>

The first round of the Oslo Peace Process started as secret negotiations between Palestinian and Israeli delegates that were ultimately brought to the top level, and resulted in the signing of Oslo I. The agreement that was successfully kept outside of the media's glare, took the world by surprise, and established Palestinian autonomy in parts of the West Bank and Gaza. The Palestinians leader Yassir Arafat was also allowed to return to Palestine, and the parties were mutually recognizing each other for the first time. The negotiators had deliberately postponed several of the key issues of Palestinian-Israeli relations, including the refugee problem, the future for Palestinian sovereignty, and the status of Jerusalem.<sup>253</sup>

It was not until the peace-talks at Camp David in July 2000 that these issues were on the table, and the writings of the New Historians became influential on the negotiations. It was primarily *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* by Benny Morris that was the subject of debate. Avi Shlaim has the following view of the matter: The Foreign Minister of Israel at that time was Shlomo Ben-Ami, who is a historian. He did a PhD at St. Andrews College of Oxford, and was a professor of history in the University of Tel Aviv prior to becoming Foreign Minister. He asked Labor Prime Minister Ehud Barak to admit a share of the moral responsibility for creating the Palestinian Refugee Problem, because he understood the importance of establishing a common ground of understanding between the parties, a common narrative. The Palestinians are the defeated party, and it is a lot harder for them to accept responsibility and to accept criticism than the victors. Shlomo Ben-Ami suggested that Israel should take the first step and accept responsibility, but Barak refused. He would not accept any responsibility as he feared that even small concessions would be interpreted as Israel having the moral responsibility for the refugee problem, and thus they would be pressured to accept return or to pay compensations.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Shlaim, Avi. Interview Oxford 29. May 2012.

<sup>253</sup> Cleveland, William L. (2004). *A History of the Modern Middle East*. Oxford. Westview Press. (p. 505-510)

<sup>254</sup> Shlaim, Avi. Interview, Oxford 29. May 2012.

Shlomo Ben-Ami, although unsuccessful in convincing Barak to accept responsibility, says that the New Historians were important in accommodating the narratives of the parties:

*“The new historians definitely helped in consolidating the Palestinians’ conviction as to the validity of their own narrative... the Israeli peacemakers also came to the negotiating table with perspectives that were shaped by recent research... But the introduction of new and powerful arguments on the 1948 war into the public debate in Israel became part of the intellectual baggage of many of us, whether we admitted it or not.”<sup>255</sup>*

### *The effect of the Oslo-peace process on the reception of the New Historiography*

The New Historians evidently played a role in especially the later rounds of negotiations of the Oslo-peace process relating to the resolving of the Palestinian Refugee Problem. However, the importance of the breakthrough of the early agreement in Oslo I for the reception of the New Historiography in the Israeli society was significant. In the beginning, the books of the New Historians were received with harsh criticism and rejection. However, during the 1990s and the development of the Peace Process, there was a shift in mentality in the Israeli society as a consequence of the Oslo agreement. Avi Shlaim believes that the Oslo-process was an important factor for the Israeli public’s reception of the New Historiography:

*“Yes, a very important factor. The peace seized to be a metaphysical concept, that politicians just talks and make features about peace. With Oslo Israel touched peace. They made experience with peace. And Yossi Beilin (one of the early negotiators) wrote a book which in Hebrew was called: “Touching Peace”, that was the title.” (...)* Gradually, people thought about it, and some of our findings found its way into the intellectual mainstream. Particularly the notion of Israeli responsibility for the Palestinian refugee problem. History textbooks were rewritten in line with the new history. I don’t want to exaggerate this. It is not so that the old history books were junk, and new history books were written that were new history, but rather they were less dogmatic. The new textbook said to schoolboys and girls: “Imagine what it was

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<sup>255</sup> Referred in Avi Shlaim: “When Historians Matter”, “Prospect” June 29, 2008.

*like to be a Palestinian child in 1948 in the midst of this war.” So they didn’t say “Israel is to blame, Israel expelled them”, but they opened discussion about what actually happened, and the dilemma of the war.”<sup>256</sup>*

### *The Collapse of the Oslo Peace Process*

After the collapse of negotiations, the bloody intifada of 2000, or al Aqsa intifada erupted, following Ariel Sharon’s visit to the Temple Mount. This, as we have seen, again led to the ideological reorientation of Benny Morris. It also led to a shift in Israeli politics to the right and the Premiership of Ariel Sharon. After the election of Ariel Sharon as prime minister in 2001, Limor Livnat, launched an all-out offensive against all manifestations of the New Historiography. The newly appointed education minister from Likud, ordered all history textbooks used in Israeli schools to be rewritten, removing all traces of the perspectives from the New Historians.<sup>257</sup> These factors, together with the trial of Ilan Pappé at the University of Haifa after the Katz-controversy, created a totally different climate for reception of critical revisionist history in Israel.

## **Conclusions**

So, going back to my research questions: What is the “new” in the New Historians? Well, they are certainly not “new” as in “young” any longer. Paraphrasing Avi Shlaim: The New Historians went from being *young Turks* to old jerks. They are now very much a part of the establishment (if not in Israel), and Shlaim is semi-retired. However, being of a new generation, born around or after the 1948 war, was part of the notion of the term New Historians as it was coined by Benny Morris in his 1988 essay “The New Historiography”.

As the reader might or might not have noticed, I have throughout this thesis abstained from using the term “new history”, and rather talked about the “New Historiography” (of Israel). That is because “new history” is an established trend in

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<sup>256</sup> Shlaim, Avi. Interview, Oxford 29. May 2012.

<sup>257</sup> Rogan and Shlaim (editors, 2001, 2007) *The War for Palestine*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. (preface to the second edition: xxii)

the European historiography (*nouvelle histoire*) of the French *Annales* School. It presumed to shift the focus from the elite, over to the history of the lives of the ordinary people. The New Historians of Israel, does not follow this approach, and the New Historiography is very much the history of the elite. The New Historiography of Israel is not “new history”, but rather a revision of traditional political history (with a possible exception of the writings of Baruch Kimmerling, sometimes called New Historians, which is not part of this historiographical overview.)

Efraim Karsh, the author of *Fabricating Israeli History, The ‘New Historians’* says that the New Historiography were like a “new bottle – sour wine”, meaning that the notions of the new historiography were not new, but were preceded by numerous writers. As I have covered in chapter two of this thesis, the New Historians were indeed preceded in many of the notions presented, but they were still the first ones to present the notions based on solid archival sources in a comprehensive academic language. This is what’s really new in the writings of the New Historians: They were the first professional historians examining the evidence in the newly opened archives and wrote credible history that was critical of the Zionists and their leaders conduct especially in the first Arab-Israeli conflict. In doing this they broke free from the paradigm of nation-building Zionists historiography. In addition, the fact that they were writing in English, were educated in prestigious English institutions (with the exception of Flapan) and all had sympathies with the Palestinians, helped the New Historiography reach a much wider audience than other Israeli historians.

No wonder it caused fierce reactions and angry protests. The entire establishment of Israel had been taking part in the fighting against the Palestinians in 1947-1949. For them this was the heroic War of Independence. Now they were faced with questions about massacre and expulsions. The nationalistic narrative was challenged, and with it the Israeli self-image of a peace loving people that were only defending themselves from a second holocaust at the hands of the Arabs. Challenging the myths and criticizing the legendary Zionist leader David Ben-Gurion was in many Israelis eyes equal to treason. The Palestinians were the enemy, and Israel had no responsibility for the Palestinian Refugee Problem. After reading Morris’ *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem*, this notion became increasingly more difficult to uphold. The anger of Anita Shapira, the princess of Zionist history, must be noted. She believes her selves to be the revisionist, but she is still no more than a

sympathetic critic of the labor movement of the Yishuv, and hardly credible authority on the 1948 war and its aftermath. In her eyes, no further revision is needed, and the New Historiography is a nuisance.

After the 2000 Camp David negotiation where the history of the Palestinian refugee problem became an important factor, a lot of people belonging to the Israeli right got their eyes up for the “danger” of accepting the narrative of the New Historians as it might lead the negotiators a step closer to Israeli concessions towards the Palestinians in a future peace-treaty. This, combined with the brutality of the al Aqsa intifada, brought an end to the accommodation of the New Historiography in the Israeli society. Instead the New Historians became a target and were put under pressure. Benny Morris seemingly succumbed to this pressure and conceded some of his statements, while re-interpreting other into a neo-Zionist ideology. Ilan Pappé were put on trial, isolated and pushed into exile by his own employer, the University of Haifa.

This also answers the third research question: Why was the New Historians unsuccessful in changing the paradigm of the official version of the birth of Israel? The short answer is that politics and nationalism got in the way of the Israeli society’s ability to have a critical view of its past. The shift to the right in Israeli politics following the intifada and Ariel Sharon’s election as prime minister led to the removal of all influence of the New Historiography from Israeli schoolchildren textbooks. In addition, the Katz-affair and Morris’ defection made matters worse. However, the changes made in the international view on Israeli historiography were permanent. The New Historians thus changed the paradigms of international perception of Israeli history, but were not able to shift the paradigms of Israeli history writing.

The historiography of the New Historians that I have covered in this thesis is of the historiographical works I have seen, the most comprehensive dealing with the central works of the New Historians and the historiographical context. Other works exist that covers the issue of the New Historians, for examples have the New Historians themselves written several articles and book-reviews that gives a historiographical overview. Shlaim’s article: “The Debate About 1948”, and Pappé’s “Post-Zionist Critique on Israel and the Palestinians: Part I: The Academic Debate” as well as Morris’ essay: “The New Historiography, Israel Confronts Its Past” gives all important

insight in how the New Historians themselves perceive their historiography. However, as they themselves and their books are the subjects of this field of historiography, outside evaluation is required.

As I started the introduction: There really is a paucity of outsiders writing in the field of Israeli history, and especially about its historiography. Derek J. Penslar of the University of Toronto (who has recently received a fellowship at St. Anne's College at the University of Oxford) has written the book: *Israel in History, The Jewish State in Comparative Perspective* (2006). It has a chapter devoted to the New Historians, although it deals with the subject rather briefly. It has however been an invaluable source for me for understanding the generation of the Yishuv-scholars that preceded the New Historians. In Norwegian, the most comprehensive work on the New Historians that I have found, is an article by the PhD candidate at the University of Oslo, Trude Strand, who in 2008 published an article called "Narratives in Conflict" (my translation) in the Norwegian journal for Middle Eastern studies: "Babylon." It is a good introduction, but my thesis is of course more comprehensive as it is almost ten times longer.

In writing a historiographical thesis, isolating what is original in your theses is not so straight forward as one might think. There is not much to compare with, and a historiographer does not examine the actual events of history as one writing a pure historical thesis would do. What I believe is original in my work is the comprehensive overview of the historiography of the New Historians and the historical and historiographical context. Also, the emphasis on the importance of Menachem Benin's claims to historical continuity for the development of the New Historiography, the importance of the Oslo Peace Process for the reception of the New History in Israel, as well as the significance of the New Historiography for the negotiations at Camp David in 2000, are all perspectives that I believe have been unsatisfactory covered by previous historiographers.

In writing this master thesis, I have learned above all that history is an academic discipline that is very much in dialogue with the current politics of the regions or situations in question. Writing history is casting judgment on the actions and policies of the authorities in the past, and the present authorities might or might not look favorably on your interpretations. In some countries, even democratic ones, this

might result in unwanted personal repercussions. It must be the goal of all historians everywhere to support and guard the right to academic freedom. History is too important to be left to the whims of politicians. And finally, I can appreciate that for better or worse; history matters.



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Figure 1, The Balfour Declaration with a portrait of Balfour.

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## Sammendrag på norsk

Denne oppgaven handler om Israelsk historiografi, med et spesielt fokus på fire bøker utgitt i 1987-1988 og forfatterne bak dem: Simha Flapan (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*. New York, Pantheon Books. Benny Morris (1988): *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem 1947-1949* (Cambridge University Press) Avi Shlaim (1988): *Collusion across the Jordan, King Abdullah, the Zionist movement and the Partition of Palestine* (Columbia University Press) og Ilan Pappé (1988): *Britain and the Arab-Israeli conflict, 1948-1951* (St. Martin's Press).

Disse bøkene ble kjent som den "nye historiografien" i Israel, etter at Benny Morris betegnet seg selv og de andre forfatterne av de nevnte bøkene som "nye historikere". Disse historikerne har til felles et kritisk blikk på den «offisielle» historiografien i Israel. De nye historikerne tok et oppgjør med nationalistiske myter i den Israelske historiografien. I hele etterkrigstida var det beretningene til den Zionistiske ledelsen om hendelsene i 1948 ubestridt som den «offisielle» Israelske historieforståelsen. Fra 1982 endret forutsetningene for å skrive kritisk historie seg, ettersom myndighetene frigjorde store deler av de offisielle stats-arkivene i Israel på bakgrunn av 30-års regelen for frigivelse av arkivmateriale. I tillegg invaderte Israel Libanon, og hundretusener av Israelere demonstrerte mot krigføringen og særlig Israels delaktighet i massakren i de palestinske flyktningeområdene Sabra og Shatila i Beirut. Dette førte til et nytt kritisk klima også i academia overfor myndighetene. De nye historikerne tok da tak i hendelsene i 1948 da Israel ble stiftet, og hevdet at forståelsen av denne perioden var preget av myter. Blandt disse var myten om at Israel ikke hadde skyld i at Palestinerne flyktet i 1948 den mest sentrale, og med de største politiske implikasjonene. De nye historikerne sa at Israel kastet ut Palestinerne med makt, og massakrer og bombeangrep utført av Israelske styrker gjorde at resten flyktet. Et annet sentral tema i den nye historiografien er samarbeidet mellom Zionistene og Kong Abdullah av Jordan i forkant og under den første Arabisk-Israelske krigen i 1948-1949. De nye historikerne sier at Araberne ikke var forent i målet om å ødelegge den jødiske staten, ettersom Kong Abdullah av Jordan som kommanderte den sterkeste arabiske hærstyrken: Den Arabiske Legion, samarbeidet med Israelerne om å dele Palestina-mandatet mellom seg, på bekostning av Palestinerne.

Men den politiske skiftet til høyre i israelsk politikk etter sammenbruddet av Camp David-forhandlingene og følgende utbrudd av den andre intifadaen i 2000, førte til en reversering av resepsjonen for New Historiografi i den israelske offentligheten.

## Abstract

This master thesis is about the Israeli historiography, with a particular focus on four books published in 1987-1988 and the authors behind them, Simha Flapan (1987): *The Birth of Israel, Myths and Realities*. New York, Pantheon Books. Benny Morris (1988): *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem 1947-1949* (Cambridge University Press) Avi Shlaim (1988): *Collusion across the Jordan, King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement and the Partition of Palestine* (Columbia University Press) and Ilan Pappé (1988): *Britain and the Arab-Israeli conflict, 1948-1951* (St. Martin's Press).

These books became known as the "new historiography" in Israel, after Benny Morris described himself and the other authors of these books as "new historians." These historians have cast a critical eye on the 'official' historiography in Israel, and took issue with nationalist myths in the Israeli historiography. In the post-war period the accounts of the Zionist leadership of the events of 1948 were undisputed as that the "official" Israeli understanding of history. From 1982, the conditions for writing critical history changed, as authorities released large part of the official state archives in Israel on the basis of the 30-year rule for the release of archival material. In addition, Israel invaded Lebanon and hundreds of thousands of Israelis demonstrated against the war and especially Israel's complicity in the massacre in the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila in Beirut. This led to a new critical climate even in academia with the authorities. The new historians then investigated the events of 1948 when Israel was founded, and argued that the understanding of this period was characterized by myths. Among these was the myth that Israel did not have any moral responsibility the flight of the Palestinians in 1948 that was the most important and had the largest political implications. The new historians said that Israel expelled Palestinians by force, and massacres and bomb attacks by Israeli forces caused such fear in the population that many more fled. Another central theme in the new historiography is the collaboration between the Zionists and King Abdullah of Jordan prior to and during the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948-1949. The new historians say that it is not true that the Arabs were united in the goal of destroying the Jewish state, as King Abdullah of Jordan who commanded the strongest Arab army: The Arab Legion, collaborated with the Israelis to divide Palestine Mandate between them, at the expense of Palestinians.

However, the political shift to the right in Israeli politics after the collapse of the Camp David negotiations and the following outbreak of the second intifada in 2000, led to a reversal of the reception for the New Historiography in the Israeli public.